PRACTICAL WISDOM IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

by Paul G. Apple, April 2005 (rev. June 2024)

THE PATHWAY TO SUCCESS IN EVERYDAY LIVING REQUIRES PURSUING THE PRACTICAL WISDOM OF THE LORD AMIDST THE DISTRACTIONS OF A SEDUCTIVE WORLD

"*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,*
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."
(**Proverbs 9:10**)

For each section in the Book of Proverbs:

- Thesis statement … to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline … to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions … to encourage life application
- Representative quotations … to stimulate deeper insight

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OVERVIEW OF BOOK OF PROVERBS

You could say that Proverbs takes **Psalm 1** with its contrast of the Two Ways and Two Destinies of the Righteous and the Ungodly [Remember we looked at that psalm last week] and expands the contrast between the **wise** and the **foolish** with a long series of pithy, impactful comparisons. It is a book of Poetry and a book of Wisdom literature. As poetry it is dominated by **Hebrew parallelism** as we mentioned in our introduction to Job – either by way of **comparison** – stating the same thought in different words, or by way of **opposites** – where the second line contrasts with the first. Other times the second line **extends the thought** in some fashion or completes the thought. As a book of Wisdom, Proverbs provides practical insights into living a successful and productive life from the perspective of godly righteousness.

Big Idea: The Pathway to Success in Everyday Living Requires Pursuing the Practical Wisdom of the Lord Amidst the Distractions of a Seductive World

Key Verse: **Proverbs 1:7; also 9:10**

> *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,*
> *Fools despise wisdom and instruction."*
>
> "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,*
> *and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding*"

House and Durham: By God's grace, the book of Proverbs enables each of us to have God's insight on how to live lives that will glorify Him; how to build up others; and how to be at peace with ourselves. Following its precepts will bring success in business and in the home. Through heeding its advice, we can avoid those regrettable pitfalls that can make life so difficult. If we listen to God's wisdom, we will experience joy and laughter rather than feeling the sorrow and despair that are so much a part of those who heed the "spirit of the age." Proverbs speaks to every area of life we will ever encounter. No stone is left unturned; no path not taken. The only issue in question is whether we will consider its ways and follow its advice.

Overview: The Book of Proverbs lays out the Pathway of Wisdom in contrast to the Pathway of Fools. In the context of instruction of a father to his son, the fear of the Lord and receptivity to wise counsel are the foundation for success in the practical areas of everyday living amidst the distractions of a seductive world. The first nine chapters provide the framework for choosing wisdom and actively pursuing it as more precious than anything else life has to offer. There is a heavy emphasis on resisting sexual temptation in these opening chapters. The benefits of wisdom are extolled at length and personified so that we can see the **Lord Himself** as our wisdom. The rest of the book consists of individual proverbs – commonly studied **thematically**. [For example Mark Dever treats 7 major thematic groupings of proverbs: the Fool, the Sluggard, the Family, Friends, Words, and then Life and Death as final destinations.] But I have chosen to follow the overall structure of the book which revolves around the author of each section of proverbs as we will see.

(1:1-7) PROLOGUE / INTRODUCTION: PRIORITY OF GAINING WISDOM

A. (:1a) Catchy Genre of Proverbs

"*The proverbs*" = nuggets of truth

A proverb is a figure of speech in which the author uses comparison in order to present a pithy, poignant observation or instruction. A proverb is a timeless truth in the form of a simple illustration that exposes a **fundamental reality of life**. Proverbs are practical (not theoretical), easy to memorize and imminently applicable to real life situations.

Arthur Pierson: A proverb is a wise saying in which a **few words** are chosen instead of many, with a design to condense wisdom into a brief form both to aid memory and stimulate study. Hence proverbs are not only "wise sayings," but "dark sayings" – parables, in which wisdom is disguised in a figurative or enigmatic form like a deep well, from which instruction is to be drawn, or a rich mine, from which it is to be dug. Only profound meditation will reveal what is hidden in these moral and spiritual maxims.

One common error in studying proverbs is taking them as **absolute promises** when in fact they are **Generalities** based on the observation of life. Let me give you a couple of examples to show that you cannot treat proverbs as absolute promises: (Bill McRae)

- **10:27** – "*The fear of the Lord prolongs life*" – not always true; no guarantee
- **22:6** – most misunderstood verse of bible – "*Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it*" -- not a promise; probably not even talking about **spiritual development**; probably referring to the natural bend of the child; if you have a child that has a natural bend toward a particular profession or talent then the parent should train the child in accordance with the way the child is wired; rather than trying to reshape the direction of the child towards one of your goals and preferences

Not all proverbs are easy to understand at first glance. Mark Dever offers
7 Clues to help read and understand difficult proverbs:

1) **Common sense** – first tool you use (assuming prayer)
   Example: "*Look before you leap*" – [not in the Bible but similar to biblical proverbs] what if you leap once without looking and it turns our OK? Does that nullify the proverb? No – it is a **general maxim**.
2) Realize that these proverbs are always true **ultimately**. Things that are said might not seem immediately true.
3) Realize that they are **normally true now**. They are memorable rather than exhaustive. They don't cover every possibility. They are there to put truth in your mind in a way that you will carry it away with you.
4) They often use **imagery**; you don't need to take them all literally.
5) Many of them are **partial** in themselves. You may see in one verse that he who uses a bribe succeeds and gets what he wants; you might conclude that bribes are good things; but you keep reading and find another reference that condemns bribes. It is simply making a sardonic observation about real life.
6) They are sometimes **obscure**. We won't have the cultural background to understand because we live 3,000 years later.

7) These proverbs are **religious**. Not a book of secular proverbs. The good life is only found when we have wisdom about God and ourselves.

B. (:1b) Consummate Author

"*of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:*"

Who is better equipped than Solomon to provide us with such insights about life. He asked for wisdom and God granted his request. Sadly, in his later years he did not continue to follow the wisdom he had been taught. But remember, these are not the words just of a human philosopher – like Chinese fortune cookies. These nuggets of truth are divinely inspired.

George Milne: These words are the instructions of that king who excelled all the kings of the earth in wisdom and grandeur. This great prince is our teacher; but not he alone; the only wise God here condescends to become our instructor. He, then, who disregards this book, despises a greater than Solomon. This book is the work of a noble writer, and truly it was written with a noble design.

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There will be <u>other authors</u> later in the book:

- **22:17 – 24** Words of the wise men
- **Chap. 30** – Words of Agur
- **Chap. 31** – Words of King Lemuel and his mother

C. (:2-6) Comprehensive Purpose Statement

<u>1. (:**2-3**) Overall Purpose: Wise Living</u>

"*To know wisdom and instruction,*
To discern the sayings of understanding,
3 To receive instruction in wise behavior,
Righteousness, justice and equity;"
[much better triad than Diversity, Equity, Inclusion]

Allen Ross: <u>The first purpose</u> is that the disciple will **develop skillfulness and discipline in holy living** (**v.2a**). "*Attaining*," from the infinitive *da ʿat* (lit., "*to know*"; from GK 3359), encompasses an intellectual and experiential acquisition of wisdom and discipline, for the expression "*to know*" wisdom not only means to become conscious of it but also to <u>observe it</u>, to <u>realize it</u>, and to <u>experience it.</u>

"*Wisdom*" (*ḥokmâ*; GK 2683) basically means "*skill*." This word describes the "skill" of the craftsmen who worked in the tabernacle (**Ex 31:6**), the "wits" of seasoned mariners (**Ps 107:27**), administrative abilities (**1Ki 3:28**), and the "wise advice" of a counselor (**2Sa 20:22**). In Proverbs "wisdom" signifies **skillful living**—the ability to make wise choices and live successfully according to the moral standards of the covenantal community. The one who lives skillfully produces things of lasting value to God and to the community.

The other object to be acquired is "*discipline*" (*mûsār;* GK 4592; cf. **4:5**), the necessary

companion of wisdom. *Mûsār* denotes the training of the moral nature, involving the correcting of waywardness toward folly and the development of reverence for the Lord and personal integrity. Waltke, 1:175, asserts that wisdom cannot be possessed without this instruction to **correct moral faults**.

The second major purpose of Proverbs is to help the disciple acquire **discernment** (**v.2b**). The meaning of the Hiphil infinitive *hābîn* ("*to understand, discern*"; GK 1067) can be illustrated by the cognate preposition *bên* ("*between*"). "*To discern*" means to distinguish between things, to compare concepts, form evaluations, or make analogies.

2. (:**4-6**) Specific Emphasis for Different Groups

a. **(:4a**) Protection for the **Naïve**

"*To give prudence to the naive,*"

Jay Adams: The "*simple*" or naive is the one who is highly **impressionable**, who is open to all sorts of influences—both good and bad. He lacks the know-how and the discretion to distinguish the one from the other. He is in a dangerous place; he lives in a fallen world that continually beckons him in addition to the call of wisdom. He has trouble knowing which voice is which; he does not know how to distinguish the two. That is what this wisdom book will provide if he reads and heeds.

b. (:**4b**) Tips for **Teenagers**

"*To the youth knowledge and discretion,*"

Great memory exercise for youth groups – spend time in the book of Proverbs

c. (:**5-6**) Leadership Training for the **Mature**

"*A wise man will hear and increase in learning,*
And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,
6 To understand a proverb and a figure,
The words of the wise and their riddles."

We are never too old to benefit from the wisdom in Proverbs.

Tremper Longman: How do we handle life's problems? How do we deal with difficult people or uncomfortable situations? What do we say and how do we act? How do we express our emotions? The Bible has a word to describe the person who navigates life well; that word is "wise." A wise person lives life with boldness in spite of the inevitable difficulties.

D. (:7) Complex Fundamental Question – How Does a Man Become Wise?

1. Fundamental Step One: Complete Submission to Divine Instruction

"*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;*"

Derek Kidner: *The beginning* (i.e. the first and controlling principle, rather than a stage which one leaves behind; cf. **Ec. 12:13**) is not merely a right method of thought but a right relation; a worshipping submission (*fear*) to the God of the covenant, who has

revealed Himself by name (*the Lord*, i.e. *Yahweh*: **Ex. 3:13-15**). *Knowledge*, then, in its full sense, is a **relationship**, dependent on revelation and inseparable from character.

What are the Key Elements of Fearing the Lord? Fear of the Lord involves:

- **Reverence and Awe** – recognizing God's greatness, majesty and holiness
- **Moral Alignment** – with what God loves and what He hates – He hates evil
- **Trust** in God and **Obedience** to His Word – complete dependence and humble submission;
  - Requires being teachable, not wise in our own eyes
- **Sincere Worship** from the Heart
- **Living with Accountability**

2. Fundamental Problem: Refusal to be taught

"*Fools despise wisdom and instruction.*"

Let's take a quick topical look at this subject:

Proverbs 12:1

"Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid."

In Hebrew, the word for "*stupid*" refers to brutishness or animal-like ignorance = a willful refusal to learn.

Proverbs 13:1

"*A wise son accepts his father's discipline, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke*."

A fool's pride makes him unteachable, even when correction comes from a loving authority.

Proverbs 15:12

"*A scoffer does not love one who reproves him, He will not go to the wise*."

A fool avoids wisdom at all costs – they don't even seek it out.

Proverbs 18:2

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

Fools aren't interested in learning – they're only interested in being heard.

Note on the **Structure of the Book of Proverbs**:

Tremper Longman: Clear distinction between **Proverbs 1-9** and **10-31**.

- Collection of lengthy discourses
- Mainly individual proverbs

We cannot be sure how many discourses are in **Proverbs 1-9**. Some have clear boundaries, with a change of speaker and an initial appeal for the son to pay attention. But the appeal can also be repeated in the middle of a speech, making it difficult to determine whether we are dealing with a new speech or a continuation of the old speech.

Spend most of our time in this first major section

I. (1:8 – 9:18) INSTRUCTION OF PARENTS – WISDOM FOR THE YOUNG

Conflict (tension) between wisdom and folly – both personified
2 Pathways – one leading to life and the other to death

We are going to study this section based on an analysis by Whybray:
Following the introduction, In **Proverbs 1 – 9** there are ten separate sections of 'fatherly talks'. Whybray calls them the 'Ten Discourses' or 'Ten Instructions', and compares them with the Egyptian school instruction books which have similar form and content. These fatherly talks, or discourses, practically all follow a similar pattern. Thus

(a) there is an introductory address, '*My son'*, or something similar, followed by
(b) an instruction to hear, receive or be attentive. Then
(c) the virtue of Wisdom in one or another of her forms is extolled, and the son is told to clothe himself with it.
(d) The main theme of each discourse then follows, usually with an exhortation or a prohibition or a command.
(e) Finally, the talk ends with a reflection on either the happy state of the righteous or the fate of the wicked or the fool.

Here are the **Ten Instructions (or Discourses)** as identified by Whybray:

1. First Instruction -- Proverbs 1:8–19
Wisdom Warns against Bad Influences

- **Theme**: Warning against joining violent men or sinners who entice with promises of easy wealth.
  - **(:10-14)** Your peer group can be a bad influence
    "*if sinners entice you, do not consent*" **(vs. 10)**
  - **(:18-19)** Lawless men come to a violent end
    "*They ambush their own lives*" **(vs. 18)**

- (**1:20-33**) **Wisdom Warns**
  - **(:20-21)** Wisdom is available to all
    "*Wisdom shouts in the street*" (**vs. 20**)
  - **(:22-25)** Foolishness closes its eyes to wisdom until it is too late
    - **(:22)** Failure to face reality
    - **(:23-24)** Failure to respond to persistent solicitation
      "*Because I called and you refused,*
      I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention." **(vs. 24)**
    - **(:25)** Failure to repent in time
  - **(:29-33)** Bitter fruit of rejecting wisdom
    "*So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way*
    And be satiated with their own devices." **(vs. 31)**

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2. Second Instruction -- Proverbs 2:1–22

Wisdom Protects against Corrupt Influences

- **Theme**: The value of wisdom for moral protection and guidance.
  - (:**1-5**) The gift of wisdom must be actively pursued; but the Lord gives it **vs. 6**
  - (:**6-11**) This gift of wisdom makes its home at the center of your being – **vs. 10** "*For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul*"
  - Wisdom protects against evil men (:**12-15**) and the seducing woman (:**16-19**)

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3. Third Instruction -- Proverbs 3:1–10
Wisdom Promotes Spiritual Maturity and Divine Prosperity

- **Theme**: Benefits of trusting the Lord and living wisely.
- **<u>5 Commitments of the Heart</u> Essential to Spiritual Maturity and Divine Prosperity**
  - **(:1-2)** Obey God's Law in your heart
  - **(:3-4)** Preserve kindness and truth in your heart
  - **(:5-6)** Trust in the Lord's sovereign guidance in your heart "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. [6] In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight*."
  - **(:7-8)** Fear the Lord in your heart
  - **(:9-10)** Honor the Lord in your giving

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4. Fourth Instruction -- Proverbs 3:11–20
Wisdom is Supremely Valuable

- **Theme**: Praise of wisdom as more valuable than riches.
  - Wisdom is more valuable than material wealth.

    "*For its profit is better than the profit of silver, And its gain than fine gold. [15] She is more precious than jewels; And nothing you desire compares with her*." (**vs. 14-15**)

  - It leads to long life, peace, pleasantness, and honor.

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5. Fifth Instruction -- Proverbs 3:21–35
Wisdom Is Undermined by Various Traps
<u>Traps to avoid</u> that contradict the character of God and endanger your prosperity

- **Theme**: Wisdom brings security, and kindness earns favor.
- **(:25-26)** Don't panic in the face of calamity or unjustified attacks "*Do not be afraid of sudden fear, Nor of the onslaught of the wicked when it comes*;" (**vs. 25**)
- **(:27-28)** Don't procrastinate in doing good to others according to your ability "*Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in your power to do it.*" (**vs. 27**)

- **(:29-30)** Don't pervert your neighbor's trust
- **(:31-32)** Don't pursue the path of the wicked
- **(:33-35)** Conclusion: Contrast between the righteous and the wicked
  "*The wise will inherit honor, But fools display dishonor*." (**vs. 35**)

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6. Sixth Instruction -- Proverbs 4:1–9

Wisdom Must Be Valued as a Family Legacy = time-tested, generational truth

- **Theme**: A father's appeal based on the wisdom passed down from his own father.
- **Emphasis**: Tradition and heritage of wisdom.
  - **(:1-2)** the importance of listening to parental instruction
  - (:**3-4**) wisdom passed down through generations
  - (:**5-7**) wisdom as the principal thing
  - (:**8-9**) the rewards of embracing wisdom

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7. Seventh Instruction -- Proverbs 4:10–19

Wisdom Guides One Along the Path of Light Instead of Darkness

Contrast between 2 Paths – Righteousness vs. Wickedness

- **Theme**: Two paths—righteousness vs. wickedness.
  - **(:10-13)** Path of wisdom tied to long life and security
  - (:**14-17**) Path of wicked tied to appetite for evil
  - (:**18-19**) Contrast between path of righteous and path of wicked
    "*But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, That shines brighter and brighter until the full day.* [19] *The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know over what they stumble*." (**vs. 18-19**)

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8. Eighth Instruction -- Proverbs 4:20–27

Wisdom Requires Constant Vigilance -- Stay the Course / Guard your heart

- **Theme**: Guarding the heart and staying morally upright.
  - **(:20-22)** Attentiveness to godly instruction
    Wisdom brings life and healing—it's not just intellectual but deeply restorative
  - **(:23)** Guarding the heart = source of life's direction
    "*Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life*." (**vs. 23**)
  - **(:24)** Watching your words – your speech reflects your heart
  - (:**25-27**) Staying focused and morally directed – purposeful living

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9. Ninth Instruction -- Proverbs 5:1–23

Wisdom Protects against Marital infidelity

Avoid the path of sexual temptation which leads to certain destruction

- **Theme**: Warning against the seductive and destructive power of the adulterous woman.
- **Contrast**: Adulterous woman vs. wife of your youth.

Max Anders**:** An illicit affair may provide short-term pleasure, but the long-range consequences will be disastrous. Stay faithful to your spouse, and you will experience genuine satisfaction—and God will be pleased. You cannot escape the painful results of immorality.

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10. Tenth Instruction -- Proverbs 6:1 – 7:27 – I would prefer to treat **Chap. 6** and **Chap. 7** as separate lessons:

- (**6:1-35**) **Wisdom Avoids the Pitfalls of Life** -- 5 Ways to avoid wrecking your life
  - **(:1-5**) Avoid assuming financial responsibility for another's debts
  - (:**6-11**) Avoid laziness by choosing diligence – Not just put off; but put on
  - (:**12-15**) Avoid the trap of deceptive schemers
  - (:**16-19**) Avoid the seven pillars of wickedness
    "There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him:
    1. [17] Haughty eyes,
    2. a lying tongue,
    3. And hands that shed innocent blood,
    4. [18] A heart that devises wicked plans,
    5. Feet that run rapidly to evil,
    6. [19] A false witness *who* utters lies,
    7. And one who spreads strife among brothers." (**vs. 16-19**)
  - (:**20-35**) Avoid sexual promiscuity
- (**7:1-27**) **Wisdom Avoids the slippery path of sexual seduction**
  Sexual seduction attacks the naïve at their point of vulnerability and sucks them into the path of destruction.
  - (:**1-5**) Seductive enticements require strong defenses
    My favorite verse: "*Keep my commandments and live, And my teaching as the apple of your eye*." (**vs. 2**) Apples get a bad name in Genesis but some redemption here
  - (:**6-12**) Only the naïve put themselves in harm's way
  - (:**13-21**) The aggressive adulterer persuades the vulnerable to pursue their sexual fantasies
  - (:**22-23**) The dumb ox cannot discern his coming slaughter
  - (:**24-27**) Final Warning: Sexual seduction has ruined countless lives
    "*For many are the victims she has cast down, And numerous are all her slain*." (**vs. 26**)

(8:1-36) WISDOM PERSONIFIED AS PRECIOUS AND VALUABLE

- (:**1-11**) The Call of Wisdom – its surpassing value (:**10-11**)
  "*Take my instruction, and not silver, And knowledge rather than choicest gold.* [11] *"For wisdom is better than jewels; And all desirable things can not compare with her*." (**vs. 10-11**) repeating **3:14-15**
- (:**12-21**) The Companions and Rewards of Wisdom
  - Positive Companions: (:**12**) Prudence / Knowledge / Discretion
  - Negative Companions: (:**13**) Pride / Arrogance / Evil behavior / Perverse Speech
  - Positive Companions: **(:14**) Counsel and sound judgment / Understanding and Power
  - Rewards of Wisdom (:**18-21**)
- (:**22-31**) The Co-Existence of Wisdom with the Creative Activity of God
- **(:32-36**) The Caution of Wisdom – Blessing vs. Cursing

Wisdom's eternality, righteousness and creative power as depicted in Proverbs 8 is a poetic foreshadowing of the Logos who became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ
1 Cor. 1:24 "*Christ is the power of God and the Wisdom of God*"
1 Cor. 1:30 **"***Christ Jesus has become to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption*"

(9:1-18) FINAL CALL TO CHOOSE WISDOM OVER FOLLY

- (:**1-6**) The Invitation of Wisdom
- (:**7-12**) The Response to Wisdom and the Consequences
- (:**13-17**) The Invitation of Folly
- (:**18**) The Final Destiny of Folly

II. (10:1 – 22:16) FIRST COLLECTION OF SAYINGS BY SOLOMON

Chap. **10-15** Contrast between a wise and foolish man –
"the wise man is this and the foolish man is that"

Chap. **16 - 22:16** Description of the Wise man and Foolish man – using various metaphors and similes and proverbs

Peter Wallace: I had originally planned on preaching **topically** through **Proverbs 10-31**, but the more I dig through it, the more convinced I am that there really is a structure and pattern in these chapters that gets lost when you bounce around!

Right now we are in the "*proverbs of Solomon*" (**10:1 - 22:16**). The first section -- **10:1 - 15:29** -- consists of largely antithetical proverbs -- proverbs that contrast the two ways: **the righteous and the wicked**, the diligent and the sluggard, the wise and the fool. And, as you have no doubt noticed by now, each chapter talks about words, deeds, and ends. What you say and what you do are important in shaping where you are going. The pattern may vary, but plainly these chapters were set up intentionally to be literary units. When we get to **chapter 16**, we will see a switch from **antithetical** to **synthetic** proverbs -- where the second line adds to the first, rather than contrasts with it.

We have seen a pretty regular pattern in this opening part of the proverbs of Solomon. What you say – and how you live – form the pattern of your life. If you don't like the trajectory – then turn – repent – change your path. How do you do that? **Change your words. Change your actions.**

[Illustration: PEF – ski trip study project – topical commentary on Proverbs]

Why didn't the Lord present this material in topical fashion?

- Value of **memorization** of the verses that stand out to you
- Best if you **meditate** on these verses in small chunks; don't rapidly just read thru it like you would with a historical narrative

- Very rich section – but we just can't cover it in this class

III. (22:17 – 24:34) SAYINGS OF THE WISE MEN

Paul Koptak: The shift from individual sayings to the address of a teacher in **22:17** tells us that we have entered a **new section** of the book. We set this section apart here because

- there is a new title, "*the sayings of the wise*" (**22:17**);
- the style returns to the instruction-like writing we encountered in **chapters 1–9**; and
- a generation of biblical scholarship has drawn comparisons between **22:17 – 23:11** and the Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope, noting similarities and differences in form and content.

Within these words of the wise, there are three subsections after the introduction in **22:17–21**:

Richard Clifford (1999: 199) proposes that

- the first part is addressed to young people ambitioning a career,
- while the second deals with the concerns of youth,
- and the third covers the destinies of the righteous and the wicked.

A. 22:22 – 23:11 – Key Life Choices – 9 Don'ts

1. (**22:22-23**) Don't Exploit the Poor
2. (**22:24-25**) Don't Associate with a Hothead
3. (**22:26-27**) Don't Give Pledges for Debt
4. (**22:28-29**) Don't Try to Increase Wealth Selfishly or Illegally
5. (**23:1-3**) Don't Overindulge When Invited to a Ruler's Feast
6. (**23:4-5**) Don't Set Your Hopes on Fleeting Wealth
7. (**23:6-8**) Don't Accept Hospitality from the Selfish
8. (**23:9**) Don't Offer Wisdom to Fools
9. (**23:10-11**) Don't Steal Private Property of Take Advantage of the Vulnerable

B. 23:12–35 Concerns Related to Training Youth

1. (:12-14) Importance of Discipline and Instruction in Pursuing Wisdom
2. (:15-21) Insights Regarding Pursuing Wisdom
   - (:15-16) Cause and Effect relationship between wisdom and joy
   - (:17-18) Wisdom is rooted in the Fear of the Lord
   - (:19) Wisdom comes from assimilating instruction
   - (:20-21) Wisdom comes from avoiding evil companions

C. 24:1–22. Destinies of the Wise and the Wicked

(:**15-22**) 4 Prohibitions Based on the Ultimate Destiny of the Righteous vs. the Wicked

1. (:**15-16**) Do not attack the righteous who will always rise again
2. (:**17-18**) Do not gloat over fallen enemies
3. (:**19-20**) Do not envy evildoers
4. (:**21-22**) Do not associate with rebels but fear the Lord and the King

IV. (25:1 – 29:27) SECOND COLLECTION OF SAYINGS BY SOLOMON

Collected by the wise men under King Hezekiah

Once again, we must skip over this valuable section

(30:1 – 31:9) APPENDIX: SAYINGS OF AGUR AND KING LEMUEL

A. (**30:1-33**) Sayings of Agur
(:**4-6**) Exalting the Unique Supremacy of God and Sufficiency of His Word
(:**11-14**) Critique of 4 Foolish Behaviors
(:11) Disrespect for Parents
(:**12**) Self-Delusion / Self-Righteousness
(:**13**) Arrogance
(:**14**) Vicious Oppression of the Poor

B. (**31:1-9**) Sayings of King Lemuel and his Mother
3 Priorities for Rulers:
(:3) Rulers Must Guard against Sexual Temptation
(:4-7) Rulers Must Guard against Excessive Strong Drink
(:8-9) Rulers Must Advocate for Justice for the Vulnerable

(31:10-31) APPENDIX: IN PRAISE OF THE EXCELLENT WIFE

(:**10-12**) Her Value (Worth)
(:**13-19**) Virtues Reflected in Activities in the Home
(:**20-27**) Virtues Reflected in Activities in the Community
(:**28-31**) Her Veneration (Praise)
(:**28-29**) Praised by Her Husband and Children
(:**30-31**) Praised by Everyone for her Inner Spirituality and Outward Good Works

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Structure:

(**1:1-7**) Prologue / Introduction
A. **(:1)** Title and Author
B. **(:2-6)** Purpose
C. **(:7)** Theme — "*The Fear Of The Lord Is The Beginning Of Wisdom*"

I. (**1:8 – 9:18**) Instructions of Parents — Wisdom for the Young
II. (**10:1 – 22:16**) First Collection of Sayings by Solomon
III. (**22:17 – 24:34**) Sayings of the Wise Men
IV. (**25:1 – 29:27**) Second Collection of Sayings by Solomon
(**30:1 – 31:9**) Appendix: Sayings of Agur and King Lemuel
B. (**30:1-33**) Sayings of Agur
C. (**31:1-9**) Sayings of King Lemuel and his Mother
(**31:10-31**) Appendix: Praise of the Excellent Wife

Ken Boa: **Reciprocal relationship**:

- **9:10** – Fear of God leads to Wisdom
- **2:1-5** – Wisdom leads to the Fear of God

<u>WHY STUDY THIS BOOK?</u> We are going to identify 11 key reasons to study Proverbs:

1. To attain wisdom and discipline
2. To acquire a disciplined and prudent life so that we do what is right and just and fair
3. To give prudence to the simple; knowledge and discretion to the young
4. To let the wise listen and add to their learning
5. To let the discerning get guidance
6. To enjoy a longer and more successful and prosperous life
7. To avoid the enticing temptations of sinners and the seductive attraction of the world
8. To avoid the inevitable consequences of calamity and destruction that result from foolish choices
9. To understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God
10. To win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man
11. To bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones

Big Idea: The Pathway to Success in Everyday Living Requires Pursuing the Practical Wisdom of the Lord Amidst the Distractions of a Seductive World

TEXT: Proverbs 1: 1-33

TITLE: THE FUNDAMENTALS: STEP ONE ON THE PATHWAY TO WISDOM

BIG IDEA:
THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

INTRODUCTION:

Roland Murphy: There are two units: **vv 8–19**, an instruction of the father to the son, and **vv 20–33**, Wisdom's speech. The first, **vv 10–19**, is composed mainly of a warning against the vividly described temptations posed by the wicked, who will be undone by their wickedness. "*Such the ways . . .*" (**v 19**) is a "summary-appraisal formula," typical of wisdom teaching (e.g., **Job 8:13; 18:21**) and also used in the prophets (e.g., **Isa 14:26**).

In the second unit Wisdom is personified as a woman who delivers a condemnatory speech in the style of a prophet denouncing the failure of the people; cf. **Jer 7** and **20**. It is threatening, in contrast to the other speeches of personified Wisdom (chaps. 8 and 9). For the literary structure, see the study of P. Trible. However, the meaning of the whole turns on the interpretation of **vv 22–23**. The introduction (**vv 20–21**) places Wisdom in a prominent position for public address (vv 22–33). The prophetic mood shifts into didactic language at the end (**vv 30–33**), but the grim lesson remains clear. The audience is called "*the simple*" (i.e., naive) and "*fools,*" who will also be addressed in the other speeches of wisdom (cf. **8:5** and also **9:4, 6**). It is possible that the language reflects the threatening language of a teacher, but only in part, since it is not characteristic of wisdom teaching to threaten in such a prophetic style as in **1:24–28**. Rather, the lessons of experience and the teaching of parents are the more normal motivation. In **1:20–33**, the stance is that of a prophet, not a teacher. The setting for the first unit could well be the family (cf. **vv 8–9**), and now it forms part of the several addresses to "*my son*" in this collection. The second unit is clearly **condemnatory**, and can be understood as strengthening the warning against the sinners in **vv 8–19** by its mixture of prophetic (**vv 24–29**) and wisdom (**vv 29–33**) motifs.

David Atkinson: In **Proverbs 1 – 9** there are ten separate sections of 'fatherly talks'. Whybray calls them the 'Ten Discourses' or 'Ten Instructions', and compares them with the Egyptian school instruction books which have similar form and content. These fatherly talks, or discourses, practically all follow a similar pattern. Thus

(a) there is an introductory address, 'My son', or something similar, followed by
(b) an instruction to hear, receive or be attentive. Then
(c) the virtue of Wisdom in one or another of her forms is extolled, and the son is told to clothe himself with it.
(d) The main theme of each discourse then follows, usually with an exhortation or a prohibition or a command.

(e) Finally, the talk ends with a reflection on either the happy state of the righteous or the fate of the wicked or the fool.

We can illustrate this by briefly outlining the sections in question.

Talks about evil company (1:8–19)

(a) My son (**8**).
(b) Listen to instruction, do not forsake teaching (**8**).
(c) Wisdom is like a garland (**9**).
(d) Beware of evil company (**10–15**).
(e) In fact evil people waylay only themselves (**16–19**).

George Milne: In this chapter, Solomon gives us an account of the writer, and the design, of this book. He recommends the fear of the Lord, a dutiful regard to the instructions of parents, and diligence in guarding against the temptations of bad company as principal parts of wisdom. It is concluded with an earnest call to the unwise to learn wisdom.

David Hubbard: The bulk of Proverbs divides into two major kinds of literature:

1. instructive speeches, **chapters 1–9**;
2. wisdom sayings, **chapters 10–31**.

The speeches had as their main purpose to state every possible reason why wisdom should be valued and folly despised. The larger canvas of the speeches gave them more room to make their claims than did the small sketch pad of the individual sayings, and they took advantage of every square centimeter of space. Wisdom for them was a matter of nothing less than life or death. It was the way in which children of the covenant with Yahweh were to live. And it was the only course in life that made both present and ultimate sense.

Incentives to wise living and **illustrations of what that entails**—these two themes are the point and counterpoint of the first nine chapters, where bright encouragement and dark warning find artful interplay. The warnings anticipate and amplify some of the key topics covered by the clusters of sayings in **chapters 10–31**: perverted speech (**ch. 2**), loose sexuality (**chs. 2, 5, 6, 7**), ungodly self-reliance (**ch. 3**), greed (**ch. 3**), rashness in guaranteeing the financial obligations of others (**ch. 6**), laziness (**ch. 6**), lying (**ch. 6**), disruptive social behavior (**ch. 6**).

Scripture Outline

Title (**1:1**)
Purpose (1:2–6)
Theme (**1:7**)
Call to Attention (**1:8–9**)
Warning Against Bad Company (**1:10–18**)
Summary Appraisal (**1:19**)
Wisdom's Denunciation of Fools (**1:20–31**)
Antithetic Summary (**1:32–33**)

I. (:1-7) PREFACE: NUGGETS OF TRUTH FOR WISE LIVING

Roland Murphy: One reason for characterizing vv 1–7 as a "**preface**" is the striking literary style with which its message is announced: a long sentence followed by a motto ("*fear of the Lord*") that is in a pivotal position. Many scholars are of the opinion that all of **chaps. 1–9** serve as an introduction to what follows. As it were, they set the tone or provide the hermeneutical key to the **disparate sayings** in the following chapters.

Jonathan Akin: Main Idea: **A relationship with the Lord will make you wise for everyday life.**

I. What Is Wisdom (**1:1-6**)?
   - A. Wisdom is royal (**1:1**).
   - B. Wisdom is correction and understanding (**1:2**).
   - C. Wisdom is the knowledge of good and evil (**1:3**).
   - D. Wisdom is discernment (**1:4**).
   - E. Wisdom is obtaining guidance (**1:5-6**).

II. How Do You Get Wisdom (**1:7**)?
   - A. You get wisdom by reverent trust in the Lord (**1:7**).

A. (:1a) Catchy Genre of Proverbs

"*The proverbs*" = nuggets of truth

B. (:1b) Consummate Author

"*of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:*"

George Milne: These words are the instructions of that king who excelled all the kings of the earth in wisdom and grandeur. This great prince is our teacher; but not he alone the only wise God here condescends to become our instructor. He, then, who disregards this book, despises a greater than Solomon. This book is the work of a noble writer, and truly it was written with a noble design.

Jonathan Akin: In **Proverbs 8:15-16** Wisdom states, "*It is by me that kings reign and rulers enact just law; by me, princes lead, as do nobles and all righteous judges*." Immediately Proverbs connects wisdom with the kingship and with the Messiah. "*Son of David*" is a messianic title. The Son of David will establish God's eternal kingdom on earth, but he can only do it through wisdom—through justice (see **2 Sam 7; Isa 11**). In Proverbs, Solomon is training his "*son*" in wisdom so that he can establish the messianic kingdom. As we will see, he is also instructing the youth of the nation in wisdom in hopes of producing it in them as well. But the king embodies the nation and represents the nation. If the king is wise, the people will be wise; but if the king is unwise, the people will be foolish. There is a need for a wise king who can produce a wise nation—a wise kingdom. Throughout Israel's history the foolishness of the kings led to the difficulties and ultimately the destruction of the kingdom. The kings were fools, so the people were fools. As a result, there was death and chaos.

C. (:2-6) Comprehensive Purpose Statement

1. (:2-3) Overall Purpose: Wise Living

"*To know wisdom and instruction,*
To discern the sayings of understanding,
3 To receive instruction in wise behavior,
Righteousness, justice and equity;"

Chuck Swindoll: Wisdom is the ability to view life as God perceives it.

Max Anders: In summary, then, the purpose of Proverbs is that the reader might gain skill for living life, the discipline to carry through with it, and the discernment to know whether one is "on course."

Allen Ross: The first purpose is that the disciple will **develop skillfulness and discipline in holy living** (**v.2a**). "*Attaining*," from the infinitive *daʿat* (lit., "to know"; from GK 3359), encompasses an intellectual and experiential acquisition of wisdom and discipline, for the expression "*to know*" wisdom not only means to become conscious of it but also to observe it, to realize it, and to experience it.

"*Wisdom*" (*ḥokmâ*; GK 2683) basically means "*skill*." This word describes the "skill" of the craftsmen who worked in the tabernacle (**Ex 31:6**), the "wits" of seasoned mariners (**Ps 107:27**), administrative abilities (**1Ki 3:28**), and the "wise advice" of a counselor (**2Sa 20:22**). In Proverbs "wisdom" signifies **skillful living**—the ability to make wise choices and live successfully according to the moral standards of the covenantal community. The one who lives skillfully produces things of lasting value to God and to the community.

The other object to be acquired is "*discipline*" (*mûsār;* GK 4592; cf. **4:5**), the necessary companion of wisdom. *Mûsār* denotes the training of the moral nature, involving the correcting of waywardness toward folly and the development of reverence for the Lord and personal integrity. Waltke, 1:175, asserts that wisdom cannot be possessed without this instruction to correct moral faults.

The second major purpose of Proverbs is to help the disciple acquire **discernment** (**v.2b**). The meaning of the Hiphil infinitive *hābîn* ("*to understand, discern*"; GK 1067) can be illustrated by the cognate preposition *bên* ("*between*"). "*To discern*" means to distinguish between things, to compare concepts, form evaluations, or make analogies. One cannot gain wisdom and instruction without understanding.

The object of this infinitive is cognate to it: "*words of insight*" (*ʾimrê bînâ*, with "*words*" referring to complete statements, of course). Proverbs will train people to discern lessons about life, such as distinguishing permanent values from immediate gratifications. Both writing and speaking these words were used in the instruction.

John Kolkebec: Instruction (Education enforced by Loving Discipline)

1. In Wise Behavior - Prosper concept,

wisdom bringing success.
2. In Righteousness - God's ethical Moral Standard.
Form of - to be straight.
3. In Justice - Proper Government: Process of God

2. (:4-6) Specific Emphasis for Different Groups

a. (:4a) Protection for the Naïve

"*To give prudence to the naive,*"

Jay Adams: The "*simple*" or naive is the one who is highly **impressionable**, who is open to all sorts of influences—both good and bad. He lacks the know-how and the discretion to distinguish the one from the other. He is in a dangerous place; he lives in a fallen world that continually beckons him in addition to the call of wisdom. He has trouble knowing which voice is which; he does not know how to distinguish the two. That is what this wisdom book will provide if he reads and heeds.

b. (:4b) Tips for Teenagers

"*To the youth knowledge and discretion,*"

c. (:5-6) Leadership Training for the Mature

"*A wise man will hear and increase in learning,*
And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,
6 To understand a proverb and a figure,
The words of the wise and their riddles."

John Goldingay: Proverbs has four related target audiences. There are the naive, young people, the people who might be literally addressed by their mothers and fathers. They need to acquire insight for life. Yet this doesn't mean its teaching is irrelevant to older people who have already gained some such insight. Proverbs believes in lifelong learning and believes that the people who are already wise need to continue to increase in wisdom; the opening paragraph has already made that point. We sometimes wonder what new truths we need to learn, but as often as not we need to get a securer or fresher grasp of things that in theory we know already.

For both the naive and the wise, Proverbs has some hope. Of the other two groups, it's more despairing. Wisdom's antithesis is stupidity. Stupid people are not people with academic learning difficulties but people who turn their backs on the kind of wisdom that has moral implications. Stupidity thus overlaps with arrogance. The arrogant are the people who mock the teaching of the wise. They think they know everything already. Their mouths are always open, but their ears are closed.

D. (:7) Complex Fundamental Question – How Does a Man Become Wise?

1. Fundamental Step One: Complete Submission to Divine Instruction

"*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;*"

Derek Kidner: *The beginning* (i.e. the first and controlling principle, rather than a stage which one leaves behind; cf. **Ec. 12:13**) is not merely a right method of thought but a right relation; a worshipping submission (*fear*) to the God of the covenant, who has revealed Himself by name (*the Lord*, i.e. *Yahweh*: **Ex. 3:13-15**). *Knowledge*, then, in its full sense, is a relationship, dependent on revelation and inseparable from character.

Stephen Olford: In this context, it ("*the fear of the Lord*") means a penitential turning from sin. "*The fear of the Lord is to hate evil*" (**8:13**). The Bible calls this repentance. We can never know God and hang on to our sins at one and the same time. But to know God, we must also trust Him. This calls for a reverential trusting in God. . . The second part of our text reveals the barrier to the knowledge of God. The word "*fools*" describes the unrepentant mindset that despises divine wisdom and instruction… synonymous with a wicked person. He or she aggressively flouts personal independence from God and His commandments.

2. Fundamental Problem: Refusal to be taught

"*Fools despise wisdom and instruction.*"

Jay Adams: But what is it to **despise wisdom and disciplined training**? The word in the original is a strong one indicating that the fool in question has stupidly slighted and even acted contemptuously toward wisdom and the training by which it is acquired. To despise it is more than the sour grapes attitude of one who has failed to learn as he ought; rather, it is to take a positive delight in showing contempt (probably by outward words and actions) for something. He has abandoned (or never begun) the search for wisdom, not so much out of lethargy (though that is where his antipathy toward wisdom and training may have begun) as out of a definite dislike for it. He is, according to the word for fool used here, one who will have nothing of the counsel of others; he is self-confident to the point of despising wisdom out of self-importance and pride. To submit to a teacher or counselor is the height of stupidity in his mind, whereas exactly the opposite is true. He is stupid for failing to do so. So, Solomon's admonition is to heed Wisdom's call to come and drink to the fill. If you do not, you will end up in the company of fools, and become like them.

II. (:8-19) DISCERNING BETWEEN GOOD AND BAD INFLUENCES

Jonathan Akin: Main Idea: **Unchecked greed for money and stuff is foolish because it will destroy you.**

I. Getting Money the Wrong Way Will Destroy You (**1:8-19**).
II. The Problem: It Doesn't Always Work Out Immediately, but It Will Work Out Ultimately (**1:19**).
III. Our Biggest Problem Is That We Have All Failed at This (**1:8-19**).
IV. Jesus Can Save You from Your Foolishness (**1:8-19**).

A. (:8-9) Fundamental Training Ground: Follow the Good Influence of Parents

"*Hear, my son, your father's instruction,*

And do not forsake your mother's teaching;
9 Indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head,
And ornaments about your neck."

John Piper: God ordained the family not just to be fruitful and fill the earth with people, but to fill the earth with instructed people and taught people. The family is the place where the next generation is born and where the next generation learns how to live.

B. (:10-19) Avoid the Bad Influence of Wayward Peer Group

1, (:10-14) Their Lawless Enticement

"*My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent.*
11 If they say, 'Come with us, Let us lie in wait for blood,
Let us ambush the innocent without cause;
12 Let us swallow them alive like Sheol,
Even whole, as those who go down to the pit;
13 We shall find all kinds of precious wealth,
We shall fill our houses with spoil;
14 Throw in your lot with us, We shall all have one purse,"

Robert Deffinbaugh: What evil men offer:

- Group acceptance and identity
- Promise of material gain
- Excitement and sense of power

2. (:15-17) Their Naïve Expectations

"*My son, do not walk in the way with them.*
Keep your feet from their path,
16 For their feet run to evil, And they hasten to shed blood.
17 Indeed, it is useless to spread the net In the eyes of any bird;"

3. (:18-19) Their Violent End

"*But they lie in wait for their own blood;*
They ambush their own lives.
19 So are the ways of everyone who gains by violence;
It takes away the life of its possessors."

Robert Deffinbaugh: Regarding Violence

- Natural inclination towards violence
- Violence is Attractive
- Violence is a Way of Live

Jonathan Akin: The wisdom principle is clear: Getting money or stuff the wrong way (i.e., at others' expense) will destroy you. Using people, abusing people, or cheating people to get money will end badly. Unchecked greed, lustful desire, or ravenous craving for money and stuff at any cost will destroy you. It does not deliver what it promises.

III. (:20-33) FOLLY OF REJECTING THE PATH OF WISDOM

A. (:20-28) Wisdom Spurned Despite Its Availability

1. (:20-21) Access to Wisdom Available to All

> "*Wisdom shouts in the street,*
> *She lifts her voice in the square;*
> *At the head of the noisy streets she cries out;*
> *At the entrance of the gates in the city, she utters her sayings:*"

Raymond Ortlund: Now the father points to wisdom as the speaker, wisdom personified as a woman, but not a typical woman, especially for this culture. Women were not given the same voice as men. But Lady Wisdom is standing here at the crossroads of culture – where business, government, education, the arts, athletics all intersect – right in the middle of all the bustle and noise and competition, and she stands up and shouts more loudly than all else. Here is Lady Wisdom the street preacher, warning and scolding and demanding, very unladylike.

Paul Koptak: As we examine the speech of personified Wisdom, we learn that the main emphasis of the entire first chapter is the **fate of those who reject wisdom**. Therefore, one can read this chapter as an extended illustration of **1:7**: "*Fools despise wisdom and discipline.*" Wisdom's speech also continues the first lesson of discernment and listening that began with the parent's instruction in **1:8.** The young man is to learn how to discern who is worthy of his trust and who is not.

Wisdom's speech can be divided into three sections following the use of the key word "*call*" (Heb. *qrʾ*, **1:21, 24, 28**).

- "*Wisdom calls aloud in the street*" (**1:20–23**)
- "*You rejected me when I called*" (**1:24–27**)
- "*Then they will call to me but I will not answer*" (**1:28–33**)

Each section addresses a different audience, and each makes use of a different verbal tense. Whereas Wisdom calls to all in a present tense, she addresses the simple and fools, who rejected her calls in the past. She then turns away from them to say that they will call on her in the future to no avail. . .

The **chiastic** or mirror structure can also be diagrammed to highlight the change from second to third person in the address to the simple and fools:

A **1:20–21**—Wisdom calls out to all
  B **1:22–23b**—Appeal to simple and fools—"*you*"
    C **1:24–27**—Wisdom rejects those who reject her—"*you*"
  B′ **1:28–32**—Fate of simple and fools—"*they*"
A′ **1:33**—Final call to listen and promise of safety to those who hear

The change to third person "they" in 1:28 signals that Wisdom's words of rejection are final. She no longer addresses the simple, scoffers, and fools directly but turns to explain her reaction to anyone who will listen, especially the young learner and the reader. The final call also promises safety to those who will listen; it offers a confirmation to those who have already chosen to walk along Wisdom's path. Like the prologue, it encourages the reader to continue reading the book and to walk in the ways of wisdom.

2. (:22-25) Foolishness Closes Its Eyes to Wisdom Until It is Too Late

a. (:22) Failure to Face Reality

"*How long, O naive ones, will you love simplicity?*
And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing,
And fools hate knowledge?"

Plaut: Three types of people are exhorted by wisdom:
1) The thoughtless . . . a character weakness is involved.
2) The scorners. The *letz* lives by tearing others down; he is derisive because derision builds up his ego.
3) The fools. . . morally deficient. Intellectually, he is capable of understanding right and wrong, but he hates to learn how to make right decisions and manages to get himself into trouble.

Charles Bridges: A **simple person** is another name for a foolish person. It describes those who do not fear God. They do not weigh what they say or do. They live as if there is no God and no eternity. Their minds are blinded by their love for sin. In other instances man delights not in his ignorance, but in its removal. But these simple ones, ignorant of the value and danger of their souls, love [their] simple ways. They think of all attempts to enlighten them as an intrusion on their indulgent rest. While they live wild, profligate, and lazy lives, they forget that God remembers their wickedness and that they will be judged (Hosea 7:2; Ecclesiastes 11:9).

b. (:23-24) Failure to Respond to Importunity (persistent solicitation)

"*Turn to my reproof, Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you;*
I will make my words known to you. 24 "Because I called, and
you refused; I stretched out my hand, and no one paid attention;"

John Miller: She speaks with tremendous passion: *Behold, I will pour out to you my spirit; I will make known my words to you* (**22:23b**, lit.). Her speech is more precisely a warning of an imminent calamity due to the fact that the fools she addresses have so persistently rejected her advice (**1:24-25**).

c. (:25) Failure to Repent in Time

"*And you neglected all my counsel,*
And did not want my reproof;"

3. (:26-28) Wisdom Will Reject the Belated Appeals of Desperate Foolishness

"I will even laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when your dread comes,
27 When your dread comes like a storm,
And your calamity comes on like a whirlwind,
When distress and anguish come on you.
28 "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer;
They will seek me diligently, but they shall not find me,"

Plaut: The verse (:**28**) portrays a common human weakness: we wait until it is all but too late, and then we cry for help and expect it right away."

B. (:29-33) Bitter Fruit of Rejecting Wisdom

1. (:29-30) You Have No One to Blame But Yourself

"*Because they hated knowledge,*
And did not choose the fear of the LORD.
30 They would not accept my counsel,
They spurned all my reproof."

2. (:31-32) Fools Get What they Asked For

"*So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way,*
And be satiated with their own devices.
32 For the waywardness of the naive shall kill them,
And the complacency of fools shall destroy them."

Raymond Ortlund: Wisdom is dangerous, like fire. But it will purify you. Folly is more dangerous, like poison. It will turn you howling and insufferable. Which danger will you risk?

3. (:33) Fundamental Promise: It Doesn't Have to Be This Way

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

Raymond Ortlund: **Wisdom Is Our Only Safety**
The world offers complacency (counterfeit ease). That is its false promise. Christ offers you ease. That is his true promise to all who listen to him with urgency.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Why are proverbs an especially effective form of communication? Have we emphasized the memorization of proverbs for our children?

2) Trace the personification of wisdom throughout these opening chapters (even into **chapter 8**). How does Christ become wisdom and righteousness to us?

3) What facts are typically ignored by fools? Where do we tend to deny reality in our own lives?

4) What are the characteristics of one who listens and submits to divine instruction as opposed to one who ignores and rejects it?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Goldingay: The opening paragraph of Proverbs thus comes to a climax by declaring that the first principle of knowledge is **awe for Yahweh**, whereas stupid people despise wisdom and discipline; the opening chapter of Proverbs refers to knowing or knowledge six times. But the knowing isn't expressed merely in achieving a high IQ or a high score in the Standardized Admissions Test (SAT). The point runs through the opening paragraph, which introduces many of Proverbs' key words. The connection between what goes on in the head and what goes on in the life immediately appears in the link between **wisdom** and **discipline**. Increasing in wisdom is tied up with increasing in discipline. It's linked with the idea of "getting" discipline or "getting" wisdom—the word is the Hebrew verb that means to take. Getting hold of wisdom involves action. We speak of "grasping" things, and the word for "grasp" here is related to the word for "getting." Grasping is an activity. In substance, gaining wisdom is related to understanding words that express understanding—the Hebrew word for understanding is related to the word for "between," so it hints at **the capacity to distinguish between things or to see behind the surface of things.**

Ray Stedman: The book of Proverbs expresses the conclusion of the will of man. Together, the books of Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes give us the cry of the soul of man. In Psalms you have the emotional nature, which is one part of the soul function. Ecclesiastes deals with the function of the mind – the search of man's reason throughout the earth, analyzing, evaluating, weighing and concluding on the basis of what is discoverable under the sun, that is, by human reason. But in the book of Proverbs we have the appeal to the will of man and the conclusion of the will; therefore, this book is all about the things man should decide, the choices of life. This is beautifully set before us in the introduction to the book. First, there is a title in Verse 1: . . .

And then we read the purpose of the book (**Verses 2-6**): In other words, this is designed for man in every division and age of his life, from childhood through youth and maturity, in order to understand what life is all about. The book of Proverbs is very practical and is recommended especially for those who are just beginning to try to solve some of the mysteries of life. Also, if you are just moving out for the first time into contact with the world and its ways and mysteries, this is an excellent book of admonition.

Verse 7 gives the key to the whole book. And, since Proverbs is the book that deals with life, this is also the key verse to all of life and is one of the greatest verses in the Bible. It states the summary and conclusion of this book: . . . This whole book approaches life from the position that God has all the answers -- God is all-wise; God knows everything. There is nothing that is hidden from his knowledge. He understands all mysteries, sees the answer to all riddles. He sees below the surface of everything. Therefore, the beginning of wisdom is to reverence and fear God.

David Holwick: Wisdom is a relationship, offered by God and requiring a commitment of our character. ..

II. Most people are like thermometers. (Rev. Charles Adams, Illustration #1534)

A. They reflect their surroundings.

1) At some time, or in some situation, most of us are like this.

B. Young people are especially eager to be molded by others.

1) Everyone wants to be liked. "*entice*" **Proverbs 1:10**

2) Examples of "accepting" behavior: Drugs, drinking, sex.

C. Choose what will mold you.

1) Choose friends carefully.

"*A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray*." **Proverbs 12:26**

a) Cling to good people.

2) Choose spouse carefully.

a) Don't be unequally yoked. **2 Corinthians 6:14, 17**

You may end up spending a lifetime trying to change someone who doesn't want to be changed.

III. Other people are like thermostats.

A. They change the temperature of their surroundings.

1) Takes much moral strength to change others for good.

2) Christians should have this ability.

B. Jesus set the temperature for others.

1) Jesus associated with "riff-raff."

a) Prostitutes.

b) Tax collectors.

c) Low-lifes.

2) But Jesus brought them up to his level, not other way around.

a) Zacchaeus and repentance. **Luke 19:7-9**

C. Jesus' church should be able to set the temperature of others.

Derek Kidner: The secondary purpose of Proverbs is to introduce the reader to a style of teaching that provokes his thought, getting under his skin by thrusts of wit, paradox,

common sense and teasing symbolism, in preference to the preacher's tactic of frontal assault. . .

Re. **vv. 20-33** – Wisdom's impassioned appeal
This passage is the first of many in which wisdom is personified; the most far-reaching of these is **chapter 8**. Here the open proclamation, heard above the noise of the market, significantly balances the domesticity of **verse 8**, to make it clear that the offer of wisdom is to the man in the street, and for the business of living, not to an elite for the pursuit of scholarship.

Tremper Longman: Wisdom is the skill of living. It is a practical knowledge that helps one know how to act and how to speak in different situations. Wisdom entails the ability to avoid problems, and the skill to handle them when they present themselves. Wisdom also includes the ability to interpret other people's speech and writing in order to react correctly to what they are saying to us.

Wisdom is not intelligence pure and simple. It does not necessarily exclude intelligence, but that is not the focus. Proverbs itself attributes wisdom to a series of animals, not because they have great intelligence but because they know how to navigate life well (**Prov. 30:24-28**).

Robert Deffinbaugh: Proverbs **chapter 1** is like a road map in that it outlines life in terms of only two ways--the way of wisdom and the way of folly. Wisdom leads to peace and security, while the way of folly ends with death and destruction. Everyone is on one of these two paths. The way of folly is characterized by evil men who seek material gain through violence. The way of wisdom is entered by fearing God and forsaking evil. . .

While an in-depth study of "*the fear of the Lord*" is worthwhile, let it suffice for now to point out that wisdom is personified in Proverbs. I believe that in addition to serving as a literary device this personification of wisdom prepares us for the incarnation of wisdom in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice the striking comparison of wisdom in Proverbs with Jesus in the Gospel of John. . .

Louis Goldberg: The relation between "*the fear of the Lord*" and true wisdom is that fear is the foundation and wisdom is the superstructure for moral and spiritual maturity.

The people who make a habit of continually rejecting wisdom and her God will begin to "*eat the fruit of their ways*" (**1:31**). The New Testament sequel is that "*a man reaps what he sows*" (**Galatians 6:7**). The final step in rebelliousness, apostasy, and careless ease is destruction. What a fearful price to pay for the complete rejection of the gracious appeal by wisdom. Scorn or mockery, security or peace – the choice is ours.

Jerry Falwell: The unredeemed person never sees things from God's point of view. He always views things from an earthly perspective. He is captured by the cosmos. He is imprisoned by the planet on which he lives. His gods are labeled "hedonism" and

"immorality," and they are all he worships. We have read again and again of the tragic deaths of actors and actresses. These pathetic figures have worshiped before a false altar of success, and have, in the end, reaped a fatal harvest. The greater catastrophe is that millions who do not enjoy a celebrity's level of prosperity still reject the Word and wisdom of God, and move through life devoid of wisdom, security, and success.

Warren Wiersbe: The six verses that precede this key verse (**1:7**) explain why the book of Proverbs was written: to give us **wisdom, instruction, understanding, prudence (subtlety), knowledge, discretion, learning, and counsel**. Everything depends on wisdom; the other seven words are practically synonymous with it. Louis Goldberg says that *wisdom* means exhibiting "His [God's] character in the many practical affairs of life."8 Instruction carries the idea of discipline, a parent's correction that results in the building of the child's character. *Understanding* means the ability to grasp a truth with insight and discernment. *Prudence* ("*subtlety*") is the kind of intelligence that sees the reasons behind things. People with prudence can think their way through complex matters and see what lies behind them, and thereby make wise decisions about them. (In a negative sense, the word translated "prudence" means craftiness. It is used to describe Satan in **Genesis 3:1**.) The word translated "*knowledge*" comes from a Hebrew root that describes skill in hunting (**Gen. 25:27**), sailing (**2 Chron. 8:18**), and playing a musical instrument (**1 Sam. 16:16**). *Knowledge* involves the ability to distinguish; the Latin equivalent gives us our English word science. *Discretion* is the ability to devise wise plans after understanding a matter. The negative meaning is "to devise a plot." The Hebrew root for "*learning*" means "to lay hold of, to grasp, to acquire or buy." When we grasp something with the mind, then we have learned it. The word translated "*counsel*" is related to the verb "to steer a ship." Counsel is wise guidance that moves one's life in the right direction. You'll find these eight words repeated often in the book of Proverbs; when you put them together, you have a summary of what Solomon means by wisdom.

TEXT: Proverbs 2:1-22

TITLE: STAYING ON THE PATHWAY TO WISDOM

BIG IDEA:
THE GIFT OF WISDOM FROM THE LORD KEEPS ONE ON THE RIGHT PATH OF UNDERSTANDING AND PROTECTION

INTRODUCTION:

Steve Zeisler: . . .a series of lessons that a father is teaching his son. A godly father is with his young son, an early adolescent, we can well imagine, and with his arm around him, is talking to him about life. . .

Now this is clearly a son who is just beginning to face adult realities and to become responsible for himself. The sayings and commandments are offered as new, wisdom's treasures yet to be discovered.

Paul Koptak: As was common in the ancient Near East, each section of teaching has a predictable pattern or form. An address ("*My son*") is followed by a charge or condition ("*if you accept my words*"), which is followed in turn by a series of motivations or rewards ("*then you will understand the fear of the LORD*"). Often there is also a mention of final outcomes.

The six subsections of **chapter 2** form an **extended conditional statement**, the protasis ("*if*") of **verses 1–4** followed by five apodoses: "*then*" in **verses 5–8, 9–11**, "*in order to*" in **verses 12–14, 16–19**, and **20–22**. Interestingly, the first three of these six sections begin with the letter *aleph* ("A," **vv. 4, 5, 9**) and the last three begin with the letter *lamed* ("L," **vv. 12, 16, 20**). Readers should note that *lamed*, the first letter of the second half of the Hebrew alphabet, is used in the second half of the poem. Based on these clues we can suggest the following outline:

> *Aleph* stanza (**2:1–4**), "*If you*" (three times, **vv. 1, 3, 4**)
> *Aleph* stanza (**2:5–8**), "*Then you will understand*" ("*guard*," **v. 8)**
> *Aleph* stanza (**2:9–11**), "*Then you will understand*" ("*protect*," **v. 11**)
> *Lamed* stanza (**2:12–15**), "*to be saved*" from evil men
> *Lamed* stanza (**2:16–19**), "*to be saved*" from the adulteress
> *Lamed* stanza (**2:20–22**), "*in order to walk*" safe in the land

This outline helps us observe the repetition of terms for understanding and protection, the dominant themes of the passage.

John Miller: The poem has **twenty-two verses** (the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet). These verses are in two parts of eleven verses each.

- Part 1 (**2:1-11**) starts with three clauses beginning with *if* (**2:1, 3, 4**), followed by two clauses beginning with *then* (**2:5, 9**). The if clauses state in general what benefits will accrue to a son who heeds his father's commandments.
- Part 2 (**2:12-22**) identifies two more specific benefits of being wise in this sense (**2:12-19**) and concludes with a statement about the contrasting fates of upright and wicked (**2:20-22**).

Charles Bridges: Wisdom, having solemnly warned rebellious scoffers, now instructs her obedient children. The deep question previously asked, "*Where can wisdom be found*?" is now answered. It is set before us here as the fear of the Lord (**verse 5**). It is seen as the principle of practical godliness (**verses 7-9**), as preserving us from besetting temptations (**verses 10-19**), and as a guide into the right and safe path (**verse 20**). So its pupils are safe (**verse 21**), but the ungodly who despise it will definitely be ruined (**verse 22**).

David Hubbard: Wisdom is nothing less than the **key to survival**. Israel's teachers looked out on a world fraught with menace and proclaimed wisdom as the savior. To **deliver** or **rescue** is its chief mission (**vv. 12, 16**). The means given by God to achieve this salvation are described in military nouns and verbs: "*shield*" (**v. 7**), "*guards*" (**v. 8**) or "*keeps*" (**v. 11**; the two Hebrew words are the same), and "*preserves*" (**vv. 8, 11**). Wisdom's value is noted in passing as part of the encouragement to seek it (**v. 4**), but it is its **effective protectiveness** that dominates the chapter.

The structure of this speech is further testimony to its compactness and unity. It is also a window to the ways in which the teachers combined argument and illustration to bundle and cinch their lessons.

Argument **2:1–9**
- condition **2:1–4**
- result **2:5**
- reason **2:6–9**

Illustrations **2:10–20**
- men of perverse speech **2:10–15**
- women of loose sexuality **2:16–20**

Antithetic conclusion **2:21–22**
- positive **2:21**
- negative **2:22**

Lindsay Wilson: The **flow of thought** in this chapter is that wisdom linked with the fear of the Lord will lead to a shaped character which will be the means God uses to protect people. Thus, it is this shaped character that will preserve a person from evil men (**vv. 12–15**) and the strange woman (**vv. 16–19**). These are both manifestations of folly. The evil men have already been seen to have this role (**1:8–19**), and in **chapters 5-7** the loose/strange woman will have this task as well.

Max Anders: **MAIN IDEA**: Wisdom can be found, if a person searches for it diligently enough, and once found, it will save a person from disaster and lead to satisfaction.

SUPPORTING IDEA: If you dedicate yourself to an intense search for wisdom, you will find it. And with the wisdom, you will find God. You will be protected from violent men or seductive women who would otherwise entice you to disaster. You will be able to choose the right paths because you know where each path ends.

I. (2:1-5) THIS GIFT OF WISDOM MUST BE ACTIVELY PURSUED

A. (:1-4) The Pursuit of Wisdom

Allen Ross: The teacher again makes the appeal: To attain wisdom requires constant meditation and rigid discipline. Charles T. Fritsch (IB, 4:793) refers to it as a receptive spirit and an ardent search.

The requirement of meditation begins with receiving the teaching. "*Accept*" is paralleled with "*store up*" (**v.1**), and "words" is paralleled with "*commands*," thus showing intensification from the first colon to the second. The figure "*store up*" implies that most teaching cannot be used immediately but that some time will pass before education's effects are felt (Plaut, 43). In the meantime the teachings will develop in their pupils attitudes that will influence their actions at some time in the future.

Such a perspective calls for **patience** by the students—patience that makes both heart and mind attentive. The ear is the instrument of hearing obediently, and the heart the focus of the mental process of learning and understanding. The figures (metonymies) describe a responsive and obedient person, with "ear" and "heart" (**v.2**) representing the mental faculties.

Max Anders: Now in **chapter 2**, he extols the wonderful blessings that wisdom brings. In **2:1-4**, Solomon lists three conditions, each beginning with the word if (**vv. 1, 3, 4**).

- First, one must choose attentiveness (**2:1-2**).
- The second condition for gaining wisdom is to ask for it (**2:3**).
- A third step in gaining wisdom is to commit oneself to a determined search for it (:**4**).

Roland Murphy: The **intensity of the appeal** matches the intensity of the speeches of Moses in Deuteronomy.

1. (:1-2) By Dedication to Hearing and Obeying

"*My son, if you will receive my sayings,*
And treasure my commandments within you,
2 Make your ear attentive to wisdom,
Incline your heart to understanding; '

2. (:3) By Desiring Wisdom's Fruit

a. Discernment

"*For if you cry for discernment,*"

Ray Ortlund: Your most meaningful prayer is to "*call for insight*" and "*raise your voice for understanding*" (**v. 3**). The whole passage is meant to position us in that place of blessing and protection. We need it. A tsumani of sin is slamming us in our world today. And all of us are suffering under it. Sometimes that suffering is our own fault, because we have been complacent and unguarded. Other times that suffering is precisely because we have stayed true to the Lord.

b. Understanding

"*Lift your voice for understanding;*"

3. (:4) By Diligently and Urgently Searching Her Priceless Value

"*If you seek her as silver,*
And search for her as for hidden treasures;"

Warren Wiersbe: People are willing to work diligently in their jobs because they know they'll earn a paycheck, but what about applying themselves diligently to God's Word in order to gain spiritual riches that are more valuable than gold and silver and jewels, riches that will last forever? (See **2:4; 3:13–15; 8:10–21; 16:16**.) There's a **price to pay** if we would gain spiritual wisdom, but there's an even greater price to pay if we don't gain it. We must walk with God through the study of His Word.

B. (:5) The Prize

1. Reverence -- Discerning the Fear of the Lord -- Awe

"*Then you will discern the fear of the LORD,*

George Mylne: The fear of the Lord, and the sound knowledge of God, are inseparably connected. The fear of God is not a blind and tormenting passion of the soul but a holy and delightful grace, founded in true apprehensions of the solemn and lovely glories of the divine nature and disposing him who possesses it, to walk with God. The knowledge of God regulates this fear, and preserves it from sinking into terror, or degenerating into superstition but guides it to express its power in checking and subduing every corrupt affection, and animating the soul to every instance of obedience.

2. Relationship -- Discovering the Knowledge of God Himself -- Intimacy

"*And discover the knowledge of God.*"

Jonathan Akin: There is a reciprocal cycle laid out here in **Proverbs 2.** Seek Wisdom, and you will find God. Find God, and you will gain wisdom. A right relationship with God will make you wise. Knowledge implies an intimate relationship. This happens by faith. Oftentimes allegiance precedes understanding.

Derek Kidner: With these two phrases (*the fear of the Lord . . . the knowledge of God*) **verse 5** encompasses the two classic Old Testament terms for true religion – the poles of awe and intimacy.

II. (2:6-11) THIS GIFT OF WISDOM MAKES ITS HOME AT THE CENTER OF YOUR BEING

A. (:6a) The Root of This Gift of Wisdom

"*For the Lord grants wisdom*!"

Derek Kidner: What you *find*, then (**vs. 5**), is what He *gives* (**vs. 6**); discovery and revelation are inseparable.

David Atkinson: With our minds we can come to understand something of God's wisdom, but we need to search for it. When we do, we discover that wisdom is God's precious gift. God is the source of all wisdom; all knowledge comes from God. It is when human beings live in tune with the ways of God that the precious gift of humanity itself is safeguarded and protected.

Roland Murphy: Most important is the emphasis on wisdom as a gift of God. This is somewhat **paradoxical**. On the one hand, the teacher speaks as if everything depends upon the listening and obedience of the youth. On the other hand, wisdom is a divine gift. Her origin is described as *from the mouth of the Lord*, an anticipation of Sir 24:3; cf. **Prov 8:22–24**. As things develop, it will be seen that there is divine mystery lurking behind the security and the certainty of wisdom teaching. One must strive for the goal, but also realize that wisdom remains a divine gift. Ultimately we have a picture of the acquisition of wisdom by means of human industry and divine aid and generosity.

B. (:6b-7) The Riches of This Gift of Wisdom

1. (:6b) Knowledge and Understanding

"*From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.*"

2. (:7a) Good Sense

"*He stores up sound wisdom*"

C. (:7c-8) The Recipients of This Gift of Wisdom

1. To the Upright

"*for the upright;*"

2. To Those Walking in Integrity

"*to those who walk in integrity,*"

3. To His Godly Ones

"*of His godly ones*"

D. (:8-9) The Resources of This Gift of Wisdom

1. Protection

"*He is their shield,*
Guarding the paths of justice,
And He preserves the way"

W. A. Rees Jones: God watches over the path His people take, both to protect them in it and to keep them in the right way.

2. Discernment

"Then you will discern righteousness
and justice
and equity
and every good course."

E. (:10-11) The Radiance of This Gift of Wisdom

1. Residing at the Core of Your Being

"*For wisdom will enter your heart,*"

2. Resonating Throughout Your Entire Person with Joy

"*And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;*"

3. Restraining Evil Temptations and Attacks

"*Discretion will guard you,*
Understanding will watch over you,"

III. (2:12-19) THIS GIFT OF WISDOM GUARDS YOUR SOUL AGAINST DESTRUCTIVE TEMPTATION

A. (:12-15) Temptation of Depraved Companions

1. (:12) Depraved Companions Traffic in Perversity

"*To deliver you from the way of evil,*
From the man who speaks perverse things;"

Ray Ortlund: "*Perverted speech*" is not limited to bad words and dirty jokes. It includes even good words, but good words being used to turn things upside down. Upheaval, turning things upside down and inside out – that is the force of the Hebrew behind the word "*perverted*."

Jonathan Akin: Like Satan in the garden, these men **distort reality** and try to get you to follow the distortion. They seduce you. That's what it means to speak perversely. Perverse speech distorts ultimate reality. The people who are saying this may genuinely believe that what they are saying is right and true and helpful, but it **goes against the created order**. Their words go against the way things really work.

2. (:13) Depraved Companions Reject Righteousness for Darkness

"*From those who leave the paths of uprightness,*
To walk in the ways of darkness;"

3. (:14) Depraved Companions Delight in Doing Evil

"*Who delight in doing evil,*
And rejoice in the perversity of evil;"

4. (:15) Depraved Companions Trick You into a Destructive Lifestyle

"*Whose paths are crooked,*
And who are devious in their ways;"

Derek Kidner: The process is that wisdom and knowledge, when they become your own way of thinking, and your acquired taste (**10**), will make the talk and interests of evil men alien to you (**12-15**).

Allen Ross: **Verses 13–15** describe the purpose, pleasure, and perverted paths of those who are wicked. Their purpose is to walk in the ways of darkness (**v.13**); they abandon the straight way to follow an evil way that can only be described as "dark." Darkness is often metaphorical for sinfulness, ignorance, or oppression. Their way is uncertain, devoid of ethical illumination (see **4:18; Ecc 2:13**).

B. (:16-19) Temptation of Seductive Prostitutes

Allen Ross: The second class of evil persons from whom wisdom delivers is the **licentious woman**. Her seductive voice joins the appeal from the disloyal men but with a different result; whereas the evil man brings pain and perversion, the evil woman brings moral ruin through a more subtle temptation. Prostitutes and adulteresses existed in Israel from the earliest times (**Jdg 11:1; 1Ki 3:16; Hos 3:1**; notice also laws against adultery in **Ex 20:14; Lev 20:10**). In this passage the licentious woman is first described (**vv.16–17**); then her ruin and that of those who submit to her are presented as a warning (**vv.18–19**).

David Hubbard: "*Immoral woman*" and "*seductress*" (**v. 16**) are appropriate translations of terms that suggest "*foreignness*." Their point is not so much that the woman comes from a strange land and resides in Israel as an ethnic alien. Rather, she is a spiritual and social outsider because she has deliberately chosen to violate the covenant mores of her people. She violates the law as she "*forsakes*" and abandons her husband ("*companion of her youth*"), and even worse she "*forgets*," that is, **deliberately fails to obey** (see **Hos. 2:13**, for a similar use of "*forget*") her marriage vows made before God and in His name as a "*covenant*" (the only instance of the term in Proverbs) to which God is party (see **Mal. 2:14,** for a kindred expression). The ugliness of her actions stands in sharp contrast to the attractiveness of her seductive techniques: she "*flatters* [lit., "*says smooth and pleasing things*"] *with her words*."

1. (:16) Seducing Solicitations and Flattery

"*To deliver you from the strange woman,*
From the adulteress who flatters with her words;"

Jonathan Akin: How does this woman work? She **flatters with her words**. This is perhaps shocking to some. Most of us think of unfaithfulness as starting with looks, but that's not the case in Proverbs. Adultery and sexual sin start with flattery. One of the top needs that men have is respect and admiration; so if a woman inflates the male ego, he will usually respond. They are suckers for flattery. This may start in a subtle way that the man doesn't recognize as unwise. His coworker might lend a sympathetic ear, or she may laugh at his jokes. He may think of their conversations as just "harmless flirting." Or perhaps he justifies his flirtation with, "I'm not happy at home." Before long, he starts to look forward to work events that she will be at, or he begins to send secret messages to her on Facebook. Before he knows it he's cheating on his wife, and it all started with what many looking on would justify as "harmless conversation."

Warren Wiersbe: Someone has said that flattery isn't communication, it is manipulation; it's people telling us things about ourselves that we enjoy hearing and wish were true. The strange woman knows how to use flattery successfully. She has no respect for God because she breaks His law (**Ex. 20:14**); she has no respect for her husband because she violates the promises she made to him when she married him. She no longer has a guide or a friend in the Lord or in her husband because she has taken the path of sin. Anyone who listens to her words and follows her path is heading for the cemetery.

2. (:17) Shameful Unfaithfulness

"*That leaves the companion of her youth,*
And forgets the covenant of her God;"

Paul Koptak: While this use of the term "*covenant*" (the only one in Proverbs) refers to the covenant of **marriage** and not the covenant God made with Israel, one cannot help but remember that when Israel broke its covenant with God, the prophets likened Israel to an unfaithful wife (**Jer. 3:6; Hos. 2:1–13**). The abandonment of marriage became a symbol for faithlessness of all kinds. Unlike **2 Kings 17:35–38**, the use of "*covenant*" here does not mention other gods, but in abandoning the covenant of marriage, this Israelite woman has in effect also severed covenant relationship with God.

3. (:18) Stinking Sinkhole Leading to Death

"*For her house sinks down to death,*
And her tracks lead to the dead;"

4. Shattered Lives with No Hope of Recovery

"*None who go to her return again,*
Nor do they reach the paths of life."

5. Solitary Way of Escape

Only wisdom from the Lord can save a man.

Illustration: some things can be glued back together and they are almost as good as new; remember the time Jenny was given a porcelain doll for her 5 year old birthday. Went outside to play; dropped it and it shattered; no putting that back together.

Charles Bridges: Take care, young people. Do not imagine, even for one minute, that God will turn a blind eye on your sinful desires or that he will excuse them as the foibles of youth. Such ropes of sin will bind you for eternity if they are not broken by the power of God's grace. Shun the company of evil people as you would avoid the plague. Keep your distance from them as you would from the pit of destruction. Fill your mind with heavenly wisdom. Cultivate the taste for purer pleasures.

IV. (2:20-22) THIS GIFT OF WISDOM DIFFERENTIATES BETWEEN A GOOD AND A BAD DESTINY

A. (:20-21) The Godly Path Leads to a Life of Fulfillment

1. (:20) Godly Path

"So you will walk in the way of good men,
And keep to the paths of the righteous."

2. (:21) Life of Fulfillment

"*For the upright will live in the land,*
And the blameless will remain in it;"

Allen Ross: The passage ends on the more positive note that wisdom will enable people to do what is right and to enjoy God's blessing. Once again the promise of blessing is for good people, the righteous, the upright, and the blameless—the same terms used earlier for those who follow the path of wisdom. Here the text brings in the Deuteronomic emphasis on the land, God's supreme gift being the fulfillment of the promises. The reference to the land could refer to the land of Israel or the whole earth—perhaps even the world to come. The upright will enjoy security and prosperity in it, but the wicked will be rooted out in divine judgment.

B. (:22) The Evil Path Leads to a Life of Futility

"*But the wicked will be cut off from the land,*
And the treacherous will be uprooted from it."

Max Anders: A person who pursues wisdom can escape this fate by staying on the right path. Like the conclusion of Christ's Sermon on the Mount (**Matt. 7:13-27**), the final verses depict the fate that waits at the end of each path. The upright or blameless will remain in the land, but the wicked will be cut off or removed from the land, like a tree that is cut down, dug out by the roots, and hauled off. "*Land*" (Heb. *eretz*; also translated "*earth*" in **Gen. 1:1**) looks back to the covenant of **Deuteronomy 28** where

the Lord warned that Israel would be expelled from the promised land if they failed to remain faithful to him.

David Hubbard: Failure to heed wisdom's call leads either to premature death or to a life so void of happiness as to be a living death in which none of the God-given blessings of the "*earth*" (**v. 22**) or "*land*," (**v. 21**; the Hebrew word is the same both places) is available to lend any joy or meaning to life.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What have you ever lost that was precious to you? How diligently and urgently did you search for it? How much more valuable is God's wisdom for our lives?

2) These are universal principles of sowing and reaping. Why do people think they can avoid the consequences of their actions and escape destruction?

3) Are we availing ourselves of the Lord's protection and guidance? Are we surrounding ourselves with godly counselors and models who will encourage us along the path of righteousness?

4) How can some societies argue that prostitution is a "victimless" crime when God declares that it destroys both parties? The argument that "What's done in Vegas, stays in Vegas" is a blatant satanic lie. The consequences of immorality follow you around.

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Steve Zeisler: **Wisdom for Everyone**
One of the things that makes the book of Proverbs such a helpful book of the Bible for us in our ministry to those who don't know the Lord is that it also touches on very real, practical issues. It puts us on the same street as the non-Christian; it talks about life as we encounter it, and we discover that not only are we ourselves helped by its wisdom, but we have something to offer those young people, neighbors or others in our lives who are interested in the things that we are. This is a book in which, as we saw last week, wisdom calls out in the streets, not in the religious community. It's a book for the world.

Jerry Falwell: This sermon on **Proverbs 2** is divided into <u>three points</u>; each point comes from the first word of the new section.

> 1) "*IF*" (**verse 1**) is conditional, including conditional challenges, similar to those a parent might say to a child. "If you finish your vegetables, you can watch television."

2) "*FOR*" (**verse 6**) is a term of reason. This word "FOR" is similar to "BECAUSE" or "WHAT." The second part of my outline deals with "what the Lord will do for those who keep His conditions."

3) "*THEN*" is the third word. It deals with results or is a summary term. First, we must keep the conditions; second, here are the reasons God wants us to obey; third, deals with results. This is what will happen to us.

I. FIRST SECTION

A. WHY A FATHER USES "*IF*" WITH HIS SON.

God treats his believers similar to the way a father treats his son: both want the son to obey from the heart. Both want the son to learn lessons. God does not force us to obey; we have a will and God wants us to love and obey Him from the heart. If God forced us to love and worship Him, it would not be love, nor would the worship mean anything.

B. THREE STEPS TO WILLING OBEDIENCE.

1. FIRST STEP - SURRENDER:
2. SECOND STEP - MOVE TOWARD GOD:
3. THIRD STEP - APPLY GOD'S WORD (**verse 2**):

II. SECTION TWO

A. FIRST REASON: WE WILL GET UNDERSTANDING
B. SECOND REASON: GOD WILL KEEP YOU SAFE

III. SECTION THREE
THEN . . . WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO US (**verses 9-22**).

A. WHAT HAPPENS?: YOUR LIGHT GOES ON; "*THEN SHALT THOU UNDERSTAND RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUDGMENT*" (**verse 9**).
B. WHAT HAPPENS: YOU ARE DELIVERED FROM EVIL MEN.
C. WHAT HAPPENS: YOU ARE DELIVERED FROM THE "*IMMORAL WOMAN*."
D. WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU GO INTO THE HOUSE OF THE ADULTERESS/HARLOT? (**verse 18**)
E. WHAT HAPPENS: NO HOPE (**verse 19**).

CONCLUSION

A. DWELL IN THE LAND.
B. THE WICKED SHALL BE CUT OFF (**verse 22**).

Dave Hartson: www.sermoncentral.com

(:6-8) Introduction:

I need wisdom because God chooses to use wisdom as a means to keep me safe in this world.

For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

A. God says of all the ways He can keep me safe in this world, He has chosen wisdom as a primary means to keep me safe.

B. He could have chosen to move people out of danger but instead He gives wisdom so Christians can move themselves out of danger. This way I keep my free choice. I am not God's robot.

C. God says His wisdom will protect and guard me.

D. God is going to give us five reasons why we need wisdom.

1. (:9-10) Without wisdom I will make the wrong choice and be convinced that it is the right choice.

Then you will understand what is right and just and fair- every good path...

A. God is telling me that even with the best of intentions I will make a wrong choice without God's wisdom because

B. God is telling us the wrong choices that we made are because we use the wrong criteria to make the choice.

C. Wisdom puts before you the right criteria so that we can make the right choice.

2. (:11) Without wisdom, I can manage on the clear-cut issues of life. But without wisdom I will struggle with the issues that are not so clear-cut.

Discretion will protect you and understanding will guard you.

A. People know that thou shall not murder or rob the local bank or run the city traffic light. Whether you are a Christian or not you know in your heart that you should not do those things.

B. But life has some difficult questions that are not so clear-cut. Should I take that second job even though it means I might miss church? Should I buy that thing on time because it is on sale or wait to I have the money? Should I step in to help someone or let God continue working in his or her life?

3. (:12-15) Without wisdom, I am likely to fall in with the wrong crowd because I will fall to see the warning signs that there is danger.

Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men from men whose words are perverse.

A. You teenagers listen up. You need to know God's word so that when you go out with your friends you will know which ones to be around and which ones to avoid.

B. Are you and I careful in the friendships that we develop?

4. (:16-19) Without wisdom, staying faithful to your spouse throughout the marriage will be difficult.

It will save you also from the adulteress from the wayward wife with her seductive words…

A. Let me tell you today, the fact that you wear a wedding band doesn't make a big difference.
B. Many people have destroyed not only themselves but also their families as result of not having the wisdom to avoid the adulteress.
C. There is something exciting about someone other than your spouse being attracted to you. But if you have wisdom you see all the problems.

5. (:20-22) Without wisdom, you fall to see that there is only one of two roads that each person travels on.
Thus you will walk in the ways of good men…
A. In life there are only two paths that we have to choose from.
B. The key elements are: on one path you dwell in safety. The other path you dwell in uncertainty.

Louis Goldberg: The proper regard for wisdom and of her reception leads to an encounter with God that not only includes reverential awe but also intimate experience. These two experiences seem to be opposites. How does one stand in awe before a holy God and yet be intimate with Him? How can one fellowship with God and have respect for His holiness? Yet wisdom makes this possible as another of her fruits.

Harry Ironside: (Re **vs 10-17**) Two enemies are seen besetting the feet of the young man. Here (**10-15**) it is the evil man; in the next few verses, the strange woman. The evil man is the man who walks in the pride of his heart and in independence of God. This, to the young, seems very attractive, appealing to the natural mind. But to follow the evil man is to "*leave the paths of righteousness*" and to "*walk in the ways of darkness*." The truth of God possessing the reins will deliver from this, keeping the recipient of it from the self-willed ways of the evil one and pointing out his crooked and perverse paths.

TEXT: Proverbs 3:1-35

TITLE: WISDOM = THE PATHWAY TO MATURITY

BIG IDEA:
THE CONNECTION BETWEEN WISDOM AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY INVOLVES EMBRACING THE ESSENTIAL HEART COMMITMENTS AND AVOIDING THE TRAPS THAT CONTRADICT GOD'S CHARACTER AND ENDANGER OUR PROSPERITY

INTRODUCTION:

Ray Ortlund: Why are we studying the Book of Proverbs? Because we need more than ethical principles. We need new hearts. **We need wisdom deep within**, at an intuitive level, as we hurry from one complex decision to the next, moment by moment, in the concrete realities of our daily lives. Without God's wisdom, many difficulties in life will remain confusing and threatening. With God's wisdom entering our hearts, we get the hang of how life really works, and we come alive more and more. . .

Proverbs 3 explains why wisdom matters and what wisdom creates. Wisdom matters, according to **verses 13-26**, because wisdom is the open secret of the universe. It is not a private option, take it or leave it. **Wisdom is how life works**. We can disregard that for a while and get away with it, because God built everything so well. But we want the last chapter of our stories to be the best, don't we? So wisdom matters. Wisdom also creates something, according to **verses 27-35**. Wisdom creates a culture of life amid this culture of death called our world. **Wisdom is a community experience**. It is a shared experience of life in its fullness.

Paul Koptak: The teaching of this chapter urges its readers and hearers to give up their fantasies of self-determination and self-sufficiency and turn to wisdom, a guide and protector from the real danger of self-destruction. . .

Proverbs 3 is constructed as a series of three instructions, each marked by the address "*my son*" (3:1, 11, 21). The most outstanding feature of these instructions is the list of five admonitions in the first (**3:1–10**) and the list of five prohibitions in the last (**3:27–31**). For this reason, many commentators find only two instructions, setting **3:13–20** apart as a hymn or interlude. In my judgment, the distinctive character of the texts featuring personified Wisdom does not necessarily determine rhetorical structure. While it is true that "*my son*" does not always mark a new section in Proverbs, there are other indicators that a three-part division is the intended design here. Each address is followed by an admonition beginning with "*do not*." Moreover, the name of "*the LORD*" (Yahweh) occurs nine times in this chapter, three times in each of the divisions. An outline of the chapter based on a threefold division looks like this:

> **Five Admonitions**: "*Do not forget my teaching*" (**3:1–10**)
> **Blessings of Wisdom**: "*Do not despise the LORD's discipline*" (**3:11–20**)

Five Prohibitions: "*Do not let sound judgment and discernment out of your sight*" (**3:21–35**)

This structure directs the reader to pay close attention to the **prominence given to the name of Yahweh**. Yahweh is to be trusted, feared, and honored (**3:1–10**), Yahweh disciplines and creates (**3:11–20**), and Yahweh looks after those who walk in his way, opposing the wicked (**3:21–35**). In the first section, the admonitions to trust, fear, and honor Yahweh come in direct succession (**3:5, 7, 9**). In the second and third sections, the name of Yahweh creates a frame around the connected teachings: wisdom's benefits (**3:11–12, 19**) and the five teachings of neighbor love (**3:26, 32–33**).

This outline also helps us observe that the teaching of the parents and the discipline of Yahweh together offer the sound judgment and discernment the young learner will use **to relate to the community**. Given the focus on right relationship to God in **3:1–10** and right relation to members of the community in **3:21–35**, one can see the themes of piety and righteousness from **chapter 2** developed here (cf. **3:4**, "*favor and good name*" before God and humans) as well as the theme of "*finding*" wisdom (**2:1–6**).

David Hubbard: **Scripture Outline**

- Admonitions to Piety—A (**3:1–12**)
  - Keep the commandments **3:1–4**
  - Trust the Lord's guidance **3:5–8**
  - Honor the Lord's provision **3:9–10**
  - Accept the Lord's correction **3:11–12**
- A Practical Argument for Sagacity (**3:13–18**)
- A Theological Argument for Sagacity (**3:19–20**)
- Admonitions to Piety—B (**3:21–26**)
  - Guard wisdom **3:21–24**
  - Don't fear disaster **3:25–26**
- Admonitions to Generosity (**3:27–32**)
  - General **3:27**
  - Specific **3:28–32**
  - Don't turn away from a needy neighbor **3:28**
  - Don't plot against a neighbor **3:29**
  - Don't be contentious **3:30**
  - Don't emulate violence **3:31–32**
- Antithetic Summary (**3:33–35**)

I. (:1-10) FIVE COMMITMENTS OF THE HEART ESSENTIAL TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY AND DIVINE PROSPERITY (THE POINTED DO'S AND DON'TS)

Tremper Longman: Through admonitions and the promise of reward, the father urges the son to pursue a life of wisdom that entails fear of Yahweh and obedience to his commands. Waltke makes an interesting observation: "In theological terms, the

admonitions in the odd verses of **3:1–12** present the obligations of the son, the human covenant partner; the argumentation in the even verses shows the obligations of the Lord, the divine covenant partner. The human partner has the responsibility to keep ethics and piety, and the divine partner the obligation to bless his worshiper with peace, prosperity, and longevity."

A. (:1-2) Obey God's Law in Your Heart

1. (:1) The Pointed Exhortation

"*My son, do not forget my teaching,*
But let your heart keep my commandments"

David Hubbard: In the first admonition, "*keep my commands*," "*law*" and "*command*" (**v. 1**) remind us that the words of the wise were more than opinions or suggestions. They had a binding quality to them because they were based on the teachers' God-fearing observations of how life under divine control really worked. They were close cousins to the statutes of Moses which the prophets applied regularly to Israel's covenant relations.

Paul Koptak: The three benefits **of long life, prosperity, and good reputation** appear at the very start of the first instruction (**3:1–4**). However, these objects of desire do not come as ends in themselves but as the result of effort in learning wisdom and living wisely. The teacher means to point out the difference. Five admonitions follow on one another, all taking the form of imperative, charge, and motivation. So, for example, following the typical address "*my son*," the first admonition charges the son to remember parental teaching by keeping the commands in the heart, then presents the benefits of long life and prosperity (cf. **1:8**; **Ex. 20:2** may be in mind here). This admonition not only comes first, it serves as an introduction and summary of all that follows. Specific charges are linked to specific aspects of long life and prosperity as the list continues.

The four admonitions that follow each include some mention of God. The last three use the name Yahweh, making the claim that he is to be trusted, feared, and honored. Therefore, each admonition charges the son to give up a self-centered fantasy and replace it with a God-centered reality. Readers too are challenged to hand over the fantasies of:

- callous independence (**3:3–4**),
- self-determination (**3:5–6**),
- freedom to make one's own moral rules (**3:7–8**),
- total ownership of goods (**3:9–10**),
- and freedom from correction (**3:11–12**).

Taken together, their message is clear: "You cannot be masters of your own destiny; you cannot be your own gods."

2. (:2) The Promised Blessing

"*For length of days and years of life, And peace they will add to you.*"

Ray Ortlund: The passage [**3:1-8**] is organized around two themes:

- the shalom God gives (**vv. 1-4**)
- and the trust God demands (**vv. 5-8**).

That is obvious. But look more closely. Do you see how the wise Father links his counsel with incentives all along the way?

Tremper Longman: Peace means more than the absence of strife; it points to a rich and meaningful existence.

B. (:3-4) Preserve Kindness and Truth in Your Heart

1. (:3) The Pointed Exhortation

"*Do not let kindness and truth leave you;*
Bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart."

Roland Murphy: It is striking that the teaching is now equated with two words that have a rich history -- "*kindness*," and "*fidelity*," have been rendered in various ways, and they can stand for divine (**Exod 34:6**) as well as human qualities—relations between God and humans and also between humans. In **Prov 16:6** the phrase is parallel to "*fear of the Lord*." The intensity is indicated by the manner in which the recommendation is expressed: **love and fidelity** are not to depart from the youth, and they are to be written on the tablet of the heart; cf. **Prov 7:3; Deut 30:14; Jer 17:1**, and the interiorization in **Jer 31:33**.

2. (:4) The Promised Blessing

"*So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man*."

C. (:5-6) Trust in the Lord's Sovereign Guidance in Your Heart

1. (:5-6a) The Pointed Exhortation

"*Trust in the Lord with all your heart,*
And do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him"

Jonathan Akin: **Verses 5** and **7** say you should trust the Lord instead of trusting yourself. One could boil the whole of Proverbs down to this truth. Obedience to the law starts with faith. This is the key to wisdom, as **1:7** already stated. *Trust in Yahweh with all your heart and don't lean on your own understanding.* Trust God, not yourself. Foolishness is trusting in your own mind and heart (**28:26**). Wisdom starts with recognizing that you don't have it and looking to God in humility for it. The way that seems right to humans ends in death. We think that what is best for us is autonomy and the power to choose what to do with our own lives, but Proverbs says that is suicidal. What seems right to us usually ends up wrecking us.

Paul Koptak: **3:5–6** speak more about **guidance in ethical behavior** than particular choices such as career or mate. *Leaning on one's own understanding* is more than failing to pray about decisions. It is more like being wise in one's own eyes (**3:7**), that

is, believing that one can determine what is right and wrong without guidance from God and his gift of wisdom.

Charles Bridges: But our trust must not only be **complete** – it must be **exclusive**. No other confidence, no confidence in the flesh, can exist alongside it (**Philippians 3:3**). Man with all his pride feels that he wants something to lean on. As a fallen being, he naturally leans on his own understanding and on himself. Human power is his idol. His understanding is his God. Many people would prefer to have a lack of principle rather than a lack of talent. This is the history of man from the Fall on; this is the lamentable sin of every person created by God. Do we need to call this the sin of youth? How rare it is to see the younger submitting to the elder (**1 Peter 5:5**). If advice is sought, is it not just to confirm what has already been decided?

Those who refuse to lean on their own understanding are those who trust in the Lord. For they are trusting in his divine power and are using it as a lamp, so they can find their way. The Christian on his knees, as if he throws away his own understanding, confesses that he is completely unable to find the way by himself. But observe how he behaves. He takes trouble to improve his mind. He conscientiously follows its dictates. In this way practical faith strengthens, not destroys, its power.

So it is our clear duty not to neglect our understanding but to cultivate it diligently. In a world where knowledge abounds, ignorance is the fruit of laziness. So lean not on your own understanding. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Self-dependence is foolishness (**28:26**), rebellion (**Jeremiah 2:13; 9:23**), and ruin (**Genesis 3:5-6; Isaiah 47:10-11**). "The great folly of man in trials," as Dr. Owen has rightly remarked, "is leaning to our on his own understanding and counsels. What is the result of this? Whenever in our trials we consult our own understanding, listen to our own reason, even though they appear to be good, the principle of living by faith is stifled, and we will in this way be let down by our own counsels."

2. (:6b) The Promised Blessing

"*And He will make your paths straight*."

Louis Goldberg: A sanctuary is found by *trusting* in the Lord (3:5a), and the main idea behind the word *trust* is "to cling to" or "lean upon." The wise disciple is the one who, having received a word from the Lord, accepts it and acts upon it as true. He leans hard upon God; He has cast all his hopes for the present and future upon Him. Furthermore, this trust must be an experience with the whole heart, one that is completely undivided.

Allen Ross: What these beautiful expressions call for is "absolute obedience and surrender in every realm of life" (Fritsch, IB, 4:799). When obedient faith is present, the Lord will guide the believer along life's paths in spite of difficulties and hindrances.

Tremper Longman: Flowing specifically from the **path metaphor** in **6a**, knowing God on the paths will keep one's paths straight. The straight paths are the best, with the least obstacles. These are to be contrasted with the crooked paths, which end in death (**9:18**).

David Hubbard: [Trust in God] begins with **commitment.** Nothing less than "*with all your heart*" (**v. 5**) is sufficient. Choices, decisions, motives, intentions must all be directed to what God wants and what God can do. "*Trust*" steps onto the bridge of God's loving power and leaves the shoreline of our own abilities and ambitions behind. Such belief means literally to "bet your life" on God's truth and wisdom.

Our trust in God continues with **renunciation**:

(1) of our "*own understanding*" (**v. 5**), not tempered and not molded by God's will and guidance;
(2) of our own wisdom in which it is so easy and so foolish to take pride (**v. 7**) and, so doing, cancel its effectiveness and expose it not as wisdom but stupidity;
(3) of "*evil*" in its many-headed manifestations, but especially, in this context, in its most dangerous form—arrogant self-reliance from which all fear of God is drained (**v. 7**).

Our trust of God issues in **relationship**, as the verbs "*acknowledge*" (**v. 6**; lit., "*know*," "*recognize*") and "*fear*" signal. These are terms of personal bonding which result in changes of behavior. They combine the senses of awe, intimacy, and obligation which mark sound relationships. They suggest that God's people want to know Him so well that they do His bidding virtually without having to be reminded. The path we walk is marked out (*directed*, **v. 6**) by Him, and the power to walk is His gift.

D. (:7-8) Fear the Lord in Your Heart

1. (:7) The Pointed Exhortation

"*Do not be wise in your own eyes;*
Fear the Lord and turn away from evil."

2. (:8) The Promised Blessing

"*It will be healing to your body, And refreshment to your bones*."

E. (:9-10) Honor the Lord in Your Giving
(in Your Heart as demonstrated with your wallet)

1. (:9) The Pointed Exhortation

"*Honor the Lord from your wealth,*
And from the first of all your produce"

Jonathan Akin: Solomon gives one practical example of how inward piety leads to outward obedience to the law. **Verse 9** speaks of **generosity**: honor the Lord with your possessions and your first produce (cf. **Lev 23:10; Deut 18:1-5**). Again, this is **covenantal language** (i.e., obedience to the law). Give back to Yahweh out of what he has provided for you. Give the firstfruits; give your best and your first to God, not the leftovers. This means giving should be set out at the top of your budget, not at the bottom "after everything else is covered." This practice demonstrates gratitude for what God has given and confidence that he will continue to provide (see **2 Cor 8–9**).

2. (:10) The Promised Blessing

"*So your barns will be filled with plenty,*
And your vats will overflow with new wine."

II. (:11-20) CAPSTONE OF MATURITY: THE BLESSINGS OF WISDOM -- APPRECIATING THE SUPREME VALUE OF GODLY WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING

A. (:11-12) Receive the Loving Discipline of Your Heavenly Father

(in Your Heart as demonstrated in your attitude)

1. (:11) The Pointed Exhortation

"*My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord,*
Or loathe His reproof"

Paul Koptak: The "*My son*" and "*do not*" of **3:11** mark the beginning of a **new section**, just as they do for **3:1** and **21**. In this section there is only one admonition (**to welcome Yahweh's discipline**), which is followed by a poem in praise of wisdom's great worth. The admonition advises the young man to neither despise nor resent Yahweh's "*discipline*" (*musar*) and "*rebuke*" (*tokaḥat*), for they are signs of fatherly love. The potential for the son to "*despise*" and "*resent*" such teaching stands in stark contrast with the "*love*" and "*delight*" with which it is given. Unlike the more tangible motivations of **3:1–10**, this one holds out God's love as a motive in itself. Taken in context with all of the parental instructions of **chapters 1–9**, the statement becomes a strong reminder that this parental teaching originates in the parental love of Yahweh. His discipline sets in motion a chain of teaching that extends from generation to generation (cf. **4:1–4**).

Charles Bridges: Prosperity and adversity are part of our present situation. Each can honor the Lord. In prosperity this can be done by consecrating our wealth to the Lord (**verses 9-10**). In adversity this can be done by being humble and cheerful in whatever the Lord sends us. As Bishop Patrick has written, "In prosperity it is well to expect discipline; and if it is the Lord's pleasure, do not let this make you doubt God's gracious providence." In no other way does the Lord act more like a father toward us than in this. It is wonderful to be addressed as my son at any time, but most of all when we experience the Lord's discipline.

2. (:12) The Promised Blessing

"*For whom the Lord loves He reproves,*
Even as a father, the son in whom he delights."

Tremper Longman: God corrects out of love. He does not want his people to continue in life-damaging attitudes and behavior. The analogy that the father presents is that of a father who treats his son favorably. This is particularly poignant since the discourse is the loving admonition of a human father to his son. Correction, though painful, is thus seen as a favor, a sign of grace

B. (:13) Thesis: Consummate Value of Wisdom and Understanding

"*How blessed is the man who finds wisdom,*
And the man who gains understanding"

David Hubbard: This speech interrupts the stream of admonitions to insert a double argument in favor of wisdom's excellence: a practical argument in the form of a beatitude and a theological argument expressed as an affirmation. The literary touch is graceful and changes the pace from the incessant series of commands found in **verses 1–12** and resumed in **21–32**. So placed, the argument serves to underscore the first set of admonitions and blaze the trail for the second.

C. (:14-18) Value Preferred Over All Else

1. (:14-15) Nothing Can Compare in Value

a. (:14a) Not Silver

"*For its profit is better than the profit of silver*"

b. (:14b) Not Gold

"*And its gain than fine gold*"

c. (:15a) Not Jewels

"*She is more precious than jewels*"

d. (:15b) Not Anything

"*And nothing you desire compares with her*"

Tremper Longman: This type of comparison is used frequently in Proverbs (**8:10, 19; 16:16**) and elsewhere, but nowhere is it as fully developed as in **Job 28**. That text develops the idea that gold and silver are immensely valuable precisely because they are so difficult to extract from the earth. Though hard, humans can do it. However, finding wisdom is not just difficult; it also is **impossible** for men and women. They cannot exert their strength or intelligence to find it. Only God has it; and thus the chapter ends with an exhortation to fear Yahweh.

2. (:16-18) Nothing Can Compare in Blessing

a. (:16a) Blessing of Long Life

"*Long life is in her right hand;*"

b. (:16b) Blessing of Riches and Honor

"*In her left hand are riches and honor.*"

c. (:17a) Blessing of Pleasantness

"*Her ways are pleasant ways,*"

d. (:17b) Blessing of Peace

"*And all her paths are peace.*"

e. (:18a) Blessing of Fruitful Life

"*She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her,*"

John MacArthur: This expression is a metaphor referring to temporal and spiritual renewal and refreshment (cf. **11:30; 13:12; 15:4**).

f. (:18b) Blessing of Happiness

"*And happy are all who hold her fast.*"

David Hubbard: The similarity of this beatitude to that of **Psalm 1** reinforces that tie:

(1) here wisdom is sought; there the law is to be treasured (note **Prov. 3:1** where wisdom teaching is "*my law*");

(2) here wisdom is likened to a "*life-giving tree*"; there the one who is nourished by the law is like a tree;

(3) here wisdom's "*ways*" are "*pleasantness*" (for Hebrew word see **2:10**); there the "*way*" of the righteous is known by God.

Hence, in language both elegant and familiar, the teachers have displayed the **superlative claims of wisdom** with the firm hope that it will prove irresistible to their disciples.

Paul Koptak: If the admonitions in **Proverbs 3:1–10** challenge the reader to remember that life and its goodness are gifts of Yahweh, this picture of creation does the same through poetic imagery. Moreover, if wisdom is the principle by which the Lord gives life, it makes sense that those who find it and lay hold of it (**3:13, 18**) are called "*blessed*." Wisdom's role in creation is merely sketched here, but it will be developed when she speaks for herself in **chapter 8**, using many of the terms found here. For now it is enough to notice that references to creation undergird the good life and *šalom* offered by wisdom through the parents' teaching. If Woman Wisdom was involved in the creation of a place for life to thrive, then, metaphorically speaking, she surely can bestow God's gift of life through her teaching.

D. (:19-20) Value Proven as a Dynamic Change Agent in Creation

Tremper Longman: The poem concludes by **associating wisdom with creation**. While this is the first time this connection is made in Proverbs, it will recur later (**8:22–31**) and constitutes a profound theme of the book.

The creation is ordered, not random. **God established it by his wisdom**. This assertion belies the thought that it might be the result of chance. Experience at times might lead to the latter conclusion (see **Eccles. 9:11**), but that would be a fateful mistake. No, earth and heaven were created by wisdom. The order of creation can also be learned from **Gen. 1**. Such a teaching would lead us to conclude that the apparent disorder observed in creation is the result of the fall, not the original creation.

Furthermore, understanding wisdom's role in creation should motivate humans to acquire wisdom. After all, if one wants to know how the world works and thus benefit

from recognizing the rhythms of creation, what better way to do that than to share in the wisdom that produced the world to begin with?

Jonathan Akin: **There is a wise order to the world**. The world works in a certain way—according to the pattern of -wisdom—so you can know the order and live by it if you possess wisdom. In a fallen world that has been broken by sin, this order generally works out now; but it will always work out later. Wisdom gives you the ability to perceive God's order and live by it. You must live by this order. Don't try to live against the grain because that is ruinous.

1. (:19a) Impact on Creation of the Earth
   "*The Lord by wisdom founded the earth*"

2. (:19b) Impact on Creation of the Heavens
   "*By understanding He established the heavens*"

3. (:20a) Impact on Creation of the Deeps
   "*By His knowledge the deeps were broken up*"

4. (:20b) Impact on Creation of the Heights
   "*And the skies drip with dew*"

Charles Ryrie: Wisdom played a dynamic part in the creation of the universe. By it God changed chaos to order. So also wisdom can have a dynamic effect on human life.

David Hubbard: This affirmation, fraught with theological significance, lauds and commends wisdom to the young by linking it to God's creative work at the beginning. Wisdom's antiquity, usefulness, and intimate connection with Yahweh are what the argument points to. . . Wisdom is pictured here not so much as companion to Yahweh (see **8:22–31**) as a tool used by Him to do what only He could do. The argument is clear: If Yahweh with wisdom as His tool could accomplish the wonders of the various phases of creation—settling the "*earth*" on its foundations, setting the "*heavens*" in their appointed place (**v. 19**), breaking up the "*depths*" to irrigate the dry land through wells, springs, and streams, and watering the earth with "*dew*" from the clouds (**v. 20**; a key source of moisture for truck gardening and other crops in Palestine is dew)—think what wisdom will do, better, what Yahweh will do through wisdom in the lives of those who find it.

III. (:21-32) TESTS OF MATURITY: THE FOUR TRAPS TO AVOID THAT CONTRADICT THE CHARACTER OF GOD AND ENDANGER YOUR PROSPERITY

Paul Koptak: This final section presents the typical elements of the instruction form in a different order: a charge to keep wisdom teaching (**3:21**), descriptions of benefits (**3:22–26**), and a series of ethical teachings (**3:27–31**).

(:21-24) Thesis Restated: Consummate Value of Wisdom and Discretion

1. (:21) Baseline of Successful Living = Valuing Wisdom

"*My son, let them not depart from your sight;*
Keep sound wisdom and discretion"

2. (:22-24) Benefits of Wisdom in Practical Everyday Experience

a. (:22) Value of Life and Beauty

"*So they will be life to your soul,*
And adornment to your neck."

b. (:23) Value of Purposefulness and Security

"*Then you will walk in your way securely,*
And your foot will not stumble."

Roland Murphy: The metaphors for life's journey appear: walking without mishap (cf. **Ps 91:12**) and sleeping without any fear. The Lord protects followers when they sleep (**Ps 3:6; 4:9**), and there is always the threat of the "*terror of the night*" (**Ps 91:5**).

c. (:24) Value of Peace and Serenity

"*When you lie down, you will not be afraid;*
When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet."

A. (:25-26) Don't Panic in the Face of Calamity or Unjustified Attacks --
A Contradiction of the Faithfulness of God – Absolute Dependence upon God

"*Do not be afraid of sudden fear,*
Nor of the onslaught of the wicked when it comes;
For the Lord will be your confidence,
And will keep your foot from being caught."

B. (:27-28) Don't Procrastinate in Doing Good to Others According to Your Ability --
A Contradiction of the Generosity of God – Rejection of Materialistic Hoarding

"*Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due,*
When it is in your power to do it.
Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go, and come back, And tomorrow I will give it,'
When you have it with you."

Ray Ortlund: We sin against each other not only by the bad things we do but also by the beautiful things we withhold. Withheld love is a life-depleting sin.

David Hubbard: The security and protection offered by the Lord of wisdom put us under obligation to be generous to others. The **principle of generosity** is stated in general yet striking terms in **verse 27** and then elaborated in four more specific admonitions. All five commands are framed in negative terms—a reminder that both wisdom and law help us cope with our human frailty and self-centeredness by telling us

what not to do. Every parent knows why: "Don't" more than "do" salts our vocabulary as we equip young children both to stay alive and to fit the structures of human society. Before we can really know how to do right we must learn to avoid the dangerous and cruel ways to which we are compulsively attracted.

Charles Bridges: The wise man comes now to some practical points. He shows that the result of selfishness is to **withhold good**. This dishonesty takes many forms: in borrowing without making any repayment (**Psalm 37:21**), in evading paying taxes, in keeping back wages due to employees (**James 5:4; Jeremiah 22:13-17**). But this instruction is deeper than this. Even if we are not legally indebted to anyone, we have an outstanding debt to "*love one another*" (**Romans 13:8**). Even the poor person is bound by this universal law to his poorer neighbor. Everyone has a claim on our love. Every opportunity to do good is our calling to do so. **Kindness is not an option but an obligation.** It is an act of justice, no less than an act of mercy. If we withhold it, that will be to our eternal condemnation (**Matthew 25:41-45**).

C. (:29-30) Don't Pervert Your Neighbor's Trust --
A Contradiction of the Goodness of God – Avoidance of Exploitation / Selfishness

> "*Do not devise harm against your neighbor,*
> *While he lives in security beside you.*
> *Do not contend with a man without cause,*
> *If he has done you no harm*."

Ray Ortlund: In a culture of life people protect each other. . . Trust is the glue that holds community together.

D. (:31-32) Don't Pursue the Path of the Wicked --
A Contradiction of the Holiness of God – Desiring God and His Righteousness

> "*Do not envy a man of violence,*
> *And do not choose any of his ways.*
> *For the crooked man is an abomination to the Lord;*
> *But He is intimate with the upright*."

Ray Ortlund: In a culture of life the wise keep their distance from the violent. . . The way things are now, violent people succeed, and we are tempted to envy them. It starts early, with the bully on the playground who is also in the popular crowd. People fear and envy the violent. So the violent run the world.

W. A. Rees Jones: James tells us that heavenly wisdom is pure, peaceable, gentle, easily intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity, and that it has a diabolical parody whose marks are envy and strife.

John MacArthur: Specifically, an abomination is an attitude or act that is incompatible with God's nature and intolerable to Him, leading to His anger and judgment. This is an important theme in Proverbs.

David Hubbard: **Verse 32** supplies the motivation for all five negative commands (**vv. 27–31**). Absence of generosity in all its forms "*is an abomination to the LORD*" (see **11:20; 12:22; 15:26; 17:15**; it may be Hebrew's strongest term of divine abhorrence), who cares about neighborliness and community. Generosity is the way the "*upright,*" the people of rectitude and integrity, live. To withhold it and hence destroy community is to choose the wrong path and get lost, as "*perverse*" literally means. The opposite of this is to be on intimate, insider terms with God so that we know what He wants and are given power to do it. "*Secret counsel*" means to be taken "*into His* (Yahweh's) *confidence*" (see NEB, JB, NIV). Can there be any stronger motivation to neighbor-love than this? Certainly not, short of the Cross.

Allen Ross: **vv. 31-35** -- In dealing with neighbors, one should avoid both envying and emulating (LXX) a violent person (cf. **Ps 73:3–5**). This warning in **v.31** is followed by the reasons, expressed in a series of contrasts but essentially arguing that God punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous. The Lord detests the perverse (**v.32**), curses the house of the wicked (**v.33**), mocks proud mockers (**v.34**), and holds fools up to shame (**v.25**). But he is pleased with the upright (**v.32**); he blesses their home (**v.33**), gives grace to the humble (**v.34**), and bequeaths honor to the wise (**v.35**). So wise and upright behavior pleases God and results in his blessing.

(:33-35) CONCLUSION: CONTRAST BETWEEN RIGHTEOUS AND WICKED

David Hubbard: As we have seen frequently in Proverbs, the clusters of synonyms reinforce and augment each other. Their power is in the **buildup of intensity** effected by their repetition rather than in the meaning of the individual terms. On the nouns and adjectives of "conduct," see **chapter 10**. The nouns and verbs of result deal with status in the community as the outcome of obedience to God. The text seems to say that what we wrongheadedly thought we could gain from a neighbor by greed, deceit, quarrel, or violence—namely, power, wealth, and status—are attainable only as gifts of God and then only on His terms of uprightness and humble dependence. The **theme of honor** ties the speech together like a thread: In humble gratitude we honor the Lord with our substance (**v. 9**); this and other acts of obedience put us in touch with wisdom who holds riches and honor in her hand (**v. 16**); that honor (lit., "*glory*") God makes available to those who live in loving and peaceful community with their neighbors, who are His creatures and beloved ones as well (**v. 35**).

A. (:33) Contrast Between Wicked and Just

"*The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked,*
But He blesses the dwelling of the righteous."

B. (:34) Contrast Between Scorners and Lowly

"*Though He scoffs at the scoffers,*
Yet He gives grace to the afflicted."

C. (:35) Capstone: Contrast Between Wise and Fools

"*The wise will inherit honor,*
But fools display dishonor."

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How does God's concern for inward righteousness here and commitments of the heart parallel Christ's interpretation of God's law in the Sermon on the Mount?

2) How can you take hope for change within your own life when you look back at how God used His wisdom and understanding as powerful change agents in Creation?

3) Why would someone be tempted to envy a man of violence?

4) Do we mirror the heart of God in seeking to minister grace to the afflicted?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Preston Brown: 10 New Year's Resolutions from the Wisest Man Who Ever Lived -- They deal with:
1. Things to make us look better and live longer.
2. Things to make us have more.
3. Things that will help us to get along with everyone.

I call them - Longevity, Prosperity and Peace.
www.sermoncentral.com

Derek Kidner: Whereas **chapter 2** emphasized the moral stability which grows with wisdom, **chapter 3** particularly promises serenity. This is seen as the fruit of a thoroughgoing godliness, three aspects of which mark the main divisions of the chapter.

3:1-10 Glad Commitment

3:11-20 Patient Quest

The childlike trust of **1-10** is to coexist with the mature wisdom now held up before us. In this preview of the great **chapter 8**,

- wisdom is seen as a possession (often hard-won, **11, 12**)
- which brings all else in its train (**13-18**) – indeed,
- without which the very universe would not have existed (**19, 20**) – and
- which crowns its possessor with peace (**21-26**).

3:21-35 Quiet Integrity

It becomes very clear that wisdom means walking with God (**23, 26**).

W. A. Rees Jones: All around him men were engaged in the all-absorbing pursuit of riches and honour. He is therefore at pains to show (**13-18**) that heavenly wisdom is a thing infinitely more precious than all those things that men seek after, and, indeed, holds the key to the things most desired by them (**17**), things which are added as a by-product of the search for wisdom.

Louis Goldberg:
Some preachers today insist that the believer can have material wealth if he claims it in prayer and then works hard for it. Supposedly, God will then bless His child both materially and spiritually. This line of reasoning is faulty on two counts.

First, if the attempt is made to appropriate Old Testament truth along this line, the preacher is misinterpreting Scripture. Israel was constituted as a nation in the midst of a sea of pagan nations, and God had certain purposes to accomplish with and through them. Material wealth was one way to attract the interest of the pagans; therefore, the Lord blessed Israel that unbelievers of other nations might inquire about the God of this favored people. The Body of Christ is not a nation; instead, it consists of individual peoples from many nations. The universal Body on earth is an organism, not an organization, and each believer must be obedient to the laws of the country wherein he or she resides. God does not deal with the church on the same basis as Israel.

Second, the Bible contains no promise of material blessings for the church. Believers living in North America in a context of political freedom enjoy material prosperity, not because there is a covenant that promises it but because God has been merciful and gracious to the peoples of the United States and Canada… In contrast, godly believers in many other parts of the world have very little material goods … but they live joyfully. We should, therefore, avoid misappropriating Old Testament truths not present in the New Testament and thereby mislead people and pervert their faith.

Jonathan Akin: As George Beverly Shea used to sing,

> I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold;
> I'd rather be His than have riches untold;
> I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands.
> I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hand
> Than to be the king of a vast domain
> Or be held in sin's dread sway.
> I'd rather have Jesus than anything
> This world affords today.
> (Rhea F. Miller, "*I'd Rather Have Jesus*," 1922)

TEXT: Proverbs 4:1-27

TITLE: FATHER KNOWS BEST – GENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF WISDOM

BIG IDEA:
OBEDIENCE FROM THE HEART PRESERVES YOUR LIFE AS YOU PURSUE THE PRIORITY OF THE PATH OF WISDOM

INTRODUCTION:

Tremper Longman: Here all the emphasis is on the **positive results of adopting wisdom**, and nothing is said about the punishments of rejecting wisdom and going with folly, as is the case in many of the other related passages. However, what is truly distinctive here is the **appeal to tradition**. The primary dynamic of the book is a father's instruction to a son. Here we have an explicit statement to the effect that the father is simply continuing a tradition that stretches back for generations. He is speaking to his son as his own father (on behalf of himself and his mother) had earlier spoken to him. It is not only in Proverbs that we see the passing down of religious tradition, but also in the area of law (**Deut. 6**) and historical traditions, which themselves contain theological and ethical lessons (**Ps. 78:5–8**). . .

The father is vitally concerned to **keep his son moving on the right path in his life**. In many ways, this discourse is an admonition like the previous one. It does not mention God explicitly, but by invoking the two-path theology, it does so implicitly, since the father's path is the one that is associated with God. The admonition to the son here is to focus all of his energies on staying on the right path and avoiding the evil path. Again, this underlines the idea that **wisdom entails a lifetime of work and not a single decision**.

Ray Ortlund: Proverbs 4 shows us the only path into life = Christ. The chapter breaks down like this:

- how to get going (**vv. 1-9**),
- how to keep going (**vv. 10-19**),
- and how not to get lost along the way (**vv. 20-27**).

David Hubbard: **Scripture Outline**

Call to Attention (**4:1–2**)
Personal Illustration (**4:3–9**)
Practical Exhortations (**4:10–17**)
Antithetic Summary (**4:18–19**)
More Practical Exhortations (**4:20–27**)

Paul Koptak: **Chapter 4** consists of three lessons, each beginning with an address to the next generation. Key words and images define the theme of each section.

Grandfather's Teaching: "Get wisdom" (4:1–9)
Key words: Get/acquire
Key image: Wisdom is like a good wife

Paths of Righteousness and Wickedness (4:10–19)
Key words: Path/way
Key image: Wisdom is like a clear and well-lit path

Anatomy of Righteousness (4:20–27)
Key word: Heart
Key image: Wisdom is like a sound and healthy body

In this chapter, the young learners are urged to acquire wisdom, walk in its pathways, and put all their members in its service. The key word "*life*" and its cognates appears in all three sections (**4:10, 13, 22, 23**).

(:1-4) PRELUDE: IMPORTANCE OF OBEYING GOD FROM THE HEART

A. (:1) Pay Attention

"*Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father,*
And give attention that you may gain understanding."

Paul Koptak: the verbal link between the father's "*instruction*" (**4:1**, *musar*) and the Yahweh's "*discipline*" (**3:11**, also *musar*) indicates a tradition of teaching that begins with God and is passed from generation to generation. . . it would be a mistake to separate the wisdom instruction of the home from the wisdom teaching of the Lord.

The picture of Yahweh teaching and correcting as a loving father (**3:12**) makes a theological statement that is key to all of the instructions in **Proverbs 1–9**, revealing the larger picture of what the parents are doing as they teach their son(s). They pass on what they have received from Yahweh, the source, the beginning of wisdom teaching. Therefore, the stress in this chapter is on the **transmission of wisdom**.

B. (:2) Good Stuff

"*For I give you sound teaching;*
Do not abandon my instruction."

C. (:3-4) Generational Voice of Experience

"*When I was a son to my father,*
Tender and the only son in the sight of my mother,
Then he taught me and said to me,
'Let your heart hold fast my words;
Keep my commandments and live'"

David Hubbard: The intent of the illustration, which forms the heart of this speech and its major contribution to **chapters 1–9**, is not nostalgia. Much more is involved than

tender reminiscence. At issue is the right of the parent-teacher to impose instruction in command form, admonition, upon the younger generation. That right is explained and defended, as the teacher cites the setting and content of his own education at the feet of his parents. "*My mother*" (see **1:8; 6:20**) underscores her role in the curriculum. She was particularly solicitous of her son's nurture, since he seems to have been frail or weak ("*tender*"), and as the "*only*" child he carried with him the survival of the family's name and destiny (**v. 3**).

I. (:5-9) PRIORITY OF PURSUING PATH OF WISDOM

A. Go For It

"*Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding!*
Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth."

B. Make it Top Priority -- Wisdom is the principal thing

"*Do not forsake her, and she will guard you;*
Love her, and she will watch over you.
The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom;
And with all your acquiring, get understanding."

C. (:8-9) Receive the Reward

"*Prize her, and she will exalt you;*
She will honor you if you embrace her.
She will place on your head a garland of grace;
She will present you with a crown of beauty."

II. (:10-13) PATH OF WISDOM TIED TO LONG LIFE AND SECURITY

Tremper Longman: **(:10-19) Stay on the right path.**
In the next discourse of father to son, the former urges the latter to stay on the right path. The assumption here is that the son has already at least initially heeded the advice of his father, and now the father gives him further encouragement to stay the course. Again, this shows that wisdom is not a once-and-for-all decision but involves a lifetime of commitment and rededication. Indeed, part of the appeal is that the son's experience on the straight path means a minimization of problems (he does not stumble on this path). A large part of the speech is a warning against going over to the dark side, the other path, which is evil. On the surface such a move might be tempting, but in actuality it leads to trouble and heartache.

A. (:10) Tied to Long Life

"*Hear, my son, and accept my sayings.*
And the years of your life will be many."

B. (:11-12) Tied to Security

"*I have directed you in the way of wisdom;*

I have led you in upright paths.
When you walk, your steps will not be impeded;
And if you run, you will not stumble."

C. (:13) Tied to Quality of Life

"*Take hold of instruction; do not let go.*
Guard her, for she is your life."

III. (:14-19) PATH OF WICKED TIED TO DARKNESS AND INSECURITY

A. (:14-15) Warning Against Path of Wicked

"*Do not enter the path of the wicked,*
And do not proceed in the way of evil men.
Avoid it, do not pass by it;
Turn away from it and pass on."

B. (:16-17) Path of Wicked Characterized by Malicious Violence

"*For they cannot sleep unless they do evil;*
And they are robbed of sleep unless they make someone stumble.
For they eat the bread of wickedness,
And drink the wine of violence."

Tremper Longman: **Verses 16–17** add some substance to the prohibition by describing **the intentions of those who are evil.** They are compulsive evildoers, and they want to enmesh others into their lifestyle. In particular, they want to harm others. What gives them sleepless nights is their inability to mess up someone's life, to "*cause someone to stumble*." **Verse 17** employs the metaphor of eating and drinking to describe just how deeply ingrained in their lives is their desire to do evil, and in particular to hurt others. Just as ingested food and drink become a part of a person, so they eat evil and drink violence. It is a part of them.

C. (:18-19) Contrast Between Path of Righteous and Path of Wicked

1. (:18) Path of Righteous – Tied to Light and Life

"*But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,*
That shines brighter and brighter until the full day."

2. (:19) Path of Wicked – Tied to Darkness and Insecurity

"*The way of the wicked is like darkness;*
They do not know over what they stumble."

Derek Kidner: The main contrast with **verse 18** is between danger and constant bewilderment on the one hand, and safety and growing certainty on the other. **Jeremiah 23:12** takes the imagery of **verse 19** still further.

David Hubbard: This summary concludes and distills the lessons about the dangers of violent people by **contrasting the two ways** in terms of light and darkness. The figure

is of two groups of travelers. One, the "*just*" ("*righteous*" or "*innocent*," see **ch. 10**), begin life's path at daybreak and walk it in sunlight that "*shines ever brighter*" until midday when the light is at its full and the day is totally established ("*perfect*") in its ability to illumine every obstacle and turning of the path. Threats are almost nonexistent, so well can the daytime travelers see. The other group, "*the wicked*," set out on their way at dusk, only to find themselves immersed in "*darkness*" so dense that they "*stumble*" without knowing why. Dawn and dusk may each offer the same level of light to the prospective journeyers. But their pilgrimage ends poles apart: one, secure in the ability to scan from horizon to horizon and know precisely how the land lies; the other, ambling aimlessly with every familiar landmark obliterated by the impenetrable pall and every step an exercise in fear and futility.

Paul Koptak: In a payback reminiscent of the scene in **chapter 1**, those who want to make others stumble now stumble themselves, because of the darkness they have both sought and created. Just as the men of **chapter 1** were caught like birds unaware, these men "*do not know*" what they stumble over. **Not knowing or understanding the consequences of one's actions is an essential component of sin and folly**. Once again the reader learns to avoid the way of wickedness, not only for the harm it does to others but for the harm that comes back on those who walk it. In summary, this section of instruction contrasts the benefits that come to the righteous and the woes of the wicked (for other examples, see **1:32–33; 2:20–22; 3:33–35**). The contrast foreshadows the collection of righteous/wicked proverbs of contrast in **chapters 10–15**, but it is also basic to the theological outlook of the entire book.

IV. (:20-27) STAY THE COURSE

Tremper Longman: **Guard your heart.**
As with the previous discourse, the father here encourages his son to maintain the course. He is on the straight path, and he must summon all of his resources to remain diligent and not veer off this path to go onto the other path, described as evil (**v. 27**). That all the son's resources need to be marshaled to the task is underlined by the many references to different body parts that must play their role: ear, eyes, eyelids, mouth, lips, feet, and above all—the heart.

A. (:20-21) Pay Attention

"*My son, give attention to my words;*
Incline your ear to my sayings.
Do not let them depart from your sight;
Keep them in the midst of your heart."

B. (:22) Path of Obedience Tied to Life and Health

"*For they are life to those who find them,*
And health to all their whole body."

C. (:23) Condition of the Heart is Critical

"*Watch over your heart with all diligence,*
For from it flow the springs of life."

D. (:24) Truth and Integrity Essential

"*Put away from you a deceitful mouth,*
And put devious lips far from you."

E. (:25-27) Don't Get Distracted

"*Let your eyes look directly ahead,*
And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you.
Watch the path of your feet,
And all your ways will be established.
Do not turn to the right nor to the left;
Turn your foot from evil."

Paul Koptak: In summary, the last lesson (**4:20–27**) begins with the father's instructions and ends by going back to the student's own journey. Not only is the learner to keep the father's instructions in the heart (**4:23**), he is to guard that heart as a wellspring. The movement from receiving parental instruction to walking in one's own way is true to the life process of maturation, but it also observes the difference between remembering a parent's teaching and developing one's own way of living. The ethical life is not only an inheritance, it is a life work. For this reason, the father appeals to the son to take his teaching with him on the journey, here symbolized as choosing a good mate, a good path, and a good heart.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Note the generational transmission of wisdom described in **verses 1-3**. What lessons did we learn from our parents? How are we passing wisdom down to our children?

2) Note the contrast between avoiding evil (in all its forms and in all its associations) and embracing wisdom. Where do you find evil to be attractive and need to set up a guard to protect your way?

3) What types of rewards come along with the pursuit of wisdom?

4) Note the emphasis on "*heart, mouth (lips), eyes and feet*" in **verses 23-27**. How are we presenting the members of our body to serve as instruments of righteousness (**Romans 6-8**) rather than allowing them to continue in sin?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Paul Koptak: The connection between "*a father's instruction*" (**4:1**) and the teaching of past generations comes through the father's quotation of words he first heard long ago. The words are not his own, they have come from his father and presumably from his father before him. We have noted the previous chapter's reminder that Yahweh disciplines those he loves the way fathers do (**3:11–12**; also **Deut. 8:5**), a reminder that this activity of passing on teaching and discipline begins in God. There are other links as well. Just as the *musar* of Yahweh was followed by the happiness of those who find wisdom (**Prov. 3:13–18**), so here the father's musar points the learner toward her benefits (**4:6–9**). The repetition of "*life*" and "*heart*" (**3:1, 22; 4:4**) also links the teaching of both generations. Tradition is not handed down for its own sake but for the sake of "*life*."

Legacy and Traditions:

By recalling the teaching of his own father, the teacher in this chapter invites his son to enter into a legacy and a tradition of wisdom. A legacy is a gift received from an ancestor, while a tradition is that which is handed onto descendants. The father calls on the son to receive this gift; in fact, he is urged to "*get*" it. But this father looks forward to the day when he will see his son teach his own son. Religious and ethnic communities pass on their customs, traditions, and celebrations to keep them alive and bring comforting memories, but more important, to shape the outlook and character of those who carry them. Older members of those communities often mourn the loss of the old ways because they believe that they are good ways to live. Teaching is another way that tradition is passed on, as Charles Kraft argues:

> "The father teaches, communicates with the son, because he wants the son to value what he values, and maintain the character that he maintains. He wants the son to share in his inner likeness, just as he sees that the son bears his genetic image. So Jesus modeled what our relationship with the father is supposed to be like. He is the second Adam who came to reflect God's glory in his life. Therefore, this teaching about fathers and sons points to the desire of God to have children (sons and daughters) who seek to please him and reflect his glory."

Certainly this desire was the reason that Yahweh instructed Israel not only to keep his commands on their hearts but also to teach them to their children at home, on the road, at all times (**Deut. 6:6–7**). God thought of Israel as his son and longed to have that son resemble him through godly character formed through teaching (**8:5**). So this chapter links God's desire to teach and shape character (**Prov. 3:11–12**) to the tradition of parents teaching their children.

Charle Ryrie: The wicked are unable to sleep because the day has passed without an opportunity to obtain gain from an act of violence.

Derek Kidner: Re "*Concentrate*" – "The constant repetition of such a call (introducing nearly every paragraph of this section of the book) is deliberate, for a major part of godliness lies in dogged attentiveness to familiar truths. So a kind of medical inspection follows, in which one's state of readiness in the various realms symbolized by heart, mouth, eyes and feet, comes under review."

W. A. Rees Jones: Wisdom leads to life, but fundamentally wisdom originates, not in the following out of a collection of wise precepts, but in the heart, the focus of the mind and will and the fountain of action.

Mike Turner: Think of the heart as being the womb from which all of our actions, attitudes, ambitions and articulations are conceived. When Solomon encourages us to keep our hearts....he is saying "above all things that you keep.....keep your heart because life springs from it ! The word "*Keep*" is elsewhere translated preserve, observe, watchers, watchmen, and even besieged. www.sermoncentral.com

Louis Goldberg: These verses describe what is a lost art in our generation. Wisdom provides the picture of a devout home where the father sits in the midst of his children and teaches them the ways of God. This portrait contrasts with the scene of varied interests in the average home today, where regular Bible reading is hardly practiced, and prayer around the family altar is unknown.

Eric Lane: There is little fresh material in this chapter. After the riches of chapter 3 is there any more to say about *wisdom*? But what it lacks in content it makes up for in fervour. The father or teacher is desperate to gain the attention of his hearers and to elicit a response. So he goes out of his way to share with us the surpassing excellence of wisdom.

We can take this in two ways:

(1) as the Lord calling on us to give our best attention to the wisdom of his Word as we read it ourselves or hear it proclaimed;

(2) as an example of how we should teach our children or pupils: with a fervent desire they should hear and respond, and with the enthusiasm that what we teach them towers above anything they hear from anyone in the world.

It is not all repetition and the appeal is three-fold.

A. He appeals to his own upbringing (**verses 1-9**).
B. He appeals to the contrast between wisdom and wickedness (**verses 10-19**).
C. He appeals to the basic principles of wisdom (**verses 20-27**).

Charles Bridges: Young people are apt to plead with those who have the charge of their best interests – "What harm is there in this or that path?" Apart from other evils – this is plain. It is a contagious atmosphere. You are drinking in poison. It is far more easy to shun the occasion of sin, than the sin when the occasion presents it; to resist the beginnings, than the progress, of sin. There must, therefore, be no tampering with it; no trial of strength, to see how far our resolutions will keep us. Let the examples of Lot

(**Gen. xiii. 10-13; xiv. 12**), Dinah (**Gen. xxxiv. 1, 2**), Solomon (**1 Kings, xi. 1-5**), Peter (**Matt. xxvi. 58, 69-74**), warn us, how far only *the entrance into the path of the wicked* may carry us; lengths that we could never have contemplated in prospect without horror. It may appear an harmless outset. But how far on? The *entrance* is fatally connected with the next step onward. The frightful extent of the probability of falling might make the boldest tremble. Those at least, that know their own corruption and weakness, will shrink back, where you tread lightly. Here and there, indeed, there may be some special miracle of preservation. But no one comes out of the *path* without hurt (**2 Chron. xviii. 1-3; xix. 2; xx. 35-37**); and the general issue is an open door to ruin. To pretend to dread sin without fearing temptation, is self-delusion. Satan has too nearly allied them for us to separate them. The evil company is love, then the company of the evil. To pray "*not to be led into temptation*;" yet not to "*watch, that we enter not into it*" – is practically to contradict our prayers; to mock our God, by asking for what we do not heartily wish.

TEXT: Proverbs 5:1-23

TITLE: MARITAL INFIDELITY WILL DESTROY YOU

BIG IDEA:
AVOID THE PATH OF SEXUAL TEMPTATION WHICH LEADS TO CERTAIN DESTRUCTION

INTRODUCTION:

Trevor Longman: The father addresses this concern with all the rhetorical power that he can muster because the temptation is great. An intimate relationship with a woman outside the bounds of marriage promises great pleasure and satisfaction. The truth behind the appearance, however, is that such liaisons result in tremendous pain. Thus, the father warns the son not to follow one's desires, but rather to obey the instruction. If the son does not do so, he will deeply regret the ruin that he has brought into his life.

However, the father does not stop with warning about bad behavior; he also encourages the son to proper behavior in the area of intimate relationships. Using quite provocative metaphors, the father tells the son to enjoy intimacy with his wife.

Ray Ortlund: Here is the key concept we must understand, and it applies to all of life: The gospel calls us into both form and freedom, both structure and liberation. Conservative people love form and restraint and control, especially in sex. Progressive people love freedom and openness and choices, especially in sex. Both see part of the truth, but the gospel tells us the whole truth. And the truth is, God gave us our sexuality both to focus our romantic joy and to unleash our romantic joy. When this very human joy is both focused and unleashed – having both form and freedom – it becomes wonderfully **intensified.** We **thrive** within both form and freedom. Sex is like fire. In the fireplace it keeps us warm. Outside the fireplace it burns the house down. **Proverbs 5** is saying, "Keep the fire in the marital fireplace, and stoke that fire as hot as you can."

Jonathan Akin: Sexual sin is so seductive and dangerous because it can start out small and in many cases is seemingly innocent, and then before you know it your life has been ruined. You may think to yourself, "What's the harm in this relationship? What's the harm in a little innocent flirting? I'll never do anything anyway." You will destroy your life, and you won't even see it coming. Sexual sin is appealing; it promises pleasure and happiness and can even deliver it for a little while, but then it kills you. Sexual sin may cause you to walk away from God, or at least redefine "God" as someone who is OK with your sin. Sexual sin may cost you your family, your reputation, and the respect of your children; or it may just warp your ideas of intimacy in marriage and drive a wedge between you and your wife (or your future wife). There are a thousand different ways that sexual sin can destroy you, but make no mistake—it will.

Lindsay Wilson: This chapter sets out a theologically rich and multi-strand rationale for avoiding folly in the guise of the immoral woman. Folly is not only subject to God's scrutiny, but also deadly, self-destructive and enslaving (**vv. 21–23**).

Max Anders: MAIN IDEA: An illicit affair may provide short-term pleasure, but the long-range consequences will be disastrous. Stay faithful to your spouse, and you will experience genuine satisfaction—and God will be pleased. You cannot escape the painful results of immorality.

The Dangers of Adultery (5:1-14)
SUPPORTING IDEA: A man should beware of any involvement with an immoral woman because that path leads to death. At the end of the road, you will regret ignoring the advice that could have spared you from ruin.

The Joys of Marriage (5:15-20)
SUPPORTING IDEA: Just as you drink from your own fountain, you should find your fulfillment in the love of your own wife.

The Eyes of God (5:21-23)
SUPPORTING IDEA: God knows all we do, and he will judge immorality.

Paul Koptak: More than any of the other instructions in **chapters 1–9**, the lectures of **chapter 5** address the perennial issue of marital faithfulness and describe the disastrous results of its compromise. The warning against the "*strange woman*," the second of four, is the only one to include a positive description of marital fidelity. Although the teaching seeks to discipline the awakening sexual awareness of young males, it is a concern for all, young and old, male and female, just as it has been since ancient days.
Chiastic structure:
A (**5:1–6**) Avoid the adulteress—the strange woman
B (**5:7–14**) Do not give what is yours to others—lest strangers feast on wealth
B′ (**5:15–19**) Drink from your own well—do not share with strangers
A′ (**5:20–23**) Why be captive of the adulteress—the strange woman?

The **repetition of terms** at the beginning and end of the chapter create a frame or **inclusio** that links the two A sections. Death and dying as a result of ignoring wisdom teaching appear in **5:5** and **23**. The Hebrew terms for "*lead*" in **5:5** and "*hold him fast*" in **5:22** come from the same root (*tmk*), creating a link between being led away to the grave and being held fast in sin. The frame also pairs the words for the woman who "*gives no thought*" to her "*way*" (**5:6**) and the "*way*" that Yahweh "*examines*" (**5:21**). The word "*strangers*" (**5:10, 17**) links the two B sections.

David Hubbard: **Scripture Outline**
Beware the Wanton's Wily Words (**5:1–6**)
Beware the Dire Result of Adultery (**5:7–14**)
Practice Fidelity with Joy (**5:15–20**)
Negative Concluding Summary (**5:21–23**)

I. (:1-6) HONEY CAN BE BITTER – THE HONEY OF SEXUAL TEMPTATION LEADS TO THE BITTERNESS OF A DEFILED CONSCIENCE AND A DESTRUCTIVE END

A. (:1-2) Valuable Lesson

1. (:1) Pay Attention

"*My son, give attention to my wisdom,*
Incline your ear to my understanding"

David Hubbard: The call to attention (**vv. 1–2**; see **1:8–9; 4:1, 10, 20**) carries a note of urgency. It forces the student ("*my son*") to choose between the teacher's manifold "*wisdom*," whose splendor gleams in the three additional synonyms (see **1:2–6**), and the saccharine (refined "*honey*") and lubricious (filtered olive "*oil*") speech of the "*immoral woman*," whose ways were foreign to teachings of the covenant (see **2:16–17**), though she may or may not have been a native Israelite. To hear the teacher is to muffle the call of the temptress and vice versa. Refusal to answer her or responding with a forthright "no" is the way that "*lips keep* [or guard] *knowledge*" (**v. 2**).

2. (:2) Live Wisely

"*That you may observe discretion,*
And your lips may reserve knowledge."

Trevor Longman: Usually one's lips are associated with speech, so on the surface it appears that the father is telling the son to act in a certain way in order to preserve his ability to speak wisely. However, as we see in the next verse, there may be a double meaning here, since lips are used not only to speak but also to kiss.

B. (:3-4) Deceptive Allure -- Sweet as Honey … But Bitter as Wormwood

David Hubbard: The teacher's insistence is supported with strong reasons, introduced by "*for*" (**vv. 3–6**).

- First, to listen to her is to be poisoned by "*wormwood*" (**v. 4**) always a symbol of bitterness in the Bible (**Lam. 3:19; Amos 6:12**) and also in Shakespeare, where Juliet's nurse reminded her ward of the weaning process accomplished by dabbing on her breast wormwood, distilled from a shrub Artemisia absinthium, to squelch the young girl's desire to suckle.
- Second, to listen to the immoral woman (**v. 3**) is to be mutilated as her words take on the sharpness of "*a two-edged sword*" (**v. 4**; lit., "*two-mouthed*" as though the sword ate alive its victim).
- Third, to walk with her is to embark on the "*path*" to "*death*" and "*hell*" (**v. 5**), Sheol, the grave and the abode of the dead in Old Testament parlance.
- Fourth, to consort with her is to share her disorientation intoxicated as she is by passion, and to wander (as "*unstable*" means) off the path of life, the pattern of conduct that leads to survival and success, and to be hopelessly lost with her (**v. 6**).

1. (:3) Sweet as Honey

"*For the lips of an adulteress drip honey,*
And smoother than oil is her speech."

Max Anders: Solomon moves without a pause into his warning against the wiles of an immoral woman. It is her words, not her physical attractiveness, that pose the greatest danger. Her lips drip honey, the sweetest substance in the ancient world, and her words are smoother than oil, the smoothest item in the Israelite household. Her flattery is designed to inflate the young man's ego and signal her availability, opening the way for him to turn his thoughts into action.

Lindsay Wilson: The image of her lips dripping honey refers not to untidy eating habits, but is a sensual depiction of **something that initially seems sweet and satisfying**. The parallel description of her speech being smoother than [olive] oil also has rich and stimulating associations. The combined picture is of enjoying a rich banquet, a feast that promises no end to enjoyment. Of course, the reality is quite different from this projection. Her words are bitter and sharp, not just in their aftertaste, but in their very essence.

2. (:4) Bitter as Wormwood

"*But in the end she is bitter as wormwood,*
Sharp as a two-edged sword."

C. (:5-6) Potential for Disaster

1. (:5) Destined for Death and Destruction

"*Her feet go down to death,*
Her steps lay hold of Sheol."

2. (:6) Opposed to Life and Stability

"*She does not ponder the path of life;*
Her ways are unstable, she does not know it."

Charles Bridges: One feature of the tempter's wiliness is most remarkable. She winds herself in a thousand crooked . . . paths, so that everyone's different moods and circumstances can be met. She works on every weakness; she seizes every unguarded moment. She has one overriding intention in mind. Not only does she give no thought to the way of life, she is determined that nobody else should either. She knows that the checks of conscience must be diverted. No time must be allowed for reflection. The intrusion of one serious thought might break the spell and open the way of escape.

II. (:7-14) DON'T GAMBLE WITH SEXUAL TEMPTATION – YOU GOT TO KNOW WHEN TO WALK AWAY … YOU GOT TO KNOW WHEN TO RUN

Paul Koptak: In sum, the instruction of **Proverbs 5:7–14** warns that if the young man chooses the words of the adulteress over the instruction of the teachers, he will lose all that he might have kept: strength, wealth, and social standing. In this way, the choice to love folly instead of wisdom is symbolized as a rejection of wisdom and her gifts of life, riches, and reputation. The parental teacher imagines what the young man will say when the truth is known, hoping that the young man's own voice will prove to be persuasive. The son's regrets clearly state the sages' view: Adultery is not only a sin that exacts payment, it is the ultimate symbol of the fool's pathway.

A. (:7) Pay Attention

"*Now then, my sons, listen to me,*
And do not depart from the words of my mouth."

Allen Ross: (:**7-14**) A Father's Warning to Avoid Ruin and Regret

B. (:8) Don't Flirt with Sexual Temptation

"*Keep your way far from her,*
And do not go near the door of her house."

George Mylne: May not a man be permitted to talk with her, merely by way of amusement? Is it unlawful to drink a glass in her house, and to satisfy our curiosity by observing what passes in it, and by what arts she contrives to seduce those who are less established in virtue than ourselves? Yes, it is unlawful to have the least interaction with her.

By the requirements of the ceremonial law, no man was to be in the same house with a leper. The moral law forbids us to enter into a house full of the leprosy of sin. Her house is full of snares, and her hands are as iron bands. The devil glances in her smiles, and lurks in her dress and in her motions. He is there, ready to discharge at you his fiery darts of temptation! And to aid his efforts, you have much combustible material in you.

Dare you then delude yourself that the fire of licentious passion shall not be kindled, and blown up into a flame that you cannot quench! The devil will tempt you enough, without own help. To tempt is his business. As you love your life and your own soul, give him no assistance in the work of destruction.

C. (:9-14) Terrible Consequences of Infidelity

1. (:9) Sacrificing Vitality and the Fullness of Life

"*Lest you give your vigor to others,*
And your years to the cruel one."

David Hubbard: The dire results of adultery are listed first as loss of what every sane person values (**vv. 9–10**): "honor" and respect in the community; "*years*" of building up one's reputation for integrity and reliability, only to have it tarnished by a cruel person who will take vengeful delight in public exposure; "*wealth*" (lit., what gives one "*strength*" to cope with life's needs), which may be lost from the family inheritance and

squandered, perhaps by blackmail, into the hands of the harlot and her comrades; "*labors*" of a lifetime and all that they have allowed a person to accumulate, as they fly out the window and settle in a place where they do not belong—the house of a foreigner, which may refer also to the place where the adulteress resides.

Max Anders: These verses [:**9-10**] list the **losses** that crouch in the path of those who toy with lust. They will lose their strength, a reference to their health, honor, or self-respect. They will lose their years, either by a shortened life or by one composed of wasted years. They will lose their wealth to others, whether through blackmail, judicial penalty, or heavy spending on the lover.

Warren Wiersbe: When you read **verses 9–14**, you hear the words of a suffering sinner lamenting the high cost of disobeying God's laws, because the most expensive thing in the world is sin. He discovers that the woman's husband is a cruel man who demands that he pay for what he's done, so the adulterer ends up giving his strength to others and toiling away to pay his debt. Instead of luxury, the sinner has misery; instead of riches, poverty; instead of success, ruin; and instead of a good reputation, the name of an adulterer. He looks back and wishes he had listened to his parents and his spiritual instructors, but his wishes can't change his wretched situation. Yes, God in His grace will forgive his sins if he repents, but God in His government sees to it that he reaps what he sows.

Lindsay Wilson: All of **verses 9–11** depict how a relationship with an immoral woman results in all your wealth, time, energy and hard work being used up in such a way that brings no benefit to you and your family (see **vv. 15–20**).

2. (:10) Financial Hardship

"*Lest strangers be filled with your strength,*
And your hard-earned goods go to the house of an alien."

3. (:11) Physical Dissipation

"*And you groan at your latter end,*
When your flesh and your body are consumed."

4. (:12-13) Emotional Regret

"*And you say, 'How I have hated instruction!*
And my heart spurned reproof!
And I have not listened to the voice of my teachers.
Nor inclined my ear to my instructors!'"

5. (:14) Complete Disaster and Embarrassment

"*I was almost in utter ruin*
in the midst of the assembly and congregation."

David Hubbard: The shattering, soul-destroying effect of adultery is the point. It can rarely be kept secret, and its perpetrators are damned if it is and damned if it is not.

Kept hidden, it grinds on the spirit and conscience of those who practice it until exposure seems a kind of relief. And many a person has deliberately left traces of a sin for others to discover, as a desperate plea for rescue from enslaving behavior. Made public, adultery brings personal shame, humiliation to loved ones, and loss of respect in the larger community. In recent times, a number of politicians and religious leaders could be summoned to verify the accuracy of the teacher's words.

III. (:15-20) DRINK FROM YOUR OWN WELL – FINDING SEXUAL ENJOYMENT IN YOUR OWN WIFE PROTECTS THE BLESSING OF YOUR FAMILY

A. (:15) Find Sexual Satisfaction With Your Own Wife

"*Drink water from your own cistern,*
And fresh water from your own well."

David Hubbard: The contrast between the harlot's honey that goes bitter (**vv. 3–4**) and the wife's water that stays sweet ("*running*") is the point of the whole chapter.

Trevor Longman: In teaching such as we have in this chapter (as well as in the Song of Songs), we observe the very positive attitude of the Bible toward sensuality and sexuality, when enjoyed in the context of marriage. This, we maintain, goes back to **Gen. 2:23–25**, which provides the foundation for marriage.

B. (:16-17) Jealously Guard Your Own Wife

"*Should your springs be dispersed abroad, Streams of water in the streets?*
Let them be yours alone, And not for strangers with you."

Max Anders: This verse answers the question of **verse 16**. Your water sources should be for the exclusive use of your household, not open for foreigners to consume. In the same way, physical intimacy should be strictly for one's own spouse, not wasted on strangers. This verse forbids any form of marital infidelity.

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 17** sets out the idea of **exclusivity**, but with a twist suggesting that you lose rather than gain by seeking to go outside the marital boundaries. In this context variety is not the spice of life, and more is not better. **Verse 18a** is simply the language of praise and delight in your spouse (your fountain). The church needs to rediscover and promote such a positive view of marital sexuality as an antidote to a sex-obsessed but not satisfied world.

C. (:18-19) Potential for Erotic Love With Your Own Wife

"*Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth.*
As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;
Be exhilarated always with her love."

D. (:20) No Need to Look Elsewhere

"*For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress, And embrace*

the bosom of a foreigner?"

David Hubbard: The final admonition and its follow-up question (**vv. 19–20**) add warmth and tenderness to the whole speech. They portray marital loyalty as an experience of fondness as well as fertility and fidelity. The young man, with the rest of our male species through the centuries, is exhorted not just to a steely willed commitment or to a paternal pride but also to a single-hearted, impassioned affection for his bride.

IV. (:21-23) NO ESCAPING GOD'S ACCOUNTABILTY – YOU CANNOT FLY UNDER THE RADAR OF GOD'S ACCOUNTABILITY

A. (:21) God is Watching

"*For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord,*
And He watches all his paths."

Trevor Longman: However, the father has saved his **most powerful argument** for last. Thus far he has warned concerning quite human dangers. He has told his son that a liaison with another woman looks good but has bitter consequences. The relationship leads to death, not life. It saps strength and vitality and resources. But the ultimate motivation for not entering into an illicit relationship is because "*the eyes of Yahweh are on the paths of humans, observing all their courses.*" God is watching, and so the punishments of **vv. 22–23** (ultimately death) are not a matter of chance, but certainty; the implication is that no matter what particular form the punishment might take, God will assure that it will happen. The sin of the adulterers will come back and harm them (**v. 22**). If they are not inebriated by the love of their wife, then they will be inebriated by their own stupidity, and that will result in their death.

B. (:22) Sin is a Snare

"*His own iniquities will capture the wicked,*
And he will be held with the cords of his sin."

Max Anders: Those who promote **self-indulgence** often proclaim their commitment to freedom, but sin takes away a person's freedom, trapping him and binding him to his vice. Because he refused discipline (**v. 12**), his pathway ends in death. He made the choice of short-term pleasure, too intoxicated (*led astray* is the same Hebrew word as "*captivate*," **vv. 19-20**) to realize his foolishness.

Warren Wiersbe: It's impossible to sin without being bound. One of the deceitful things about sin is that it promises freedom but only brings **slavery**. "*Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin*" (**John 8:34** NKJV). "*Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness*?" (**Rom. 6:16** NKJV).

C. (:23) Foolishness is Fatal

"*He will die for lack of instruction,*
And in the greatness of his folly he will go astray."

Lindsay Wilson: The final verse brings us back to the issue of **character**. The evildoer has made the wrong foundational choice – folly rather than wisdom. He is led astray (the same verb *šgh* translated *be intoxicated* in **vv. 19–20**) because he has chosen the path that leads to death not life. He will die because he has refused to have his character shaped by the discipline or character formation offered by wisdom.

David Hubbard: The final verse (**v. 23**) echoes three notes from the whole composition:

(1) death is the expected result of sexual immorality, since life is robbed of its roots in love and loyalty; physical life may struggle on but the guilt, compromise, and failure of adultery are a walking death (see **v. 5**);

(2) rebellion against "*instruction*," the disciplined self-control that bears suffering and learns from it, is a mistake from which it is hard to recover (see **v. 12**);

(3) one should be intoxicated with the love of a spouse (**v. 19**) not the love of an immoral woman (**v. 20**); where the latter is the case, it is tantamount to being intoxicated ("*go astray*" is the same verb as "*enraptured*" in **vv. 19–20**) or overdosed with massive folly; the outcome is lethal.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How well did we listen to the words of wisdom and discipline from our parents? How well do our children listen to us?

2) What steps do we take to avoid placing ourselves in harm's way … to "*keep a path far from her*?"

3) Are you surprised by the imagery of sexual satisfaction used to describe the marriage relationship? What is the intent of this section (**vv. 15-20**)?

4) Note the terminology of bondage used to describe the snare of sexual transgression. Describe the various aspects of bondage involved.

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Warren Wiersbe: Why worry about sexual sins? These three chapters of Proverbs give us three reasons why we should worry if we break God's laws of purity:

- because sexual sin is eventually disappointing (**Prov. 5**),
- gradually destructive (**ch. 6**),

- and ultimately deadly (**ch. 7**).

That's why God says, "*You shall not commit adultery*."

Louis Goldberg: Wisdom points out the high price tag for immorality. An illicit life robs a person of his "*best strength*" and "*years*" (**5:9**). . . What a waste. We must learn that God's morals can never be thrust aside without paying the price. . . Family fidelity satisfies best . . .

Jerry Falwell: President Woodrow Wilson once expressed some thoughts on success that run parallel to a biblical concept. He said, "I would rather fail in a cause that someday will triumph than triumph in a cause that someday will fail." We must be on God's side for success to have any meaning at all. Supposed success outside of God's program is in reality just failure. All thirty-one chapters of Proverbs tell how to live successfully. The theme of **chapter 5** is **biblical morality**, or how to succeed in the moral arena.

Derek Kidner: **Verses 18-20** turn more explicitly to the personal love of husband and wife. The language is frankly erotic, delighting in the imagery to be found in the Song of Solomon (cf. **Ct. 4: 5, 12, 15**). Such an emphasis is rather rare in Scripture, simply because nature already provides it, and therefore the complementary aspects of marriage need to be stressed. But it is highly important to see sexual delight in marriage as God-given; and history confirms that when marriage is viewed chiefly as a business arrangement, not only is God's bounty misunderstood, but human passion seeks (cf. **verse 20**) other outlets.

Lindsay Wilson: In terms of the focus on female sexual predators (not the common pattern in our world), Longman (2006: 165) helpfully suggests 'that women readers transform the language to suit their context. In other words, instead of a honey-lipped female seducing a male reader, they should read in terms of a sweet-talking male trying to entice them into bed.' Proverbs was written with a particular audience in view (young men), but the **principles apply to male and female alike**. It is certainly not asserting that sexual sin is primarily the fault of females.

Charles Bridges: Ponder this chapter – ye that know not the poison and corruption of fleshly lusts. Perhaps painful experience (**I Kings xi. 1-8. Eccles. vii. 26**) had given the wise man wisdom and understanding. Therefore attend to it with fear and trembling. Man's own strength, the restraint of education, or self-discipline, is powerless, as the green withs to bind the giant. (**Judg. xvi. 9**.) Engrafted wisdom is the only effectual safe-guard. This heavenly influence teaches us, both to regard discretion for the covering of our souls, and to keep knowledge for the warning of our fellow-sinners. (**Chap. ii. 10, 11, 16; vi. 20, 24; vii. 1-5. Ps. xvii. 4; cxix. 9, 11**).

TEXT: Proverbs 6:1-35

TITLE: FIVE WAYS TO AVOID WRECKING YOUR LIFE

BIG IDEA:
THE PATH OF WISDOM WILL RECOGNIZE AND AVOID THE COMMON PITFALLS THAT ARE MAJOR LIFE WRECKERS

INTRODUCTION:

Paul Koptac: The chapter brings together two instructions, both concerning behaviors and associations that the wise person avoids. The first set of teachings tells how one deals with other men, here described as brothers and neighbors (**6:1–19**); the second returns to the subject of the strange/other woman (**6:20–35**).

Warren Wiersbe: **Chapter 6** deals with three enemies that can destroy a person financially, physically, morally, or spiritually:

- unwise financial commitments (**vv. 1–5**),
- laziness (**vv. 6–11**),
- and lust (**vv. 20–35**).

It is not unusual for one person to be guilty of all three, because laziness and lust often go together; people who can easily be pressured into putting up security for somebody can be pressured into doing other foolish things, including committing adultery. "*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*" (**Matt. 6:21**).

Avoid the Way of Pledges, Sluggards, and Scoundrels (6:1–19)
Get free from pledges (**6:1–5**)
Go learn from the ant (**6:6–11**)
Watch out for the scoundrel (**6:12–15**)
Hate the seven things Yahweh hates (**6:16–19**)

Avoid the Way of Adultery (6:20–35)
The commands are a guide for life (**6:20–24**)
The adulteress preys on your life (**6:25–29**)
The husband will show no mercy (**6:30–35**)

David Hubbard: **Scripture Outline**
Disengage Yourselves from Rash Pledges (**6:1–5**)
Learn Diligence from the Ant (**6:6–11**)
Perverse People Are Dangerous (**6:12–15**)
Divisive People Are Deadly (**6:16–19**)
Call to Attention (**6:20–22**)
Shun Adultery (**6:23–35**)

Lindsay Wilson: The warnings against four snares or distractions in **6:1–19** are the only materials in **chapters 5-7** that do not deal with the immoral woman. This raises the

question of **why these verses are located in this part of the book**. A crucial hint is that the role of the immoral woman in **chapters 5-7** is to **personify folly**. When you look again at **6:1–19**, it seems to be moving beyond the personification of folly to some specific, concrete examples of folly, and warns against them. Perhaps this is in case some miss the significance of personification and say, 'Well, I haven't committed adultery, so I'm OK', even if the rest of their life is full of folly.

- So **verses 1–5** speak of folly in financial matters with your neighbour;
- **verses 6–11** target laziness;
- **verses 12–15** refer to troublemakers,
- while the numerical sayings of **verses 16–19** outline a miscellany of activities, climaxing in stirring up conflict in the community (**v. 19**).

These examples of other forms of folly are a reminder that the real focus in **chapters 5-7** is not adultery or the loose woman, but rather folly itself.

I. (:1-5) AVOID ASSUMNG FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ANOTHER'S DEBTS

(This would be one quick path to poverty)

A. (:1-2) Recognize the Trap of Unwise Debt

1. (:1) Trapped by Assuming Unnecessary Debt

"*My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor,*
If you have struck hands in pledge for another"

Ray Ortlund: What is "*putting up security*" or "*giving your pledge*" for someone else? It is **cosigning a loan**. It is putting yourself up as collateral. It is underwriting someone else's speculative risk. It is getting into a partnership when your partner's default can bring you down. God is saying in verses 1 and 2, "If you've done this, you're not *in danger* of becoming ensnared, you're *already* ensnared."

Tremper Longman: Interest-bearing loans to fellow Israelites are forbidden (**Exod. 22:25** [24 MT]). It was possible to give interest-bearing loans to foreigners, but if "*stranger*" implies foreigner here, then even these are discouraged. On the other hand, we need to remember that it is also the frequent teaching of the book to be generous to the poor (**28:27; 29:7, 14**). These are not loans, but rather outright gifts. And that seems to be the point. If people have needs, then give them what they need. The problem with loans is that often they are given in contexts where the lender cannot afford to lose the money, and the risk is just too high.

2. (:2) Trapped by Rash Commitments

"*If you have been trapped by what you said,*
Ensnared by the words of your mouth"

B. (:3) Seek Deliverance from the Bondage

"*then do this, my son, to free yourself,*
since you have fallen into your neighbor's hands:
Go and humble yourself; press your plea with your neighbor!"

David Hubbard: In a society where pride and self-esteem governed public conduct and made apology rare and groveling before a creditor even more rare, this lesson would have cut to the quick. It called for admitting a faux pas, reneging on a promise, and badgering a powerful neighbor for relief from it. Distasteful but necessary. And a wholesome reminder that prudence would have avoided the predicament in the first place. It was not brother or uncle for whom he rashly pledged collateral and cosigned an agreement. It was someone to whom he had no primary obligation and who, in turn, was not at all accountable to him.

C. (:4-5) Escape with a Sense of Urgency

"*Allow no sleep to your eyes, no slumber to your eyelids.*
Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter,
like a bird from the snare of the fowler."

Louis Goldberg: **The Folly of Overextended Debt:**
Unlimited debt is a foolishness for which Wisdom has some severe warnings. The Mosaic Covenant encouraged people to help one another, especially those who had unexpected financial difficulties. When loans were involved, no interest was to be charged (**Leviticus 25:35-38**). In particular, land sales were carefully regulated because the family plot of land was never to be sold. All a purchaser could buy from a needy farmer was the crop value to the next year of Jubilee, at which time the use of the land reverted back to the family who owned it (**Leviticus 25:13-16**).

II. (:6-11) AVOID LAZINESS BY CHOOSING DILIGENCE

(This would be a second quick path to poverty)

A. (:6-8) Study the Model of Diligence in Nature = the Ant

1. (:6) Model of the Ant Commended

"*Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise*!"

Lindsay Wilson: The assumption is that we can learn from observing the natural world, for there are many lessons there about how life works. However, mere observation is not enough, for there is also a need to consider or understand the way that ants live.49 The logical conclusion for the lazy and presumably unshaped person is to embrace wisdom, to take a stand with wisdom not folly, and so be wise.

2. (:7) Takes Initiative Without Direct Supervision

"*It has no commander, no overseer or ruler*"

Tremper Longman: **Verse 7** describes the ant as not having **hierarchy** in its social structure. The fact that modern scientific study has uncovered hierarchy in an ant colony is beside the point. This information was not available to the ancient Near Eastern observer, so the sage is speaking from the point of view of naive observation. And without obvious social structure, these creatures cope quite well.

The amazing fact is that ants, through their seemingly ceaseless labor, gather enough food to carry them through the winter. In **30:25** ants are described as having no strength, thus their success in gathering food is based on their **diligence**.

George Mylne: The ant has no guide to set her example, no overseer to inspect her work, no ruler to exact her task and yet she does not neglect a day in summer, when the sky clear; or in harvest, when the grain can be had in plenty. She improves every opportunity to store up provisions, that she may spend the days of cold and scarcity in comfort. And what is the result of all her toil? In winter she enjoys plenty, when other creatures are pinched with poverty, or perish with cold and hunger.

3. (:8) Maximizes Opportunities (vs. Procrastinating)

"*yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest*."

B. (:9) Shun Laziness by Rejecting the Snooze Button

"*How long will you lie there, you sluggard?*
When will you get up from your sleep?"

Getting started is half the battle;
"just give me 5 more minutes" = repetitive refrain

John Miller: The failure of a sluggard to learn foresight and initiative from an ant can have devastating consequences not just for someone in charge of a vineyard, but in any field of endeavor.

C. (:10-11) Seize Every Opportunity – Because Procrastination = Stealing From Yourself

"*A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest –*
And poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man."

Tremper Longman: The onset of poverty is described by using **similes**. In the first place, it is likened to a prowler, and in the second colon it is likened to a man carrying a shield. In both cases, this simile describes individuals whose arrival portends harm. It also suggests the idea that poverty will sneak up on the person and arrive suddenly. Again, the function of this description is to serve as a warning, with the hope that people who have a propensity to be lazy will stir themselves into activity.

Paul Koptak: The two warnings work together to present a lesson on responsibility. The young man is told not to take responsibility for someone else's finances [securing a pledge for a loan made to a neighbor] and to make sure that he never needs others to take responsibility for him [because of laziness]. Of course, this call to responsibility does not rule out lending to the poor and caring for their needs.

Lindsay Wilson: Neither the fruits of hard work, nor the prize of wisdom, will be achieved by one who is too lazy to act, think and become wise.

George Mylne: The idle man is bad but the mischievous man is still worse. Indeed it generally happens, that he who is enslaved by the one of these vices, becomes in process of time the slave of the other also.

III. (:12-15) AVOID THE TRAP OF DECEPTIVE SCHEMERS

John Miller: In this instance the portrait is of a **base person** [’c*jdcjm*], a wicked man (**6:12a**, lit.). His characteristics are those mentioned in a cluster of sayings in **16:27-30**. He is thoroughly corrupt (*beliyya’al*); the word is used elsewhere for rapists (**Judg 19:22**), perjurers (**1 Kgs 21:10, 13**), apostates (**Deut 13:14**), alcoholics (**1 Sam 1:16**), troublemakers (**1 Sam 10:27**), and fools (**Prov 16:27; 1 Sam 25:17, 25;** Fox**: 219**). The poem lists four telltale physical features of such a person: He walks about with a corrupt mouth (lit., *a crooked mouth***; 6:12b**; cf. **16:27b**). He squints (lit.; winks; his eyes are shifty; **6:13a; 16:30a**). He shuffles his feet (not able to stand still). And he points his fingers with malicious intent (**6:13**). His outer appearance reflects his perverse inner thoughts, which are preoccupied with evil plans (**6:14a**). As a result, wherever he goes, he sows discord (**6:14b; 16:28**). The poem closes with a sharp focus on his fate: He will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy (**6:15**).

A. (:12a) Their Mask Unveiled – seeing them for who they really are

1. “*a scoundrel*”

2. “*and villain*”

B. (:12b-14) Their Methodology Exposed – what you see is not what you get

1. Their Mouth

“*who goes about with a corrupt mouth*”

Tremper Longman: The description of evil people proceeds by naming different parts of the body. In the first place, they have **crooked mouths**. From such mouths one would expect lies (**6:19; 13:5; 14:5, 25; 25:18**), rumors (**18:8**), slander (**10:18; 20:19**), and gossip (**11:13; 17:4**). All of these are destructive of relationships, both intimate (family) and beyond (society). In short, a perverse mouth speaks falsehoods.

2. Their Eye

“*who winks with his eye*”

Paul Koptak: Mouth, eye, feet, and fingers are all used to communicate false and damaging messages. For example, the wink (**6:13**) is malicious in **10:10** and a sign of perversity in **16:30**. It is not clear whether these signals are secret and seen only by some, or made openly as an accusation, insult, or even a curse. What is clear is the **evil intent** with which they are presented. They are outward expressions of internal plotting and deceit (**6:14**).

Allen Ross: The description moves from the scoundrel's corrupt or perverse sayings (**v.12**) to his sinister sign language (**v.13**) to his disruptive plots developed through deceit. The expressions in **v.13** seem to refer to any look or gesture that is put on and therefore a **form of deception**, if not a way of making insinuations. A wink may seem like a playful thing, but with these troublemakers it is **malicious**. McKane, 325, thinks there is even a reference here to **magic**, as "*plots*" (*ḥōrēš*, **v.14**) is used elsewhere to devise magic. The evil plans of their hearts are a vivid reminder of the description of the wicked in **Genesis 6:5**.

3. Their Feet
"*signals with his feet*"

4. Their Fingers
"*and motions with his fingers*"

5. Their Heart
"*who plots evil with deceit in his heart –*
He always stirs up dissension"

C. (:15) Their Apparent Prosperity Overturned
"*Therefore disaster will overtake him in an instant;*
he will suddenly be destroyed – without remedy."

David Hubbard: What ultimately crushes ("*be broken*") such a wretch is not described (**v. 15**). It may be a righteous uprising of the community; it may be a negative decision by the town's elders in the litigation that takes place in the city gate. In any case, the defeat is so devastating that all temptation to copy the perverse person is quelled. These words are not wasted on our modem society where both wicked manipulation by magic and mean contention in court are daily realities. The first is an insult to divine power; the second, an outrage to divine love. Perverse people are dangerous, then and now.

IV. (:16-19) AVOID THE SEVEN PILLARS OF WICKEDNESS

"*There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him:"*

A. Arrogance – "*haughty eyes*"

George Mylne: **Pride** leads the van of this troop of iniquities. Its palace is the heart but its throne is erected in the eye, whence it looks with disdain upon men, and pours defiance towards Heaven. The proud man is not only a rebel to God but a usurper of his dignity. He would be a God to men but the living and true God looks upon him with contempt and indignation, and spurns him into Hell.

B. Lying – "*a lying tongue*"

Allen Ross: The second description is "*a lying tongue*" (*lešôn šāqer*, lit., "*tongue of deception*"). The term is used in **Jeremiah 14:14** to portray false prophets who deceive

people and in **Psalm 109:2** to describe the deceiver who betrays—a passage that the disciples apply to Judas in **Acts 1:20**. Deception in speech is harmful (**Pr 26:28**), but in the end truth will overcome it (**12:19**).

C. Murdering – "*hands that shed innocent blood*"

D. Planning Wickedness – "*a heart that devises wicked schemes*"

Allen Ross: Appropriately, at the center of the list, the fourth phrase (**v.18a**) concerns the heart that "*devises* [*ḥōrēš*] *wicked schemes* [*maḥšebôt ʾāwen*]." The heart most often represents the will, which here plots evil. God early on declared that the human heart was capable of doing this sort of thing (**Ge 6:5**); Proverbs elaborates the theme by showing that the heart that schemes wickedness is also deceitful (**Pr 12:20; 14:22**).

E. Executing Wickedness – "*feet that are quick to rush into evil*"

F. Bearing False Witness – "*a false witness who pours out lies*"

G. Capstone: Spreading Family Strife – "*and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers*"

Paul Koptak: In sum, the four teachings of **Proverbs 6:1–19** work together to create a **portrait of folly** in its various forms. The young man here is warned about what he might lose in bad deals and neglect and about wicked men who "*go about*," scheming to take what is not theirs. Each of the four sections concludes with a **negative outcome**: The one who pledges is caught in a trap, the sluggard will be ambushed by poverty, the scoundrel will be overtaken by disaster, and the one who stirs up dissension provokes Yahweh's loathing—no more threat need be said. The one who pledges can get out of the trap and the sluggard can get up and learn from the ant, but the scoundrel will be destroyed without remedy (**6:15**).

There are good indications, then, that the insertion of these four warnings is not haphazard. We have seen that the teachings on pledges and laziness are related by the **call to action** (no sleep for the eyes or rest for the hands) and the freedom of self-discipline (free from the power of a neighbor's hand and free from the need of an overseer). Likewise, the separate but similar teachings on the wicked person and the actions hated by Yahweh are related by the **misuse of body parts for evil and its recompense**. Yahweh hates these evils, and those who do them will be destroyed.

Taken together, the teaching of the four warnings may be paraphrased: Do not allow your members to become passive so that you are under another's power, and do not let your members become active for evil so that you imagine you are a power over others. Both extremes ignore the reality of Yahweh's righteous rule. If the first two have a message about earning and protecting one's own substance from loss, the last two warn about those who would take it from others.

Lindsay Wilson: A clue to reading **numerical sayings** is that the focus of the message is often on the last item mentioned. The seventh example here, **sowing discord in the community**, draws together the remainder of the other descriptions. While they are initially a loose conglomerate of images, they can all be seen to contribute to a breaking down of the harmony and wholesome relationships which God intends to characterize people living together. Proud or haughty looks (eyes) imply that some are better than others. A lying tongue ruptures trust, friendships and families. The shedding of innocent blood undermines justice and causes needless grief. The mention of wicked schemes and feet rushing to do evil reveals some in the group who are concerned only for themselves, regardless of the cost to others. A false witness (as in **14:5, 25; 19:5, 9**) can promote injustice and rip a good person's character to shreds. These are all socially destructive and anti-community activities. God longs for peace in community, and the thrust of the biblical idea of peace is not simply the absence of overt conflict, but more so the presence of wholesome relationships across human divisions. The language used in this numerical saying is very strong: God hates and detests such human failings. This gives some idea of the extent to which God is committed to building up community. Conflict, deceit and hatred must not be allowed to fester.

V. (:20-35) AVOID SEXUAL PROMISCUITY

A. (:20-24) The Foundation of Parental Guidance Is Your First Line of Defense

1. (:20-21) Priority of Obedience to Parents

> "*My son, keep your father's commands*
> *and do not forsake your mother's teaching.*
> *Bind them upon our heart forever;*
> *fasten them around your neck*."

2. (:22-23) General Benefits: Guidance / Protection / Correction

> "*When you walk, they will guide you;*
> *when you sleep, they will watch over you;*
> *when you awake, they will speak to you.*
> *For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light,*
> *and the corrections of discipline are the way to life.*"

David Hubbard: This admonition to **obedience** combines three familiar ingredients and adds a new one. Familiar are

(1) the equation of wisdom teaching with command and law (**v. 20**; see **3:1**) to show that obedience is not a matter of option or choice but of responsibility or rebellion,

(2) the mention of both parents as sources of authoritative instruction (**v. 20**; see **1:8; 4:3**), a reminder that school was seen as an extension of the home in its obligation to nurture the young,

(3) the metaphors of tying or binding (**v. 21**; see **1:9; 3:3, 22**) to depict the tenacity with which wisdom is to be grasped and the central part it plays in every aspect of life.

New are the trio of clauses that picture wisdom's constant role during the key activities of each day (**v. 22**):

(1) a guide during the goings and comings ("*roam*" suggests "*going astray*" which is not the point here) that work and leisure demand;
(2) a guard during the helpless hours of sleep;
(3) a concerned companion ("*speak*" understates the attention wisdom pays to its wards), present in the early waking hours before dawn and family break the silence.

3. (:24) Specific Benefit

"*keeping you from the immoral woman,*
from the smooth tongue of the wayward wife."

Charles Bridges: But the sin of the adulterer claims no sympathy. His plea is not the cry of hunger, but of lust; not want, but wantonness; not *the lack of bread*, but of *understanding*. (Comp. **Eccles. vii. 25, 26; Jer. v. 8, 21**.) He is willfully given up to his sin. He *destroyeth his own soul*. (**Lev. xx. 10. Chap. ii. 18, 19; v. 22, 23; vii. 22, 23. Eph. v. 5**) *He gets a wound* – not like the soldier or the martyr for Christ – full of honour; but rankling on his conscience (**Ps. xxxii. 3,4**), and bringing *dishonour* and indelible *reproach* upon his name. The tremendous passions of *jealousy and rage* shut out all forgiveness. *The face* of no one who offered a *ransom* would be *accepted*. No compensation (**Gen. xxxix. 19, 20. Judg. xix. 29, 30**), however costly, will *content*.

B. (:25-29) Playing with Fire Will Only Get You Burned

1. (:25) Don't Even Start Down This Slippery Slope

"*Do not lust in your heart after her beauty*
or let her captivate you with her eyes"

2. (:26) The Stakes are High

a. Poverty – Prostitute out for financial gain

"*for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread"*

b. Ruin – Adulteress sucks out your very life (bored with her marriage)

"and the adulteress preys upon your very life."

Tremper Longman: The passage reveals some interesting aspects of ancient Israelite culture. In the first place, it warns against two classes of dangerous women: the prostitute and the seductive but married woman. Having sexual relationships with either is wrong, but the argument of the father makes it clear that there is a difference between the two. After all, the consequences of sleeping with a married woman are much larger than sleeping with a prostitute. This difference is summed up in **v. 26**: "*For a prostitute costs a loaf of bread, but a married woman hunts for a man's life*." The point seems to be that the prostitute will sap material resources, but when one sleeps with a married woman, one must reckon with her jealous husband, who will have the support of the law behind him as he seeks revenge.

3. (:27-29) The Consequences are Inevitable

"*Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned?*
Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched?
So is he who sleeps with another man's wife;
no one who touches her will go unpunished."

Paul Koptak: Three arguments from analogy then drive home the prohibition of **Proverbs 6:25**. The parents compare:

(1) payments due the prostitute and adulteress (**6:26**),
(2) adultery and the fire that burns lap and feet (**6:27–29**), and
(3) the fates of the hungry thief and the adulterer (**6:31–32**).

Three negative outcomes are named, respectively:

(1) loss of life,
(2) punishment like burning,
(3) and the combination of public disgrace and a husband's angry vengeance.

C. (:30-35) No Amount of Money Can Bail You Out of the Consequences

1. (:30-31) Inexcusable Offense

"*Men do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving. Yet if he is caught, he must pay sevenfold, though it costs him all the wealth of his house.*"

2. (:32-33) Idiotic Self Destruction

"*But a man who commits adultery lacks judgment;*
whoever does so destroys himself.
Blows and disgrace are his lot,
and his shame will never be wiped away"

Max Anders: How can you make restitution for adultery? Committing such a deed shows a lack of judgment, a self-destructive urge. The disgrace of his action can never be wiped away, and the injured husband becomes an implacable foe whom no payment will satisfy.

MAIN IDEA REVIEW: An illicit affair may provide short-term pleasure, but the long-range consequences will be disastrous. Stay faithful to your spouse, and you will experience genuine satisfaction—and God will be pleased. You cannot escape the painful results of immorality.

3. (:34-35) Impossibility of Compensation

"*for jealousy arouses a husband's fury,*
and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge.
He will not accept any compensation;
he will refuse the bribe, however great it is."

Warren Wiersbe: In today's society, if a person has enough money and "clout," he or she might be able to survive an adulterous scandal, but life is still never quite the same. Whether in this life or the next, sinners can be sure that their sins will find them out. **Indulging in sexual sin is always a losing proposition**.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Do we have any overextended debt where we need to seek an urgent remedy?

2) Do our work habits reflect more the diligence of the ant or the slothfulness of the sluggard?

3) Are we easily attracted by get-rich-schemes or other forms of deceptive advertising?

4) Are we surprised at the list of sins that are associated with murder? Do we have God's heart when it comes to hating wickedness?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Jerry Falwell: **Chapter 6** of Proverbs has four divisions, all giving a clear recipe for a wrecked and ruined life.

1. Number 1, violate scriptural principles in **economics** and make bad financial decisions (**vv. 1-5**). . .
2. The second division of **chapter 6** concerns **bad work habits** (**vv. 6-11**). . . God says that by the sweat of your brow you will earn your bread. Part of our welfare and unemployment problem is that a lot of people are not looking for jobs. They are looking for positions!
3. But if you want to wreck your life, there is a third thing you can do: Have **bad character** (**vv. 12-19**).
4. Finally, division 4, **verses 20-35**: **Bad moral behavior** will wreck your life.

Louis Goldberg: (**6:24-35**) -- The teacher of wisdom keeps hammering away at the theme of **chastity**. He is not satisfied merely mentioning the high price tag of sexual impurity or painting the picture of family fidelity in the most desirable of terms. Now he wants to also point out that the immoral person is a stupid fool.

Derek Kidner: The **detestable things** are expressed in characteristically concrete, personal terms: the reader can almost catch the superior look and the shifty talk, and may wonder when his own hands were last employed to an innocent person's detriment. If we try to classify them, the abominations comprise one sin of attitude (**17a**), one of thought (**18a**) *imaginations*, AV, RV = *plans*, RSV), two of speech (lies -- unofficial, **17b**, and official, **19a**), two of action (**17c, 18b**) and one of influence (**19b**).

Eric Lane: In fact, in our modern society we might be even less advised to take on the role of surety. In view of the exorbitant and ever-changing interest rates now attached to loans, to underwrite another's debt is to take on something open-ended. Repaying the principal is the smallest part of the matter. While we are to be generous to the needy we are not expected to commit ourselves beyond our capacity to an unknown future. We live in a society run on credit and debt, and most of us for a large part of our lives have commitments such as mortgages and hire-purchase agreements. We find it hard enough to meet these without taking on someone else's debt. We should only do so if we are quite sure of our ability to meet it should the need arise. Let us conduct our financial transactions with great care. **Debt is a terrible thing.**

Charles Bridges: Remember, faith without diligence is slumbering delusion. Faith is the practical energy of a living faith. Always, therefore, look at sloth, not as an infirmity, but as a sin, affecting the whole man: growing upon us with unperceived power. Allow it therefore no rest, no time to root itself. Resist it in all its forms – bodily, mental, spiritual: indulgence of sleep and appetite: self-pleasing in all its subtle and plausible workings. Live by rule. Have your time strictly arranged. Be employed in early work for God. Store the mind with useful knowledge; ever reserving the first place for an industrious and prayerful study of the book of God. "*Mortify*" this baneful lust "*through the Divine Spirit* " (**Rom. viii. 13**); drawing all your motives from the death (Ibid. **vi. 6**), the life (**Mark, i. 32-35**), the rules of Christ. (**Luke, ix. 23. Rom. xiii. 11-14**.) Victory will soon declare for you; and how enriching will be the spoil!

Ray Ortlund: The sluggard reappears throughout the book of Proverbs. What does Proverbs say about the sluggard? Three things.
First, **the sluggard will not make up his mind.** There is a direct question in **verse 9**: "*How long will you lie there? When will you arise from your sleep?*" But that is too definite for the sluggard. He has no answer. He will not give an honest refusal, but he deceives himself by an endless sequence of little compromises.

Second, **the sluggard will not finish things**. On the rare occasions when he finds the motivation to get going, it is too much for him, and the impulse dies: "*The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth*" (**Proverbs 26:15**). He does not stick with a task all the way through to a strong finish. He is a shallow person.

Third, **the sluggard will not face things as they are**. Rather than embrace the challenge of life, he dreams up excuses: "*The sluggard says, 'There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!*" (**Proverbs 22:13**).

What then can we learn from an ant? Three things.
(1) First, inner motivation.
(2) Second, hard work.
(3) Third, future preparation.

TEXT: Proverbs 7:1-27

TITLE: THE SLIPPERY PATH OF SEXUAL SEDUCTION

BIG IDEA:
SEXUAL SEDUCTION ATTACKS THE NAIVE AT THEIR POINT OF VULNERABILITY AND SUCKS THEM INTO THE PATH OF DESTRUCTION

INTRODUCTION:

David Hubbard: Scripture Outline

Introductory Call to Attention—Positive (**7:1–5**)
Illustration from Personal Observation (**7:6–23**)
Concluding Call to Attention—Negative (**7:24–27**)

The structure of the speech reflects the teacher's urgency. It begins and ends with calls to attention—the first positive, pointing to the benefits of a close attachment to wisdom and the sexual continence which that attachment will bring (**vv. 1–5**); the second negative, listing the deadly results awaiting those who buy the slick coaxings of the aristocratic harlot (**vv. 24–27**). Between the two calls is an extended description of the occasion of the seduction (**vv. 6–9**), the tactics of the temptress (**vv. 10–20**), and the response of the man who is the target of her wiles (**vv. 21–23**). "Chastity always makes sense" is the teacher's premise, and he makes the seduction especially attractive to pound home his point. An outline of the speech for teaching or preaching might look like this:

Introduction -- Rely on wisdom in times of temptation **7:1–5**

Immorality is deceptive 7:6–9
It is more apparent to others than to us
It blocks the flow of our common sense

Immorality is hurtful to others 7:10–20
The woman is degraded by her conduct
The husband is betrayed by her infidelity

Immorality is death-dealing in its outcome 7:21–23
The overture is bright with promise
The epilogue is dark with defeat

Conclusion -- Reject the seductive opportunity; it is a dance of death **7:24–27**

Lindsay Wilson: This **warning example** is meant to make clear to the implied reader that the path of adultery, or sexual intimacy outside of the God-given context of marriage, is **extreme folly**. What you think you see is not what you get. The outward form or enticements are not matched by the reality – it will cost him his life (**v. 23**).

Furthermore, folly in other areas of daily living will also lead to a dead end, in contrast to the gift of life offered on the pathway to wisdom. The solution is to embrace wisdom (**v. 4**) and prize her teaching (**vv. 1–3**), but not to stray from her paths into the way of folly (**v. 25**).

Tremper Longman: The purpose for developing an intimate relationship with Woman Wisdom is to block out an illicit relationship with the "*strange/foreign*" woman. . . It is telling that the father mentions **flattery** as the first characteristic of the woman that might attract the son to an illegitimate relationship (see also **6:24**). It is not her beauty but her appeal to the man's vanity that is so dangerous.

Max Anders: **The Story of a Seduction (7:1-27)**
MAN IDEA: A young person must be convinced not only that marriage is good but that immorality is deadly, whether it involves another man's wife or a prostitute.

SUPPORTING IDEA: In **Proverbs 6**, the father explained the importance of maintaining sexual purity. Now he dramatizes the story of a seduction, taking his son through a verbal role-playing scenario to prepare him for the real thing, explaining the specific details as a way to prepare his son to deal with such situations.

Paul Koptak: The story of the chapter unfolds in a mirror-like fashion:

A **7:1–5** Call to attention—protected from the woman
  B **7:6–9** A simple young man wanders
    C **7:10–20** The woman described and quoted
  B′ **7:21–23** A simple young man is slain
A′ **7:24–27** Second call to attention—an image of the woman's slain victims

I. (:1-5) THE FORTIFIED DEFENSE: SEDUCTIVE ENTICEMENTS REQUIRE STRONG DEFENSES

David Hubbard: The teacher uses a whole cluster of techniques to rivet the student's **attention** on the subject.

- First, the quartet of nouns in **verses 1–2** emphasize the inescapable character of the admonitions -- "*words*," "*commands*" (twice), and "*law*" (see **6:20, 23**) are not options or casual suggestions.

- Second, the vital nature of the theme is spotlighted in its life giving ("*keep . . . and live*"; see Amos's "*seek me and live*" in **5:4**) and light-bringing ("*the apple* [or pupil] *of the eye*" governs the amount of the light and the focus of our vision) qualities (**v. 2**).

- Third, "*bind*" and "*write*" (**v. 3**) mark it as a permanent and indelible truth to be carried with us and stamped within us, like Moses' command to love the Lord (**Deut. 6:6, 8**).

- Fourth, treasuring the teacher's law is tantamount to treating wisdom (and "*understanding*") as "*sister*" and "*nearest kin*" (see **Ruth 2:1; 3:2** for the same Hebrew root) and so making her not an abstract idea but a person whose love and care will protect ("*keep*" or guard) us from the flattery of the seductress (**vv. 4–5**), as Miriam guarded the young Moses, cradled in the reed basket and floating in the shallows of the Nile (**Ex. 2:1–10**).

- Fifth, the artistic use of word order in Hebrew thrusts the imperative verbs into urgent prominence by placing them first and last in their clauses: *"Keep my words and my commands treasure*" (**v. 1**); "*say to wisdom . . . and understanding call*" (**v. 4**); the technique is called **chiasm** from the Greek letter chi, shaped like an x.

A. (:1-2) Life and Vitality are at Stake

"*My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you.*
Keep my commands and you will live;
Guard my teachings as the apple of your eye."

Paul Koptak: the learning of wisdom is the way to live. The whole person—eye, hand, and heart—is to be dedicated to the task (cf. **Deut. 6:5–9**).

B. (:3) Never Lose Sight of God's Standards

"*Bind them on your fingers;*
Write them on the tablet of your heart."

Paul Koptak: *Keeping* (*šmr*) the teachings, symbolized as a relationship with Wisdom, will *keep* (*šmr*) the young man from the other woman and her **seductive words** (**Prov. 7:2, 5**). Those words are literally smooth or slippery (cf**. 2:16; 5:3**) and lead astray (**7:21**). Smooth talk is always dangerous in Proverbs, for it leads one off the path of wisdom and onto the path of death.

C. (:4) Remain Loyal to Wisdom

"*Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister,'*
and call understanding your kinsman."

Where do your loyalties lie?

Max Anders: In Old Testament culture, *sister* was a term of endearment for a wife or lover (**Song 4:9-10,12; 5:1-2**). *Kinsman* (NIV, "*relative*") is used in **Ruth 2:1** and in general refers to someone who knows you intimately. The writer exhorts the young man to **love wisdom rather than an immoral woman**.

D. (:5) Seduction is Rampant

"*they will keep you from the adulteress,*
From the wayward wife with her seductive words."

II. (:6-12) THE FOOLISH VULNERABILITY: ONLY THE NAÏVE PUT THEMSELVES IN HARM'S WAY

A. (:6-9) The Naïve Fail to Avoid Temptation

1. (:6) The Wise Observe From Their Safe House

"*At the window of my house I looked out through the lattice*."

David Hubbard: The "*window*," designed to circulate air and vent cooking smoke and other fumes, was conveniently screened for shade and privacy. He could linger there "*in the twilight*," take in the scene, and never be discovered by the youth below.

2. (7) Character of the Naïve

"*I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men,*
a youth who lacked judgment."

3. (:8-9) Dangerous Conditions

"*He was going down the street near her house*
At twilight, as the day was fading, as the dark of night set in."

David Hubbard: The bad choice began with the impulse to leave the group and venture out alone into an evening so "black" and "dark" that it seemed to offer anonymity and obscurity. The thirst for illicit adventures, untried experiences, is part of the deceptiveness of immorality. It was as though the teacher could have predicted what the youth had only subliminal hankerings for. Naivete with a taste for the lurid had blocked the flow of the young man's common sense.

Max Anders: He was in the **wrong place**. Whether deliberately or carelessly, he was walking near the home of a seductive woman. They evidently were acquainted with each other (**v. 15**), and it is likely that he realized she might be in the neighborhood.

He was there at the **wrong time**, at night when much immorality took place in the concealment of the dark. The Hebrew phrases describe ever-deepening darkness, moving from twilight, as the day was fading, to the middle of the night, to darkness.

B. (:10-12) Sexual Seducers Aggressively Target Their Prey – But Can Easily Be Recognized

1. They Initiate Fraternization

"*Then out came a woman to meet him*"

David Hubbard: If we can reconstruct the setting of the scene described here (**vv. 6–23**), it appears that a husband and wife of foreign citizenship are residing in Jerusalem. They are obviously people of means, perhaps diplomats or merchants. The husband has departed the country for a month, and the wife is left alone filled with desire and furnished with opportunity to engage in sexual activities with an upper-class Israelite

man. To arrange the liaison she attires herself as a harlot in order to gain access to and attract the attention of someone for whom she craves. Her maneuvers are watched by the teacher who undergirds his warnings to the young by his personal experience.

2. They Dress Seductively

"*dressed like a prostitute*"

Tremper Longman: She may not be a prostitute, but she is dressed like one. We are uncertain what this means in ancient society. It may mean she was veiled, but it almost certainly means that her dress was **provocative**. Since she seems well-off and never asks for money, we assume she is not a professional.

3. They Have a Hidden, Harmful Agenda

"*and with crafty intent*"

Allen Ross: The expression literally means "*guarded in heart*," but Driver has shown the word's semantic development from "*guarded*" to "*crafty, sly*." She has locked up her plans and gives nothing away. But her bold attire gives her away—she knows her victim and comes boldly to trap the gullible youth. She will be more successful than Potiphar's wife was with Joseph, because this youth lacks strong convictions.

4. They Are the Opposite of Meekness and Sweetness

"*She is loud and defiant*"

Eric Lane: She is all mouth – plenty to say and a *loud* voice for everyone to hear (**v.11**). She is quite unashamed of her (presumably) lewd conversation.

5. They Are Homebreakers Instead of Homemakers

"*her feet never stay at home*"

Tremper Longman: In terms of her actions, however, she is anything but silent, according to **v. 11**. In language that will echo in the description of Woman Folly (**9:13**), she is **boisterous** and **defian**t. The description suggests just how much she lacks self-discipline. She is not content at home, so she is out on the streets. As is well known, the "*foot*" is not infrequently a euphemism for genitalia (see discussion at **6:25–28**). Thus, the assertion that her feet do not rest at home (**v. 11b**), but rather that she has a "*foot*" in the street and a "*foot*" in the public squares, may have double meaning and suggest that she has taken her sexual desire from the private sphere of marriage to the **public areas.** This also reminds us of the admonition of the father not to let one's sexuality manifest itself in public areas (**5:15–17**). The interpretation that this encounter is like an **ambush** is confirmed by the fact that she is said to lurk beside every street corner. She has been waiting for someone like this youth to come by.

6. They Accost You Everywhere You Turn

"now in the street, now in the squares, at very corner she lurks.

III. (:13-21) THE FLATTERING PERSUASION: THE AGGRESSIVE ADULTERER PERSUADES THE VULNERABLE TO PURSUE THEIR SEXUAL FANTASIES

A. (:13a) Initiating Sexual Contact

"*She took hold of him and kissed him*"

David Hubbard: He spotted her wantonness in her mannerisms—the "*loud*" and unconventional ("*rebellious*" or stubborn) speech, blanched of all grace and refinement (**v. 11**), the rapid, shifty movements that propelled her from her own property to the streets, plazas ("square[s]"), and corners where she kept lurking, as though in ambush for her prey (**vv. 11–12**). One can sense the teacher's outrage as he describes her degraded comportment. The hurtfulness of immorality knows no bounds. Brazen lust has an aristocratic woman in its clutches and it reduces her to the status of a sex-starved clown. Her face was empty of all shame ("*impudent*") as she smothered the young man in her embraces and showered him with kisses (**v. 13**). Is it possible that she knew him through the professional circles that she and her husband frequented?

Roland Murphy: The **tempo** of the narrative increases with the appearance of the woman. The speaker takes some time to describe her style (**vv 11–12**), and suddenly she is kissing the youth (**v 14**)!

B. (:13b-15) Stalking Her Prey

"*and with a brazen face she said: 'I have peace offerings at home;*
today I fulfilled my vows. So I came out to meet you;
I looked for you and have found you!'"

Allen Ross: By expressing that she has **fellowship offerings**, she could be saying nothing more than that she has fresh meat for a meal or that she has become ceremonially clean, perhaps after her menstrual period. It is also possible that she is a participant in a **fertility cult**, and having made the appropriate offering she now needs a male partner. At any rate, her claim is probably a ruse for winning a customer; after all, nothing this woman says can be believed.

Paul Koptak: She says she has been busy making preparations at home. Three enticements follow:

- the sacrifices at home offer the delicacy of meat to eat (**7:14**),
- the bed at home offers the pleasures of love (**7:16–17**),
- and the husband not at home promises a sense of security (**7:19–20**).

Having touched his lips with a kiss, all her other seductions come from her words. She is able to appeal to all his senses and make it sound as if her home is a place of paradise. What the young man does not know is that these words are the bait of a trap. The contrast between her many words and his silence is telling.

Ray Ortlund: Back in those times, religious sacrifices could include a meal from the meat of the animal sacrificed. Eating meat was a luxury anyway. So here the woman is

saying, "Not only am I caught up on my religion, but I also have a feast of extra-special food waiting at home. It's a special occasion, like Prom Night or Mardi Gras. Come on, everybody needs a break. And you're the one I want to share all this with."

C. (:16-17) Adorning Her Lair

"*I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt,*
I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon."

Lindsay Wilson: The description of her 'bedroom' is opulent and sensual. There are coverings and coloured linens imported from Egypt **(v. 16**; see **31:22**). The bed is perfumed and spiced with expensive, delicious aromas (**v. 17**). She is painting a picture that would arouse and stimulate desire, all as a prelude to her daring invitation to make love all night and delight in it (**v. 18**).

Allen Ross: The third step is the report of her careful preparations. She is not poor, for she has a bed, and it has been made ready with fine, colored, imported linens from Egypt and perfumed with the best spices—aphrodisiac scents fit for a wedding bed (cf. **Ps 45:8**). Such lavish planning and preparation would overwhelm the gullible youth.

Tremper Longman: Sexual enjoyment appeals to **all the senses**, not just touch and taste (the sacrificial meat) but also sight (colored linens) and smell (myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon).

D. (:18-20) Seizing the Opportunity to Portray Lust as Love

"*Come, let's drink deep of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love!*
My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey.
He took his purse filled with money and will not be home till full moon."

Paul Koptak: "*Till morning*" is meant to be a sign of the delights they will enjoy throughout the night, but it also suggests that it will only be that long. It is an impoverished definition of love—**sensual pleasure without emotional attachment and commitment.**

Max Anders: At this point, the only thing restraining the young man is his fear of the consequences if they should be discovered. So the seductress assures him that her husband has left on an extended journey. He took a large amount of money with him for expenses because he did not plan to return until the full moon, probably several days away.

E. (:21) Seducing Her Victim

"*With persuasive words she led him astray;*
she seduced him with her smooth talk."

IV. (:22-23) THE FATEFUL CHOICE: THE DUMB OX CANNOT DISCERN HIS COMING SLAUGHTER

A. (:22a) The Fateful Choice Made Impetuously

"*All at once he followed her*."

B. (:22b-23) 3 Images of Entrapment with No Possibility of Escape

1. Like an Ox to the Slaughter

"*like an ox going to the slaughter*"

2. Like a Deer Being Trapped and Killed

"*like a deer stepping into a noose till an arrow pierces his liver*"

3. Like a Bird Being Snared and Killed

"*like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life*."

David Hubbard: Evidently there is something about sexual immorality that anesthetizes our judgment. Part of it, I suppose, is the sheer passion involved. More than one sorry culprit has said to me, "I never thought it could happen. Before I really knew what was going on I had committed the adulterous act." Adrenalin shoots through our systems, hormones race about in our bodies, our nerves are all atingling. The chemistry and neurology that God placed within us to urge us to populate the earth and to bind us to our life partners is set to boiling in the wrong laboratory and with the wrong coworker. Nothing less than sheer mayhem is the result.

Lindsay Wilson: What began with the promise of making love all night has now degenerated into a scenario that is deadly. It will cost him his life, but he does not know it because he has been duped by her flattering words. The enticing offer promised much, but delivered only **death**.

V. (:24-27) THE FINAL WARNING: SEXUAL SEDUCTION HAS RUINED COUNTLESS LIVES

A. (:24) Urgency of Listening and Heeding the Warning

"*Now then, my sons, listen to me; pay attention to what I say*."

Max Anders: The father concludes his account with a **stern warning**. First he commands his sons to pay attention to his words. Then he issues two prohibitions: *do not let your heart turn to her ways*, and do not *stray into her paths*. Both commands aim to help him avoid temptation before it gains momentum, by guarding the heart (**4:23**) from going astray and by keeping himself physically away from the place of danger. The young man in the story was doomed because **he wandered too close to a temptation he did not have the strength to resist.**

B. (:25) Urgency of Guarding Your Heart

"*Do not let your heart turn to her ways or stray into her paths*."

C. (:26-27) Surprising Multitude of Victims – Sucked in and Destroyed with No Escape

"*Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death*."

David Hubbard: There were pagan overtones in the harlot's account of sacrifices and vows (**v. 14**). If she was a non-Israelite, resident in the holy land, as we have assumed, she would have been a devotee of pagan gods, either of Egypt (see **v. 16**) or Canaan. If the latter is the case, there may be another echo of pagan mythology in the mention of "*Sheol*" and "*death*" in **verse 27**. Death (Mot) was a Canaanite deity to whom was credited the long winter drought which Baal had to conquer if the vernal fertility was to be enjoyed in the land. The ritual act of intercourse to which the woman invited the young man was designed to encourage Baal to have intercourse with the goddess Anat and thus fertilize the land. In a subtle yet telling bit of irony, this wisdom speech, as its last word, may be saying that Mot not Baal, death not sexual prosperity, is the ultimate conqueror when the divine command is paid no heed.

Roland Murphy: She is described as a warrior who has a host of victims that she has slain! There may be an echo of the famous ancient Near Eastern goddesses that excelled at love and war, such as **Ishtar** and **Anat**. That would be a fitting reference. There can be no mistake about the **finality** of all this: in **v 27** Sheol and Death, ever the "enemies" of human existence, are in parallelism. That is where her victims are; cf. **2:18–19**. Similar metaphors are used in **22:14; 23:27**. These final verses, when interpreted in the light of the "*houses*" in **9:1–4** and **9:18**, suggest another level of meaning. **Wisdom and Folly are in conflict**, mirrored in this episode of the young man with the "stranger." In other words, the admonition (**vv 25–26**) and the story are an anticipation of a deeper struggle that dominates **chaps. 1–9**.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Do we treat the Word of the Lord casually and carelessly because we have such easy access to it? Do we flirt with danger in this area of sexual fantasy? What steps are we taking to hold tightly to the commands of the Lord in this area of sexual temptation and seduction?

2) How do TV and the media paint a positive picture of the seductress?

3) How would you contrast Love and Lust?

4) What families do we know that have been broken apart by transgression in this area? When have we ever seen positive outcomes from failure to heed the Lord's warnings in this area?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Louis Goldberg: The teacher graphically describes her crafty plan for attracting her victim. She kisses the young man (**7:13a**) as if to impress him that she really cares for him. She gives him, of all the excuses, that she is really a pious woman: "*I have peace offerings at home; today I have fulfilled my vows*" (**7:14**). How could he refuse her by ignoring such expressions of love on a day of celebration? She has offered her peace offering (no doubt at some shrine of pagan worship), and after giving the portion that belonged to the priests, she had the rest of the meat in the house for a good meal (**Leviticus 7:28-33; 15-17**). Not only will the young man be able to enjoy the sexual relationship, but there will be plenty to eat as well.

Derek Kidner: **The Tactics (13-21)**
First, comes shock treatment (**13**); second, a circumstantial story – it is a special day, a celebration; it would be unthinkable to refuse (**14**). Third, flattery: he is the very one she had to find (**15**); fourth, sensuous appeal (**16-18**); fifth, reassurance (**19, 20**). The whole is pressed home with a flood of words. . .

Epilogue. (**7:24-27**) After watching the young man, we are made to see ourselves as conceivably filling the same role. The defense is threefold. First, guard your mind; you are in danger as soon as your thoughts wander in this fatal direction. Second, keep away, literally as well as in mind (**25b**). Third, look past her, to the casualties and *the chambers of death* (**26, 27**).

Eric Lane: Solomon's remedy for promiscuity is to know and obey the word of God. However out-dated and simplistic this may seem, the same is true in our age, where those being advocated – sex education, contraception, free love, etc. – have all failed. . . Series of vivid comparisons.

(a) *Keep* them as you would treasure (**v.1** – *store*).
(b) *Keep* them as you would your life (**v.2a**). Obedience to God's Word is a matter of life, both its length and quality (**4:20-23**).
(c) *Keep* them as you would the tenderest part of your anatomy (**v.2b**), such as the pupil of the eye, which is sensitive to the slightest speck. We are to God as *the apple of his eye* (**Deut. 32:10, Ps. 17:8, Zech. 2:8**), so let his words be thus to us.
(d) *Keep* them as you would something precious to you personally**, (v.3a**) such as the ring on your finger, which may have monetary value, and will certainly have sentimental value.
(e) *Keep* them as you would those whom you are most fond of, like the friends whose name you cherish in *your heart* (**v.3b**).

(f) *Keep* them as you would the affection of a close relative (**v.4**). This means cultivating familiarity and intimacy with the Word, as if it were speaking personally to you (cf. **1:20f, 3:13-18**). Keep his words like this and they will keep you from dangerous liaisons.

Charles Bridges: Nor let present steadfastness, or seclusion from temptation, blind our eyes to the liability of yielding to the vilest indulgence. The eye of God discerns a far deeper corruption than appears in the outer man – such a total depravation, that even the affections, designed to be the sources of our holiest delight, become the principle and occasion of the most awful departures from the ways of purity and peace.

Paul Koptak: Recognize the symbolism of folly in this portrait of a predatory sexual encounter, and like the teachers of Proverbs, name it and face it. It is a mistake to allegorize the story so it becomes just a statement about folly and does not speak to the issue of **sexuality out of control**. At the same time, it is a mistake to so focus on the sin of adultery as to miss the larger point about **the folly of sin**. Certainly speaking to the matter of marital infidelity is in line with the teacher's strategy, and today's teachers and preachers should also address the confused thinking about sex that permeates our general culture and perhaps even our churches. We teach to counteract those confusions and clarify that our misunderstandings about sex can take the forms of idolatry and seduction.

Sex in contemporary society. Thus, we must find ways to talk about the goodness of sex and the essential goodness of boundaries in a culture that makes too much of sex and too little of boundaries. It is even appropriate to suggest that our culture has made sex into an idol. We have not only worshiped it with our attention and dollars, we expect it to serve and fulfill our most basic physical and emotional needs for esteem and intimacy. Yet ironically, such a view of sex trivializes it because it isolates it from the essential dimensions of **commitment** and **transparency** that mark honest and committed **relationships**.

Jonathan Akin: The immoral woman is the rival to the father. She is the rival to Woman Wisdom. Whom will the son listen to? Whom will he embrace? This immoral woman is a major character in Proverbs. She stands for a literal person with whom the son can be sexually unfaithful. However, later she will be personified as **Woman Folly**, the rival to **Woman Wisdom** (**Prov 9**). If the son embraces this forbidden woman, it will reveal that he has rejected his father, Woman Wisdom, and Yahweh himself. **Sexual sin and spiritual sin are tied together throughout the Bible.** Adultery is the distortion of the most intimate human relationship, and it is used as a metaphor to speak of the distortion of our relationship to God. **Idolatry is spiritual unfaithfulness**. That's the whole point of **Proverbs 1–9**. If our horizontal relationships are off, it reveals that our vertical relationship with God is off as well. Solomon knows this because the "foreign women" he was intimate with led him into idolatry. Falling for this woman would reveal that the son is not in right relationship with the Lord.

TEXT: Proverbs 8:1-36

TITLE: WISDOM PERSONIFIED AS PRECIOUS AND VALUABLE

BIG IDEA:
THE LEGACY OF WISDOM VALIDATES ITS OFFER OF PRECIOUS AND VALUABLE COUNSEL THAT WILL YIELD BLESSING INSTEAD OF CURSING

INTRODUCTION:

Paul Koptak: Here for the second time in the book personified Wisdom calls out like a street preacher, seeking hearers and followers. She describes herself, her qualities, and her gifts and speaks of her existence at the dawn of creation. Her words not only contribute to our understanding of that creation but also to our understanding of the Word, who was with God in the beginning (**John 1:1**).

Roland Murphy: **Chap. 8** is mind-boggling in view of the claims that Woman Wisdom makes. It is helpful to review these points. First we notice that she addresses all humankind, not just the naive or fools. The personification begins with relatively modest claims, those that are associated with wisdom in earlier chapters: truth, justice, value exceeding gold, etc. But there is an escalation when Wisdom becomes, as it were, a social worker, and is associated with kingship and universal rule, establishing justice and right by which rulers are to operate. The love relationship she has with her followers is a guarantee of prosperity, provided they walk in her ways. Then, in the astounding passage in **vv 22–31**, she affirms her origins from God, and from of old before creation.

David Hubbard: Scripture Outline

Introductory Call to Attention—Extended (**8:1–9**)
Self-Description of Assets (**8:10–21**)
Self-Description of Presence at Creation **(8:22–31**)
Concluding Call to Attention (**8:32–33**)
Beatitude as Summary (**8:34**)
Antithetic Summary (**8:35–36**)

The aim of the speeches in **Proverbs 1–9** has been to **accent wisdom's worth** and thus attract the young students who will be Israel's future leaders to pursue it with might and main. This chapter is the **core course** in the teacher's curriculum. It weaves together a number of key themes:

(1) it features the attractiveness of wisdom by bringing to full bloom the buds of personification that sprouted in **1:20–33** and **7:4**, as wisdom, in human guise, calls for attention and describes her credentials in most impressive terms;
(2) it fills in the details of the picture of wisdom's presence at creation sketched in **3:19–20**;
(3) it connects wisdom with the fear of the Lord by naming wisdom as the chief

God-fearer (**v. 13**; see **1:7**);
(4) it links wisdom to practical deeds of righteousness and justice (**v. 20**; see **2:9–15**);
(5) it contrasts wisdom's positive and profitable call with the seductive beckonings of the temptress whose face has appeared on virtually every page of these speeches (**2:16–19; 5:1–23; 6:23–35; 7:1–27**);
(6) it illuminates the path of righteousness, the only viable route in life (**v. 32**; see **4:18–27**);
(7) it underlines the importance of choice by showing that issues which lead to life, on the one hand, or death, on the other **(vv. 35–36**), call for the strongest personal response—love (**vv. 17, 36**), the absence of which is tantamount to hate.

Jonathan Akin: Main Idea: You must be in a relationship with Wisdom in order to be wise in daily life.

I. Marry Wisdom Because Jesus Tells You the Truth about Reality (**8:1-11**).
II. Marry Wisdom Because Jesus Produces Right Living in His Followers (**8:12-16**).
III. Marry Wisdom Because Jesus Rewards His Followers (**8:17-21**).
IV. Marry Wisdom Because Jesus Brings His Followers into Harmony with God, Others, and the World (**8:22-31**).
V. Marry Wisdom Because Jesus Gives Abundant and Eternal Life (**8:32-36**).

One of the things I ask couples in premarital counseling is, "Why do you want to marry this person?" . . . This is the question that Solomon wants to answer for his son in **Proverbs 8**. Solomon has told us repeatedly that wisdom is not a set of ideas; Wisdom is a person. Solomon has repeatedly tried to get his son to marry Wisdom. Here in **Proverbs 8** he makes another push by telling him why he should marry her. He details all of her **amazing qualities**.

I. (:1-11) THE CALL OF WISDOM

A. (:1-3) Public and Universal Call

"*Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?*
On the heights along the way, where the paths meet,
she takes her stand; beside the gates leading into the city,
at the entrances, she cries aloud"

Not restricted to some special elite group

David Hubbard: Wisdom's call is certain (**v. 1**). The rhetorical question, clearly marked in Hebrew by the question indicator attached to the word "*not,*" tolerates no other answer but "yes." Of course, wisdom does call. She shouts, in fact. She cares too much to keep silent. Her message is too important to be whispered. She has no intention of letting her righteous cause be drowned in the sea of wicked propositions that threaten to engulf the young -- propositions from:

- greedy savages (**1:10–19**),
- from men of lying speech (**2:12–15**),
- from women of smooth words (**2:16–19**),
- from the perverters of righteousness (**4:14–17**),
- from wretches who sow discord (**6:12–15**).

The battle is joined, and a shaky trumpet will not summon the troops. Wisdom leaves no doubt about the importance and meaning of her call.

Paul Koptac: The four terms of **Proverbs 8:2** do not all describe the same place, but each is a prominent and public spot, near the place where public decisions were made and where speakers were heard.

B. (:4-5) Personal and Targeted Call

"*To you, O men, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind.*
You who are simple, gain prudence;
you who are foolish, gain understanding."

Targeted to those who need wisdom

Tremper Longman: She refers to them as "*sons*." Thus, the audience presumed up to this point in Proverbs continues: **young men** who are at the beginning of their professional and marital lives. They are at an **impressionable crossroads**.

Roland Murphy: What she [Wisdom] has to offer (**v 5**) is **intellectual** ("*learn*!") but preeminently **moral**, as the following verses make clear. She presents a doctrine that is to be put into practice.

Max Anders: From this point on, **Lady Wisdom** is the speaker, and she begins by making a direct appeal addressed to all mankind. Whoever wants to gain wisdom can do so by coming to her. She addresses the invitation specifically to <u>two groups</u> badly in need of her help. To the <u>simple</u>, who are naive and gullible because of lack of experience, she offers to teach **prudence**, so they can avoid the pitfalls of life. To the <u>foolish,</u> she offers **understanding**. Solomon uses the word for a fool who chooses his own way rather than God's path but is not yet confirmed in rebellion.

C. (:6-9) Purposeful and Righteous Call

"*Listen, for I have worthy things to say; I open my lips to speak what is right.*
My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness.
All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse.
To the discerning all of them are right;
they are faultless to those who have knowledge."

True and Just and Worthwhile and Right and Reliable

David Hubbard: In a society that bristled with perverse speech—crooked, foolish teachings, unreliable opinions and advice (**2:12; 6:12–15**) -- words that you could bank on were worth their weight in platinum. The cluster of terms describing wisdom's teaching is a who's who of commendable expressions: "*Excellent*" (or "*outstanding*," **v. 6**) suggests a loftiness and nobility of subject matter; "*right things*" (**v. 6**) and "**right**" (**v. 9**) ring with integrity and uprightness; "*truth*" (**v. 7**) connotes accuracy and dependability; "*righteousness*" (**v. 8**) points to straight talk that has a helpful, healing intent; "*plain*" (**v. 9**) also means straightforward, on target in terms of truthfulness and moral rectitude. Part of wisdom's reliability is her rejection ("*abomination*," **v. 7**) of everything that is the opposite of truth: "*Wickedness*" (**v. 7**) is the inner turbulence of those who choose against God's ways and consequently disrupt the stability of their communities; "*crooked*" and "*perverse*" (**v. 8**) both depict twistedness, contortedness of speech that bends the truth either by deliberate misstatement or by conscious omission of relevant facts.

Paul Koptac: Wisdom speaks what is noble and precious (:**6-11**). . . Knowing that one needs wisdom is the first sign of having it. If the words are right and faultless to them, what are they to fools -- insufficient, false, worthless? Most likely, fools see her message as no use to them and reject it (cf. **1:24**). But Wisdom begins her appeal, not with benefits to the listener, but simply by declaring the **quality of her words**. Because they are true and right, they are **precious** and **valuable**.

Jonathan Akin: The perceptive person knows that Wisdom's words are right and that they will help him or her to navigate through this life, so they submit to her (**8:9**). Following Wisdom's instruction is better than riches because Wisdom is vastly superior to worldly wealth (**vv. 10-11**). Nothing you desire can compare with Wisdom. Wisdom is the pearl of great price.

D. (:10-11) Priceless and Preeminent Call – Based on Surpassing Value of Wisdom

> "*Choose my instruction instead of silver,*
> *knowledge rather than choice gold,*
> *for wisdom is more precious than rubies,*
> *and nothing you desire can compare with her*."

II. (:12-21) THE COMPANIONS AND REWARDS OF WISDOM

Jonathan Akin: Wisdom has associates that she will share with you: **shrewdness, knowledge, and discretion**. If you want these qualities, you have to know Wisdom. If you want these qualities, you have to go to Jesus. The ability to make right decisions, the ability to carefully consider a situation without making a snap judgment, and the ability to read people are available through a relationship with Jesus. Wisdom teaches you how to navigate life in a way that avoids your ruining things.

Wisdom here first shows you who to associate with, and then she tells you whom to avoid. The fear of Yahweh, which is the beginning of wisdom, is to hate evil (**v. 13**). She hates pride, arrogance, the evil way, and perverted speech (we saw that earlier in the text). She despises those who won't humble themselves under authority and counsel. She will keep you off the wicked path if you embrace her. She will produce counsel, sound wisdom, insight, and strength in her followers (**v. 14**). Strength reveals that wisdom is not simply the ability to discern the right decision, but it's also the wherewithal to carry it out.

Allen Ross: Wisdom's lesson is now developed in two parts of ten verses each, the first pertaining to historic time (**vv.12–21**) and the second to primordial time (**vv.22–31**). The first emphasizes Wisdom's counsel, understanding, and strength, and the second her nobility and authority (Waltke, 1:399–400).

A. (:12-17) The Companions of Wisdom

1. (:12-14) Those Exercising Good Judgment

a. (:12) Positive Companions

1) *Prudence*

2) *Knowledge*

3) *Discretion*

Tremper Longman: Although first-person speech begins in **v. 4**, a formal autobiographical introduction is found in **v. 12**, where the first-person speaker identifies herself as Wisdom and then proceeds to **characterize herself**. She does so first by talking about those qualities (and these may also be personified characteristics) with which she is associated -- prudence, knowledge, and discretion -- and then those from which she distances herself: evil, pride, arrogance, a perverse mouth.

Max Anders: Wisdom, you might say, lives with a family of other wonderful virtues. **Prudence** can refer to trickery (**Josh. 9:4**), but in Proverbs it always means good, sensible behavior. **Knowledge** describes not just academic attainment but knowledge of truth. And **discretion** in Proverbs means the careful behavior that arises from clear thinking. It is the opposite of recklessness. All three words refer to **the ability to form sound plans.**

b. (:13) Negative Contrast – "*to fear the Lord is to hate evil*"

1) "*I hate pride*"

2) "*and arrogance*"

3) "*evil behavior*"

4) "*and perverse speech*"

c. (:14) Positive Companions

1) "*Counsel and sound judgment are mine*"

2) "*I have understanding and power*"

2. (:15-16) Those Ruling Righteously

"*By me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just;*
by me princes govern, and all nobles who rule on earth."

Paul Koptac: This first mention of **just government** sums up all that has been said about right and just behavior, even as it looks ahead to the topic of kings and just government in the individual sayings of **chapters 10–22**. While many suggest that Proverbs was designed to train princes and courtiers, like other ancient Near Eastern instructions, there is no evidence in the speech that this feature of Wisdom's activity is limited to court personnel. Wisdom stands in the public places, and **her message goes out to all**. She offers the same guidance to kings and commoners so that readers of the instructions can put the principles of good government into practice with one's neighbor, doing justice, coveting neither goods nor spouse. Likewise, the pride, evil ways, and crooked speech that became the downfall of so many kings is rejected by the citizens as well.

Ray Ortlund: Even in the tough world of human leadership, Christ is the secret to success. He knows his way around hardheaded deals and aggressive negotiations. He knows how to get things done with agility, versatility, keenness, competence. Oh, how we underrate his abilities and resources when everything is on the line! And for a church, success does not require human rules. Rules do not make people thrive. Success requires wise, seasoned, humble, mature, Christlike leaders. And in Christ you can become one of them. He is generous with himself.

3. (:17) Those Loving and Seeking Wisdom

"*I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.*"

B. (:18-21) The Rewards of Wisdom

"*With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity.*
My fruit is better than fine gold; what I yield surpasses choice silver.
I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice,
bestowing wealth on those who love me and making their treasuries full."

David Hubbard: **Wisdom's rewards** are listed as the climax of this section (**8:17–21**). Part of what makes wisdom different is her care ("*love*") of those who value her (**v. 17**). Her call conceals no plan to exploit, no desire to use and then abandon. She is not only bright, she is good; she makes herself available to all who single-mindedly pursue her. Their welfare is her aim. And that welfare is detailed in spectacular terms: "*riches*," "*honor*" (or "*glory*"), "enduring" material wealth (the second Hebrew word for "*riches*" is a synonym of the first), and "*righteousness*," which here means "*victorious success*" based on maintaining right relations with God and His people (**v. 18**). She is like a

productive orchard or vineyard whose "*fruit*" and "*revenue*" (or "*crop*") are priceless. Righteousness and justice (see **2:8–9**) may well be the fruit she refers to (**v. 20**). They describe how she comports herself ("*traverse*" or "*walk*") and what accordingly she has to teach others (for righteousness and justice as fruit, see **Is. 5:7**). "*Wealth*" and "*treasuries*" may also be understood as more than materials. To would-be leaders charged with the implementation of righteousness and justice (see **Ps. 72:1–2**), what would be a greater boon than to have a vault stocked with those precious necessities.

Jonathan Akin: Getting Wisdom is most important, but there are blessings that will be added to you if you do. The rewards of wisdom are lasting riches, a good name, and righteousness (**v. 18**). This is not teaching a prosperity gospel because, as Proverbs has already shown us, the rewards may not come immediately in a fallen world. But there will be eternal blessings for getting Wisdom—Jesus. Wisdom says that what she produces in you—wisdom and righteousness—is better than money. It is better than money because she will lead you down the right path (i.e., obedience to the law), which means a greater reward later. She will reward you with an inheritance if you love her, and she will fill your treasuries (**v. 21**). Again, these kinds of physical rewards may come now, especially the rewards of a good reputation and walking in righteousness, but they will surely come in the new creation.

III. (:22-31) THE CO-EXISTENCE OF WISDOM WITH THE CREATIVE ACTIVITY OF GOD – THE LEGACY OF WISDOM

Paul Kopac: The second half of Wisdom's speech is organized chronologically:

- Wisdom was there before anything else (**8:22–26**)
- Wisdom was present when the orders of creation were set in place (**8:27–31**)
- Wisdom is now the one to whom we must listen (**8:32–36**)

This structure highlights the authority of her ways and words (**8:32–33**). To ignore them is to hate them, and to hate her is to love death (**8:36**).

Roland Murphy: This striking passage describes, in a mysterious way, **the relationship of Woman Wisdom to the Lord.** There is a strong emphasis on her origins and age. She was begotten of the Lord, and before anything else in creation. The style is unusual in its constructions: four times the use of the preposition "*from*" ("*of old*," etc., in **vv 22–23**), and five times the implication of "*not yet*" ("*when*," "*before*," in **vv 24–26**). These constructions underline Wisdom's origins before all else. But where was Wisdom? She was already present with God, at the very least witnessing if not cooperating in the creative acts that were taking place (**vv 27–29**); in addition to her special relationship with God, **she finds delight in human beings** (**vv 30–31**). This description is not only unexpected, but mysterious.

A. (:22-23) Co-Existence from Eternity Past – Her Antiquity

> "*The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began*."

Louis Goldberg: We need to understand more fully, however, what is meant when **8:22** describes wisdom as being "*brought . . . forth*." The context suggests the clue for further information. In **8:23** wisdom declares, "*I was appointed*," and in **8:24-25** she says twice, "*I was given birth*." In the one instance, the emphasis is on an appointment in office, while in the other reference is made to a kind of "*birth*." Since wisdom is linked to an eternal God, it is best to see her (1) as always existing, and then (2) appointed and brought forth for a ministry in the creation process.

Paul Kopac: Wisdom's presence at creation suggests that she knows how the world was put together and therefore knows how it works, inspiring the poetry of later wisdom writers like the son of Sirach. The scene also inspired certain New Testament writers, who found fitting language to describe the exalted Christ, risen from the grave and ascended to the heavens.

B. (:24-26) Co-Existence from before the Creation of Waters and Earth – Her Priority

"*When there were no oceans, I was given birth,*
when there were no springs abounding with water;
before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth,
before he made the earth or its fields or any of the dust of the world."

C. (:27-29) Co-Existence from before the Creation of Heavens and Seas

"*I was there when he set the heavens in place,*
when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep,
when he established the clouds above
and fixed securely the fountains of the deep,
when he gave the sea its boundary
so the waters would not overstep his command,
and when he marked out the foundations of the earth."

Tremper Longman: The five specific acts are as follows:

1. The establishment of the heavens
2. The decree that constructs the horizon on the deep
3. The strengthening of the clouds
4. The intensification of the fountains
5. The decree that sets the boundary of the sea

The first concerns the making of the heavens, while the last four describe elements of the construction of earth. In terms of the latter, all four describe **manipulation of water**.

D. (:30-31) Delighting in Partnering in God's Creative Activity

"*Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day,*
rejoicing always in his presence,
rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind."

Tremper Longman: The most tantalizing part of Wisdom's self-revelation is the section where she describes her association with God at the time of creation (**vv. 22–31**). As the section on exegesis pointed out, Wisdom was, in sum, the first act of God's creation, the firstborn, so to speak. She was there before anything else was created and then witnessed the creation process itself. Indeed, the implication is not only that she was present but that **she also participated in the creation**. Her reference to herself as a "*craftsman*" (**8:30**) may indicate that she helped in the project. The result of her participation is that she had an intimate, joyful relationship both with God and with the human race. . .

If one wants to know how the world works and therefore how to navigate life with its problems and pitfalls, then Wisdom is the one to get to know. Who would know better how to act in the world than the one through whom it was made?

Max Anders: Wisdom was not only an observer during creation but an **active participant**. God used Wisdom in creating the universe. And if God used Wisdom for such a task, surely we need his wisdom for the problems we face. We can also conclude that the principles of Wisdom are built into the very structure of the creation, so it would be foolish to ignore them.

IV. (:32-36) THE CAUTION OF WISDOM – BLESSING VS CURSING

Lindsay Wilson: [This wisdom speech] ends in **verses 32–36** on the theme of the **two pathways**, with a strong emphasis on wisdom as the way of life and thus the only sensible choice to make.

Max Anders: The way to happiness is to fall in love with Wisdom, constantly turning your attention to that pursuit.

Listen to Wisdom, and you will receive blessing! Wisdom closes her message with this appeal. The way to find blessing is to devote oneself to Wisdom. Listen to her words; keep her instructions; take every opportunity to spend time in her presence like a young man who devotes hours daily waiting near his loved one's doors—just to make sure he misses no opportunity to be in her presence.

A. (:32-33) Caution to Listen and Obey

"*Now then, my sons, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways.*
Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not ignore it."

B. (:34-36) Blessing vs Cursing

"*Blessed is the man who listens to me,*
watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway.
For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the Lord.
But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all who hate me love death."

David Hubbard: The tug of war between wisdom and folly for the loyalty of the heart is perpetual in Proverbs. It will dominate the argument of **chapter 9**. Here it is featured as a stark and simple summary of how wisdom sees the issues. They are white and black. The form is antithetic in that the first verse states the positive results of choosing wisdom, and the second the negative. Beyond that it is **chiastic**. The first line opposes the fourth, and the second line counters the third.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) If wisdom is so accessible, why do we need to seek so diligently to find her?

2) Are we more motivated by materialism or by seeking after wisdom?

3) Why is the legacy of wisdom stressed in this context?

4) How have we found wisdom to be linked to God's favor and blessing and fullness of life?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Allen Ross: Many interpreters have equated Wisdom in this chapter with Jesus Christ. The connection works only insofar as Jesus reveals the nature of God the Father, including his wisdom, just as Proverbs presents the personification of this attribute. Jesus' claims included having wisdom (**Mt 12:42**) and a unique knowledge of God (**11:25–27**). He even personified wisdom in a way that was similar to Proverbs (**11:19; Lk 11:49**). Paul saw the fulfillment of wisdom in Christ (**Col 1:15–20; 2:3**) and affirmed that Christ became our wisdom in the crucifixion (**1Co 1:24, 30**). So the bold personification of wisdom in Proverbs certainly provides a solid foundation for the revelation of divine wisdom in Christ. But because Wisdom in **Proverbs 8:22–31** appears to be a creation of God, it is unlikely that Wisdom can be identified as the preincarnate Jesus Christ.

Steve Zeisler: But there is something marvelous, in contrast, about the announcement of wisdom, as we come to see the person of Christ, who established the heavens, who built the earth, who gave the sea its boundaries. The creation is filled with the wise counsel of God. Creation is inherently moral. It has meaning. Your Lord who cares deeply for you is the one who made these things. He is the one to whom we can go for help and strength, direction, and understanding. He is the one who established the world that we see.

Eric Lane: This is a glorification of the wisdom Solomon is teaching and offering, both to his hearers and to us. To encourage us to receive it we need to appreciate something of the greatness and value of Wisdom. Here is a comprehensive summary of the wisdom Solomon is imparting in his book, what we might call a eulogy of Wisdom. It rises from the initial appeal to a glorious climax in **verses 22-31**, and ends with the call for response (**vv. 32-36**).

Lindsay Wilson: Wisdom is portrayed here as an attractive, even irresistible, figure. Her call is unmistakable (**vv. 1–3**); her instruction is rich (**v. 10**); her foundation is the fear of the Lord (**v. 13**); her benefits are beyond measure (**vv. 15–19**); and her character is upright (**v. 20**). She is the ideal one to shape a young person's life. Furthermore, **verses 22–31** describe her as so integrated into the creation that living in accordance with wisdom is the only way to live '*with the grain*' (**vv. 22–31**). God's incredibly complex creation is riddled with the presence of wisdom. For this reason, the chapter concludes with a call to find true life through embracing wisdom, for the alternative is deadly (**vv. 32–36**).

Max Anders: Outline

Wisdom's Call	(**8:1-5**)
Wisdom's Value	(**8:6-11**)
Wisdom and Righteousness	(**8:12-21**)
Wisdom and the Creation	(**8:22-31**)
Waiting Near Wisdom's Door	(**8:32-36**)

Ray Ortlund: **Proverbs 8** divides into four sections. Wisdom commands us to prize her (**vv. 1-11**). Why prize wisdom? Because she is both powerful (**vv. 12-21**) and profound (**vv. 22-31**). Wisdom in the real power behind the throne, enriching all who love her (**verses 12-21**). And wisdom is the secret to the universe; she was here first, rejoicing over God's creation (**vv. 22-31**). Finally, wisdom is the one necessity for true life, and we must embrace her (**vv. 32-38**)

Throughout **Proverbs 8** the sage is speaking. But he uses a figure of speech called **personification**. As he writes, he takes on the persona of Wisdom as an elegant lady. I think of her as Galadriel, the elf queen, in *The Lord of the Rings* books and movies – lovely, dignified, wise. She is the opposite of the adulteress in **Proverbs 7**. But because this is in the Bible, the ultimate voice we are hearing here is **Christ himself**.

TEXT: Proverbs 9:1-18

TITLE: TWO CONTRASTING INVITATIONS TO THE NAÏVE

BIG IDEA:
THE RECRUITMENT OF THE NAÏVE IS THE BATTLEGROUND FOR THE SOUL WAGED BETWEEN THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH

INTRODUCTION:

David Hubbard: Scripture Outline

Description of Wisdom's Wholesome Invitation (**9:1–6**)
Admonitions on Differences Between Scoffers and Wise (**9:7–9**)
Theme Repeated from **1:7**: Inclusion (**9:10–11**)
Antithetic Summary (**9:12**)
Description of Folly's Fatal Invitation (**9:13–18**)

An analysis of the structure pictures for us the ways in which these closing words sum up both the intent and the content of **Proverbs 1–8** and provide a fitting conclusion to this introductory section of the book.

Wisdom's call 9:1–6
Description of feast **9:1–2**
Dispatch of maidens as heralds **9:3**
Words of invitation **9:4–6**

Wisdom's reception 9:7–11
Rejection by wicked scoffers **9:7**
Admonitions to teachers **9:8–9**
Restatement of theme **9:10–11**; see **1:7**

Antithetical summation 9:12
reward to the wise **9:12a**
suffering to the scoffer **9:12b**

Folly's call 9:13–18
Description of setting **9:13–15**
Words of invitation **9:16–17**
Summary appraisal **9:18**

Chapter 9 is an envelope: It begins and ends with calls to eat, one issued by wisdom, the other by folly. In the heart of the envelope (**vv. 7–12**) are the descriptions and commands about dealing with the scoffer and the wise, who mark the two ways in which the calls can be answered. **Chapter 9** is an envelope within an envelope, since at the heart of it stand the theme words "*the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*" (**v. 10**) which aims to distill the message of **chapters 1–9** just as "*the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge*" served to anticipate it in **1:7**.

What this final speech tells us, then, are these things:

(1) wisdom and folly vie for our human allegiance;
(2) that ultimate choice lies with us and which call we answer, with whom we choose to eat;
(3) scoffers can be so hardened in their choice that they do harm to the teacher who challenges them; the wise are so open to wisdom's call that even her rebuke will spark their affection;
(4) behind wisdom's invitation stands Yahweh; to say yes to wisdom is to respond in reverent obedience to Him;
(5) to heed folly's call is to forsake the land of the living and to join the company of the dead.

All these themes we have met before but never so adroitly packaged, never so compellingly stated. Their bold succinctness and vivid personification give them an irrefutable power.

Paul Koptak: Wisdom works at building and preparing in order to have a sumptuous banquet to offer her guests while Folly sits at her door, loud, undisciplined, and without knowledge. The meals are different, Wisdom offering wine and meat, Folly offering only bread and water. There are the differences in outcome. Wisdom offers a future, a call to maturity, and in a word, life. Folly only offers the immediate pleasure of good things enjoyed outside their intended boundaries, hiding the fact that such pleasure brings death.

Wisdom's Invitation (**9:1–6**)
- Description and location (**9:1–3**)
- Invitation to the simple -- "*life*" (**9:4–6**)

Learning Wisdom (**9:7–12**)
- Responses of mockers and wise persons (**9:7–9**)
  - "*Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*" (**9:10**)
- Final outcomes of mockers and wise persons (**9:11–12**)

Folly's Invitation (**9:13–18**)
- Description and location (**9:13–15**)
- Invitation to the simple -- "*death*" (**9:16–18**)

Allen Ross: With a two-strophe poem of two banquets, **ch. 9** forms the conclusion of the lengthy nine-chapter introduction to the book of Proverbs. Now Wisdom is portrayed as a noble patroness and Folly as a wicked hostess. Both Wisdom and Folly will make their final appeals; and both appeal to the simpletons, those who need to live by wisdom but who are most easily influenced by folly. Wisdom out of love offers life with no mention of pleasure; Folly out of sensual lust offers pleasure with no mention of death.

I. (:1-6) THE DISCERNING INVITATION OF WISDOM TO THE NAIVE: COME AND PARTAKE OF MY BANQUET TABLE

A. (:1-2) Wisdom Has a Lot to Offer

1. Solid Foundation

"*Wisdom has built her house;*
she has hewn out its seven pillars."

Eric Lane: Does the adulteress have a nicely-furnished house (**7:16f**)? Wisdom has something better, a palace or temple (**v.1**), with pillars, like Solomon's temple (**1 Kgs. 10:12**) and palace (**1 Kgs. 7:2**). Pillars give a building strength and beauty. So will the word of the wise God give us strength, not sap our energy as adultery does (**5:11**). Its beauty is real and unfading, unlike the prostitute's glamour, dependent on cosmetics and clothes (**7:10**). Seven is no doubt symbolic of completeness and perfection: God's word is sufficient because it comes from the only wise God. It is a home where everything we need is supplied.

Tremper Longman: The fact that the house has **seven pillars** indicates that it is a magnificent and solid construction. The number seven indicates perfection and/or completeness. Thus, we are to picture the scene as a large mansion; it demonstrates that Wisdom's house was "an indication of wealth and social status."

2. Sumptuous Feast

"She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine;
she has also set her table."

Allen Ross: Thus, just as one would prepare a banquet and invite guests, Wisdom prepares to press her appeal—to come not for just a meal, but for life! All this imagery lets the simpleton know that what Wisdom has to offer is costly, but marvelous.

B. (:3-5) Wisdom Aggressively Solicits the Naive

"*She has sent out her maids, and she calls from the highest point of the city.*
'Let all who are simple come in here!' she says to those who lack judgment,
'Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed.'"

C. (:6) Wisdom Leads to Life and Understanding Beyond the Gate or Repentance

"*Leave your simple ways and you will live;*
walk in the way of understanding."

Tremper Longman: We hear Woman Wisdom speaking in the last three verses (**4–6)** of the unit. Specifically, she addresses the **simpleminded**, who are also called "*those who lack heart*." This reference is neither to the wise nor to the foolish, but to the naive or immature. These are people who are not yet committed to either side of the polarity, and it is the goal of the one named Wisdom to turn them to her side. She wants to instruct them in Wisdom.

She thus invites them to come to her home and share a meal with her. In the ancient Near East, for a woman to invite a man to a meal has erotic overtones. What Woman Wisdom wants is an intimate relationship with the man.

I. (:7-12) THE POINT OF DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN THE SCOFFER AND THE WISE IS THEIR ORIENTATION TOWARDS THE FEAR OF THE LORD WHICH IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

Jonathan Akin: There's a big question to ask about **Proverbs 9:7-12**: How do these verses fit, sandwiched between the two invitations of Wisdom and Folly? The answer is that they are giving examples of Wisdom's teachings so that you know how to read the rest of Proverbs. These verses seem straightforward, but they must be read in this context. After all, these verses contrast the two ways (i.e., the two invitations): wisdom and wickedness. These verses show what these two women teach and produce in their followers progressively. The party you choose to go to determines if you keep these. The party that you choose to go to determines how you act in daily life. **Whether you act wickedly or wisely reveals which party you chose**. Belief always determines behavior, but **behavior reveals what you believe**. This is a worship issue. . .

The point of **Proverbs 9** is that if you cannot accept a rebuke, it is not just because that is your personality type; it reveals **idolatry** in your life (perhaps worship of self). This is true in all kinds of practical areas that Proverbs touches on. If you are stingy, it reveals an idolatry of money. If you have a porn addiction, it reveals an idol of sex. If you cannot discipline your children, it might reveal that you have made your kids an idol.

A. (:7-9) Don't Cast Pearls Before Swine

1. (:7-8a) Folly of Correcting a Mocker

a. You Will Be Mocked

"*Whoever corrects a mocker brings on insult*"

Ray Ortlund: Openness and humility are how we grow. Scoffers are not like that. **What is a "scoffer**"? A scoffer is anyone who never accepts correction. He thinks other people really need his opinions. He is easily offended. He is above other people. And if someone seems to threaten his superiority, he scoffs. He mocks. He mouths off. He denigrates. This kind of person is dangerous. If you cross him, he will punish you – and claim it is your fault.

b. You Will Be Abused

"*whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse*."

c. You Will Be Hated

"*Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you*."

Charles Bridges: *Wisdom's* messengers must discriminate in the proclamation of their message. If the *simple* welcome it, the *scorner and wicked* will rebel.

David Hubbard: "Choose your pupil wisely" is the point of **verse 8.** Trying to coax one who mocks truth, morality, and wisdom to change his ways will only intensify his ire and turn him completely against you ("*hate*"). Your efforts will only add insult to injury. Spite will be the tuition paid you for your services. Better by far to spend your energies on the teachable; even if you show them where they are wrong they will shower you with appreciation and esteem ("*love*"). So open are they—the "*wise*" person and the "*just*" one (the one who wants to do right and who is fair-minded in evaluating the words of the teacher)—that they take in "*instruction*" like nutrition and become stronger and stronger by it (**v. 9**).

2. (:8b-9) Benefits of Correcting the Wise

a. He Will Love You

"*rebuke a wise man and he will love you*."

b. He Will Grow in Wisdom

"*Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still*."

c. He Will Grow in Understanding

"*teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning*."

B. (:10-12) The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom

1. (:10) Principle Stated

"*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,*
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

Lindsay Wilson: The *fear of the Lord* sayings in **1:7** and **9:10** form an **inclusio** within **chapters 1 – 9**. The chapter does not end with a fear of the Lord saying simply because it is structured **chiastically**, in which the key point is made in the centre. The invitation of personified wisdom (**vv. 1–6**) is balanced by the invitation of personified folly (**vv. 13–18**). The folly of the scoffer when corrected (**vv. 7–8a** and **v. 12b**) brackets the response of the wise person to correction (**vv. 8b–9** and **v. 12**). This leaves the fear of the Lord and promise of long life **at the centre** and the **structural key point** of the chapter (**vv. 10–11**).

Caleb Nelson: The heart of the matter is **fearing God**. The fear of God, if you remember, is the proper attitude of one who, above all else, abhors offending his Father. To fear God is to have the proper attitude toward His overpowering dynamic energy. It is know and respect Him as a consuming fire. If you work with radioactive materials, you fear them. If you don't fear them, you won't be working with them very long. And in the same way, if you have anything to do with the Holy One of Israel, then you must fear Him. Wisdom begins with an attitude, the basic attitude of piety: humility, reverence, awe, and yes, real fear before the majesty of God Almighty.

Wisdom means **knowing God** as the Holy One. Only when you understand how radically He is set apart from common use to the special and sole purpose of glorifying Himself do you begin to have an accurate conception of God. He doesn't exist to make you happy, to forgive you, to give you what you want. He exists to glorify Himself, and you exist to glorify Him too.

All true religion boils down to these two principles: the fear of God and the knowledge of God. Do you know Him? And do you fear Him? Remember, to know Him is not just to know about Him, but to know Him personally. To fear Him is not just to agree that He ought to be respected, but deep in your soul to have a holy fear of doing anything of which God would disapprove.

2. (:11) Long Life is at Stake

"*For through me your days will be many,*
and years will be added to your life."

3. (:12) Both the Wise and the Mocker Get What They Deserve

"*If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you;*
if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer."

Paul Koptak: Taking the proverb as Wisdom's last words, we see that she puts responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the listener, making it clear that one "reaps what one sows." She tells each of her listeners to decide whether they will be a wise one or a mocker. Once you hear the call of Wisdom, she warns, you are no longer simple or unlearned. You are either on your way to becoming wise or you are a scoffer; it all depends on your response. And if you are wise, you are not only learning for yourself, you are learning for others, for you will become a teacher. Wisdom's feast, then—her instruction and her correction—is a first course in the fear of Yahweh. Her call is not an invitation to some school of manners or moral self-improvement. Rather, it is an **invitation to know the Holy One**.

Roland Murphy: This saying is a kind of no-nonsense statement, pointing out the effects that wisdom/arrogance have for their possessors. It balances **vv 7–9**, which envision communication of wisdom to others, both the arrogant and the wise, in **v 8**. Wisdom is a boon that is considered to be something to be communicated, even in the home, from mother and father, and also throughout life. The youth may or may not choose to listen, and will accordingly bear the responsibility with its inevitable results.

I. (:13-18) THE SEDUCTIVE INVITATION OF FOLLY TO THE NAIVE: COME AND PARTAKE OF MY SECRET PLEASURES (portrayed as a prostitute)

A. (:13) The Fool Lacks Substance

1. Shouts an Empty Message

"*The woman Folly is loud*;"

2. Leads an Undisciplined Life

"*she is undisciplined*"

3. Lacks any Depth of Understanding

"*and without knowledge*."

B. (:14-16) The Fool Aggressively Solicits the Naive

"*She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city,*
calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way.
'Let all who are simple come in here!' she says to those who lack judgment."

Aggressively markets her wares; even to those who were not actively looking for seductive pleasures

Allen Ross: Folly's position (**v.14**) is prominent in the city streets. Here we must notice how she often **imitates wisdom** (cf. **v.3**), so only the cautious and discerning will make the right choice. In **ch. 7** the adulteress woman was lurking in the night, but now Folly is **openly bold** and apparently accepted by the community. Her deportment is one of a prostitute; she has put no effort into preparing the feast but only sits and calls. Her invitation, likewise, is to passersby (**v.15**), here described as those "*who go straight*" (*hamyaššerîm*) on their ways, thus identifying them as quiet and unwary.

C. (:17-18) Foolishness Leads to Death and Condemnation Beyond the Seductive Pleasures of the Moment

1. (:17) The Open Seduction of Temporal Pleasures

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

Does not hide the unlawful character of the sinful pleasures … just appeals to the flesh to satisfy its cravings; there is something sinister and attractive about doing something naughty

2. (:18) The Hidden Reality of Death and Condemnation

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

David Hubbard: What appears to be a portal to pleasure—"*the door of her house*" (**v. 14**)—is the corridor to "*hell*" (Sheol, the grave or the grim abode of the dead where the full life of God never reaches). Bluntly but truly put, her past "*guests*" are now ghosts.

Allen Ross: The point is that the life of folly—a life of undisciplined, immoral, riotous living—runs counter to God's plan of life and inevitably leads to death. Once again a section of the book ends with the death of a fool (see **7:26–27, 36**). Jesus will warn people to avoid this broad way that leads to destruction and to follow the straight and narrow path of righteous, wise living.

* * * * * * * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How do we distinguish between the naïve who are still open to the invitation of wisdom and the mockers who are openly attacking God's truth? How should our approach vary to these two different groups?

2) Why is foolishness so attractive and wisdom not automatically embraced?

3) What role does repentance play in your presentation of the gospel message? Why is it such a critical component?

4) How can we develop a sense of the fear of the Lord in our children?

* * * * * * * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ray Ortlund: The passage divides into three paragraphs of six verses each. The first and third paragraphs mirror one another like bookends, each one with an invitation. The sage is telling us, "It's an either/or decision. There is no third option." The invitation to wisdom stands open to everyone – with one exception. **Scoffers are excluded (vv. 7, 12)**. The middle paragraph in **chapter 9** explains why God ignores scoffers. But he welcomes both the wise and the simple.

Max Anders**: Competing Invitations from Wisdom and Folly --**
MAIN IDEA: God's wisdom is pictured as a gracious woman who invites everyone to come and learn from her. Even those who are naive can find life and escape disaster if they pay attention to her advice.

SUPPORTING IDEA: Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly are both inviting passersby to their homes for a feast. The choice is critical because the path leads to life or death, and only those who fear the Lord will make the right choice.

Louis Goldberg: (**9:7-12**) – The central section of **Proverbs 9** lies between two different kinds of invitations. The choice in selecting one or the other is important for every person because it leads to two different destinies. Those who respond to wisdom's maidens and choose her gracious banquet, though lacking in understanding and moral experience, will soon see a change in themselves. They will be known as wise, because wisdom imbues the company at her table with altogether new qualities. The wise man who sits at wisdom's banquet "*will be wiser still*" (**9:9a**). Here is a distinct contrast: worldly knowledge by itself tends to inflate a person's ego, making him so self-sufficient and self-reliant that he stops learning altogether. . .

Those who reject wisdom's invitation are viewed as mockers. They see no need to attend wisdom's banquet, and, upon being invited, they will offer only insult."

Derek Kidner: In a strikingly symmetrical chapter the first and last six verses describe the rival feasts of wisdom and folly (note the almost identical **4** and **16**), while the centrepiece (**7-12**) gives character-sketches of typical products of these opposing camps: the scoffer, with his closed mind, and the wise man, ever teachable and ever progressing.

Louis Goldberg: **Decisions Lead to Destinies (:7-12)**
The choice in selecting one or the other is important for every person because it leads to two different destinies. Those who respond to wisdom's maidens and choose her gracious banquet, though lacking in understanding and moral experience, will soon see a change in themselves. They will be known as wise, because wisdom imbues the company at her table with altogether new qualities. The wise man who sits at wisdom's banquet "*will be wiser still*" (**9:9a**). Here is a distinct contrast: worldly knowledge by itself tends to inflate a person's ego, making him so self-sufficient and self-reliant that he stops learning altogether. . .

For guests feeding on what folly has to offer, life becomes a dismal experience and death a time of horror. Eternity will yawn open to snatch its foolish victims, and they will be separated from the Lord forever and ever. How can anyone be so blind as to choose the consequences of such a revolting invitation to partake of folly's cursed crumbs?

David Thomas: The tempting woman is here described:

- She is **ignorant**. "*She is simple and knoweth nothing*." She is blind to spiritual realities and claims. She may be clever, acquainted with the way of the world, and crafty; still the great spiritual world is concealed from her. She is in the kingdom of darkness
- She is **clamorous**, full of noise and exciting talk, bearing down all objections to her entreaties
- She is **audacious**. "*She sitteth at the door of her house on a seat in the high places of the city*." Modesty, which is the glory of her sex, has left her. She is bold and brazen
- She is **persuasive**. "*Whosoever is simple let him turn in hither*." "*Stolen waters are sweet*." This is her argument. She admits that her pleasures are wrong, and on that account the more delectable. She is a portrait of all whom the devil employs as his emissaries of evil.

Mark her features, and take warning. The ministry of temptation is here presented.

Lindsay Wilson: This chapter thus rounds off **chapters 1 – 9**, highlighting the fundamental choice between wisdom and folly, and reminding us of the need to build on the right foundation of fearing God as God. Although the invitations from wisdom and folly begin in a similar way (**vv. 4, 16**), only that of wisdom leads to a life that makes sense. Folly offered what claimed to be sweet and pleasant (**v. 17**), but was

actually the way of death, a place of rotting corpses (**v. 18**). To quote a proverb, all that glitters is not gold. Folly offers much but delivers little – then and now. Wisdom must be grounded in the fear of the Lord, and will be shown in the way we respond to correction and reproof (**vv. 7–9**). Only embracing the way of wisdom will lead to the '*good life*' (**vv. 5–6, 11**). In the end there are not two ways to live, but rather one way to live, and another way that leads to death.

Caleb Nelson: **The Best Invitation Ever** – Sermon Outline:

I. Lady Wisdom Invites You to Feast on Prime Rib and Wine, vv. 1-6

- A. Her Preparations, **vv. 1-2**
- B. Her Messengers, **v. 3a**
- C. Her Call, **v. 3b**
- D. Her Message, **vv. 4-6**
    1. Its Audience: Fools and Senseless, **v. 4**
    2. Its Content: Feast on Wisdom, **v. 5**
    3. Its Content: Repent and Understand, **v. 6**

II. Wisdom and Folly: Ultimate Beginnings and Ultimate Outcomes, vv. 7-12

- A. Choose a Banquet, Choose a Lifestyle
- B. The Heart of the Matter, **v. 10**
    1. Fearing God
    2. Knowing God

III. Dame Folly Invites You to Share (Stolen) Bread and Water, vv. 13-18

- A. Her Character, **vv. 13-14a**
- B. Her Call, **v. 14b**
- C. Her Message, **vv. 15-17**
    1. Its Audience: Those Going Straight, Fools and Senseless, **v. 15-16**
    2. Its Content: Illicit Pleasure Is Good, **v. 17**
- D. Her Outcome: Death and Hell, **v. 18**

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INTERPRETATIVE APPROACHES TO PROVERBS 10-31

The approach to the latter half of the book of Proverbs (starting with **chapter 10**) is problematic for someone writing a paragraph-by-paragraph commentary based around the Big Idea concept. These individual proverbs (or sentence proverbs) often contrast the righteous and the wicked or the wise and the fool in just one very specific subject area. There is no obvious flow of thought that connects the proverbs into thematic groupings. The most common approach avoids the problem by resorting to a topical treatment of the various subjects covered in these chapters. But God did not choose to structure His revelation in such a topical format. So I will continue to make observations on a verse-by-verse basis without trying to fabricate any Big Idea statements for the various chapters. I will also skip the appendix sections of Devotional Questions and Notes – since these will be included in conjunction with each individual verse as appropriate.

Paul Koptak does a good job summarizing his approach (which I am going to attempt to mirror):

How does one study the proverbs as **individual sayings**? The most basic and fruitful practice **compares the two parallel lines**, looking for the ways in which the two lines are similar and looking for the ways in which they are different. Thus, for example, in **10:29**, "*The way of the Lord*" is stated in the first line and implied in the second, yet that same way is both "*a refuge for the righteous*" and "*ruin for those who do evil*." The juxtaposition of the two lines often has an element of surprise that closer inspection uncovers. So here, the "*way of the Lord*" might be understood as the way one walks in life, a recurring image in the instructions of **chapters 1–9**. However, this way is a ruin for those who have never walked on it, so the second line defines "*the way of the Lord*" as a reference to God's way of dealing with the world. The comparison also clarifies the use of the metaphor "*way*." . . .

This commentary will also attend to **repetitions** and **contrasts** that link the proverbs in their literary context. The proverbs seem to start one theme only to leave it off while taking on another that is related in some more or less obvious way. The theme will be picked up again, restated with variation of both vocabulary and content. For example, themes and images of final outcomes, blessing, but also dread and annihilation, intertwine in **10:22–32**, although not every saying in this section treats that theme.

This technique reminds me of the interweaving of multiple stories in television dramas and soap operas. D. W. Griffith, one of the first great film directors, kept audiences on the edge of their seats when he brought together four related stories of Intolerance. Griffith's intent was to show how the different stories related to a common truth; in a similar way, **proverbs present various viewpoints of that common truth**. Therefore, sections of these collected sentence proverbs do not address a single theme or present a monologue but rather use similarity and contrast in the way impressionist painters used strokes of color. For Claude Monet, splashes of light brown, when mixed with other strokes of blue or even green, could become a picture of a haystack at morning, noon, or sunset. So also in the writings of the ancient Near East, bringing disparate texts together by means of a perceived commonality can be seen in the Gilgamesh Epic and in **Psalms 19, 83, and 89**. . .

To summarize, readers can look for the following relations between individual proverbs: **pairs, catchword clusters, links that may begin or end a section, and concentrations of Yahweh sayings**. The connections highlight the concentrations of related proverbs and may point to an intended literary structure. . . The lack of agreement about groupings among interpreters shows these proposals are somewhat subjective. Rather than saying that the proverbs are gathered into discrete sections, the outlines presented here are intended to point out **concentrations of proverbs on a common theme.** No outline will capture the organizational strategy of the collection, but **suggestions about clusters** can alert the reader to relationships and interaction.

Analysis by Roland Murphy:

It will become clear that several of the above studies have made important progress in the discernment of **units within the book of Proverbs**. The insight that a biblical book, even if it is unmistakably a collection, can constitute a certain unity has been applied to the book of Psalms, and perhaps with less success to the book of Proverbs. But in any case it is now recognized that the collections of sayings, especially of **chaps. 10–22**, and of **25–29**, are **not haphazard**. In particular, the analyses of J. Krispenz and R. Scoralick have analyzed several units within these chapters. This research has been guided primarily by such literary features as **catch words, paronomasia**, etc., supported by analysis of the development of thought. The **sound patterns** studied by G. Boström and T. McCreesh have contributed to the recognition of units; stylistics do have a bearing on the collocation of proverbs in a group.

Analysis by Allen Ross:

Each saying falls into one of a number of parallel patterns. Whybray, 57–59, lists and explains the most common of these:

- **antithetical parallelism**, pointing to a contrast between the wise and the foolish ("*A wise son brings joy to his father / a foolish son is his mother's bane*"; cf. *10:1*);
- **synonymous parallelism**, giving the statement greater comprehensiveness and authority ("*Pride comes before disaster / and arrogance before a fall*"; cf. **16:18**);
- the **continuous sentence**, preserving the twofold shape of the saying but simply running the thought on to the second line ("*A strong man who trusts in the fear of the LORD / will be a refuge for his sons*"; cf. **14:26**);
- **comparisons, in which comparative value judgments are offered** instead of black and white decisions ("*If the righteous in the land get their deserts / how much more the wicked and the sinner!"* cf. **11:31**);
- and **the statement and explanation** ("*A king's threat is like a lion's roar / one who ignores it is his own worst enemy*"; cf. **20:2**).

The proverbs in **Proverbs 10:1 – 22:16** seem to defy an orderly arrangement or outline. With this fact in mind, yet still endeavoring to make this section as accessible and useable as possible to the reader, I have given a **topical heading to each of the proverbs**.

John MacArthur: This large section [**10:1 – 22:16**] contains 375 of Solomon's individual proverbs. They are in no apparent order, with only occasional grouping by subject, and are often without a context to qualify their application. They are based on Solomon's inspired knowledge

of the Law and the Prophets. The parallel, two line proverbs of **chaps. 10-15** are mostly contrasts or opposites (antithetical), while those of **chaps. 16-22** are mostly similarities or comparisons (synthetical).

Jonathan Akin: The second section of Proverbs (**10:1 – 22:16**) mainly consists of aphorisms that deal with a host of themes like work ethic, money, speech, family relationships, friendships, and the royal court. This section is highly concerned with **ethics**. Wisdom and righteousness are connected, as are foolishness and wickedness. In this section, Solomon often reveals rewards or consequences at the end of each path. Health, happiness, contentment, a good reputation, perhaps wealth, and immortality are at the end of the wise and righteous path, while trouble, pain, an untimely death, and the judgment of God are ready to meet the disobedient at the end of the foolish and wicked path.

This section begins with the phrase "*The proverbs of Solomon*" and is dominated by sayings people most commonly think of when they hear the word "*proverb*." People generally associate proverbs with pithy sayings that state a general truth rather than the extended discourses of **Proverbs 1-9**. However, the extended teachings of **Proverbs 1-9** have set up these shorter sayings in **Proverbs 10** and following. Only if the son has made a faith commitment to the Lord can he follow the wise saying throughout the rest of the book. Following these wise sayings will reveal genuine faith in the Lord. On the other hand, failing to follow these sayings will reveal one's idolatry. Therefore, a wise son who brings joy to his father is the characteristic of one who fears the Lord, while a foolish son who brings grief to his mother is the characteristic of an idol worshiper. The emotional consequences children bring their parents reveal where they stand with the Lord.

By contrast, David Hubbard explains his rationale for treating this section of Proverbs as **topical**:

At **10:1**, however, the Book of Proverbs takes a different tack. No more extended arguments, no more lengthy poems in praise of wisdom, no more embellished examples of the wiles of folly. Instead, the menu served from **10:1 – 22:16** is 375 sayings, usually two lines long. The mode of service is not table d'hôte but a la carte, brief, detached snacks of wisdom, like a vast buffet of hors d'oeuvres. . .

Since there is no discernible significance to the sequence of the verses, except the loose connectives of occasional catchwords, our approach to them in this section of the book is topical.

This method has the advantage of suggesting to preachers and teachers how they may collect and arrange similar sayings in a way that makes for a more coherent form of communication than is possible when each tidbit is offered individually. It is not an exaggeration to say that there are only two ways in which we can deliver the truths embedded in this collection of terse sayings from **10:1 – 22:16**: one at a time or in groups organized by topic.

The task of organizing them is a judgment call; many would fit more than one of the thirty or so subject categories which I have identified. Both the table of topics and the cross-references in the commentary will give help in finding how and where each proverb is treated. The basic approach

is to deal with two or three topics in each chapter using its relevant verses and also applicable sayings from other chapters.

Charles Bridges: The previous chapters have beautifully set out the nature and value of heavenly wisdom and contrasted it with the fascinations of sinful folly. We now come to what are more correctly (not excluding the foregoing) the proverbs of Solomon. They are for the most part unconnected sentences, remarkable for profound thought and acute observation, expressed in an antithetical or illustrative form. They comprise a divine system of morals that should be universally applied. They are a treasure of wisdom in all its varied details. They apply to the individual, the family, and governments. The previous chapters form a striking introduction to the book. The glorious description of the great Counselor (**chapters 1** and **8**) commends to us his gracious instruction concerning the principles of true happiness and practical godliness.

Jonathan Akin is concerned with what approach we take to reading these chapters in Proverbs:

There is a right way and a wrong way to read the book of Proverbs. There is a right way to read Proverbs that leads to joy and life, and there is a wrong way to read Proverbs that leads to misery or pride. Here's the difference—you can read the Proverbs like a Pharisee and say, "I need to do these things in order for God to love me. I need to obey these practical bits of advice because if I do them, God will accept me." That is one way to read the book of Proverbs—and that is the wrong way! We should not read it like a Pharisee. Instead, we need to read the Proverbs like blood-bought Christians who say, "These are not the things that we do in order to get God to love us; these are the things that we do because God already loves us. We do not do these things to become his children; we do these things because in Jesus Christ we have already been adopted into his family, and now here is how we live our lives."

The behaviors that we read about here—most of **Proverbs 10–31** does talk about conduct—are not things that God tells you to do in order to become his child. They are not things God tells you to do in order for him to love you. These behaviors are what the Lord is producing in those who are already his children—those who are already a part of his family. He is slowly, progressively conforming you to the image of Christ; he is making you more like Jesus Christ, who is the Wisdom of God. Proverbs is very much a book on sanctification. . .

What we see differently starting in **chapter 10** is how **random** everything is now. Let me talk to you about being a wise son, then let's talk about money, then let's talk about laziness, then let's talk about the blessing of the Lord, then let's talk about how you use your mouth, and then let's talk about how you discipline your children. It is all over the place and scattershot. We should not think this is by accident. The reason it is random is because the book of Proverbs is Solomon obeying the command to parents in **Deuteronomy 6** to **teach their children the law**. God gave very specific commands to the parents about how to teach their children the law. He said you do it when they wake up, when they sit, when they walk along the road, and when they lie down. How much of your day is given to waking up, sitting, walking around, and lying down? The entire day! That is the point. He is saying that your task as a parent is to teach your children the law throughout the day. How does that work? For those of you who are parents, do you sit children down one day and say, "OK. Let me map out our week. Monday, I will teach you everything you need to know about marriage and dating and romance (most of you probably do

not have a lot of material here). Tuesday, I will teach you everything you need to know about work. Wednesday, I will teach you everything you need to know about how to communicate." And so on. Is that the way we teach our children? Do you just sit them down and pour every bit of information you have into them? Of course not. Instead, **we may talk about a hundred different things as we go through the day.** We will talk to them about things from the mundane to the sublime, like how to throw a baseball, how to drive a car, how to do a job interview, how to spend money wisely, how to handle a conflict with a friend, how to handle dating issues, how to improve their prayer life—all kinds of things. We go through our day, and as conversations and topics come up, we have the responsibility to teach our children. That is what's happening in Proverbs. **Solomon says that as you go throughout the day, conversations will come up about all kinds of different topics, and you need to be ready to instruct your children and impart wisdom to them.**

TEXT: Proverbs 10:1-32

TITLE: WISDOM, WEALTH, WORDS AND WORK

(:1a) PROLOGUE

A. Genre

"*The proverbs*"

B. Author

"*of Solomon.*"

Paul Koptak: "*Proverbs of Solomon*" recalls the opening words of the book as it marks a **new major section**. We might ask why the superscription is necessary; a first and obvious answer is the change in form from extended instruction in **chapters 1–9** to the individual saying or sentence.

Lindsay Wilson: This collection from **10:1 – 22:16** is Solomonic, perhaps in the sense that he authored many of them, adopted and adapted others, and gathered still more to give a comprehensive set of snapshots and cameos that tell it like it is.

I. (:1b-14) WISDOM REFLECTED IN WEALTH AND COMMUNICATION

A. (:1b-5) Wisdom and Wealth

Paul Koptak: A chiastic structure of **10:1–5** is defined by the use of keywords and recurrent themes. The keyword "*son*" and the theme of parental joy and honor link **verses 1** and **5**. The words "*righteous*" and "*wicked*" and the theme of riches create a compound truth in **verses 2** and **4**; diligence and wealth are better than laziness and poverty, but ill-gotten treasures will not profit. The **center of the structure** (**v. 3**) sets the situation of wealth and poverty in the larger context of God's care for the righteous and his frustration of craving greed.

A Wise son makes parents glad, foolish son brings grief (**v. 1**)
  B Treasures of wickedness do not profit (**v. 2**)
    C Yahweh satisfies and thwarts (**v. 3**)
  B′ Riches of the diligent (**v. 4**)
A′ Wise son gathers, sleeping son brings shame (**v. 5**)

Lindsay Wilson: The contrast between a wise and foolish person is fundamental to the book, and rightly begins the sentence sayings. Both parents are affected by whether their son chooses wisdom or folly (see also **1:8; 15:20; 23:24–25**). In a patriarchal society a father is more focused on the public persona of his son, and the public wisdom of his son makes him glad (**13:1; 17:21, 25; 28:7**). We might have expected '*proud*' (in a good sense), but glad (*śāmaḥ*, to be glad) captures the idea of delight and satisfaction. In that society the mother would have seen the son mainly at home, and the path of folly

will spoil interpersonal and family relationships. *Sorrow* speaks of the grief that comes from ruptured relationships.

Caleb Nelson:
I. Wisdom's Point: To Please One's Father, **v. 1**
II. Wisdom on Wealth, **vv. 2-4**
    A. Wealth is not the most important thing, **v. 2**
    B. Wealth is a gift from Yahweh, **v. 3**
    C. Wealth demands hard work, **v. 4**
III. Wisdom on Work, **v. 5**
    A. The wise son works at the right time, **v. 5a**
    B. The wise son's work makes his father proud, **v. 5b**
IV. Wisdom on Wages, Ultimate and Penultimate, **vv. 15-16**
    A. Penultimate Security: Wealth
    B. Penultimate Risk: Poverty
    C. Ultimate Security: Righteous Work
    D. Ultimate Risk: Unrighteous Work

1. (:1b) Impact on Parents

"*A wise son makes a father glad,*
But a foolish son is a grief to his mother."

Bruce Waltke: The introduction at this seam in the book again mentions **both parents** (see **1:8**) and contrasts the psychological effects of a wise son (*bēn ḥākām*; cf. p. 94) and the foolish son (*bēn kesîl*; cf. p. 112-113) upon them. Like the prologue, the saying assumes that wisdom is a matter of sons receiving the traditions of generations (see p. 87-88). The saying is stated in a general way in order that its truth may remain open for diverse instantiations (cf. **13:1; 15:20; 17:25**).

Charles Bridges: This first verse may have been placed at the beginning to point to the value of a godly education in its personal, social, and national influence, which are linked to both time and eternity. The child who has been prayed over, instructed, and disciplined will in the Lord's time choose the path of wisdom and so bring joy to his father.

2. (:2-3) Sufficiency of the Lord

Bruce Waltke: Thematically both address the relationship of the wicked/righteous to material possessions. **Verse 2** pertains to the **security of their lives**, and **v. 3** to the **gratification of their appetites**. These are not unrelated because the human appetite ultimately aims to preserve life. By coupling the present "*treasures of wickedness*" with "*what the wicked crave the LORD thrusts aside*," the quatrain infers that the frustration of the wicked and the satisfaction of the righteous occur in the indefinite future, not necessarily. Until the time of justice the righteous may suffer hunger (see pp. 108; **Luke 4:2; 6:21; 1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 11:27; Rev. 6:6**).

a. (:2) Value of Integrity
"*Ill-gotten gains do not profit,*
But righteousness delivers from death."

Lindsay Wilson: What someone loses (e.g. **integrity**) in gaining wealth means that he or she has lost something more valuable than financial gain. This serves as a warning for those who think that it will be to their advantage to gain wealth by dubious means.

Paul Koptak: This contrast is (lit.) between the "*treasures of wickedness*" that are no profit when compared with "*righteousness that delivers from death*." "*Death*," the last word in the saying, determines its meaning. For anyone who takes moral shortcuts in acquiring wealth, those riches will not offer security or long life, the opposite of death in Proverbs (cf. **15:16; 21:6**). "*Righteousness*" implies the presence of Yahweh, who is named in the next verse.

Verses 2–3 form a **couplet,** each beginning with the Hebrew negative *lo* ("*not*"), so they should be compared. The first and second lines of each match up well: Treasures of wickedness do not profit (**v. 2a**), but Yahweh does not allow the righteous to go hungry (**v. 3a**). That stress on Yahweh's care for the righteous explains why righteousness delivers from death (**v. 2b**). So we also see that the terms for righteousness and wickedness correspond, with wickedness going first and last, righteousness going in between. We will note a similar pairing as we look at **vv. 4–5**.

Charles Bridges: What was the benefit of Naboth's vineyard to Ahab when in his ivory palace he was withering under God's curse?

Tremper Longman: The first colon surprises because we would not expect the wicked to have treasures in the first place. Earlier and throughout, Proverbs teaches that the righteous are more likely than the wicked to have the good things of this world (as in **3:15–16; 10:22**). Indeed, wealth is held out as a motivation for the pursuit of wisdom and its associated righteousness (**14:24**). But here we learn that wealth in the possession of the wicked provides them with no real benefit anyway. It is kind of a paradox, but treasures do not profit (see also **11:4**). The second colon claims that righteousness, a quality of the wise, extricates from death; it may indicate precisely how the treasures of the wicked do not profit. They cannot save from death.

b. (:3) Satisfaction of Needs
"*The LORD will not allow the righteous to hunger,*
But He will thrust aside the craving of the wicked."

Allen Ross: The general observation is that the Lord rewards the righteous with the satisfaction of their needs. The text literally says that he will not leave unsatisfied "*the appetite* [*nepeš*, lit., '*soul*'] *of the righteous*," which here includes the inner urge toward success. Conversely, "the wicked are condemned to live forever with their unfulfilled, and so sterile, desires, which cannot be transformed into practical attainment" (McKane, 426).

3. (:4-5) Reward for Diligent Work

Bruce Waltke: **The Practical Foundation of Wealth** --
The righteous work both diligently (**v. 4**) and at the right time (**v. 5**). . .
industry, contentment, thrift, and forethought will produce wealth and protect against poverty (cf. **12:11; 13:4, 11; 14:23; 18:9; 19:15; 20:4, 13; 21:5–6, 17, 20–21, 25; 28:14b, 24, 27**), and must be held in tension with the counter-proverbs that assume that the righteous may be temporarily poor and the wicked rich due to the tyranny of the latter. In a future that outlasts death the labor of the righteous will be rewarded (see **10:2, 3; 1 Tim. 4:8**).

Jonathan Akin: In Proverbs, **laziness** refers to people who cannot see their assignments through to completion (see Moore, "*Finding Jesus*"). They might start a task and get to the middle of it, but they walk away before it is finished. It's the son who helped plant the crops but is not there during harvest to finish the task. In our day, the laziness of Proverbs looks like distractions that keep you from staying on task. **You cannot complete your assignments** because Facebook distracts you for thirty minutes. You come back and do five minutes of work, but then check Twitter for fifteen minutes. Laziness is seen in the extended adolescence of our culture where kids can't grow up and provide for themselves but keep ending up back at Mom and Dad's house (bringing shame to their parents, even if the parents won't admit it).

a. (:4) Negligence vs. Diligence
"*Poor is he who works with a negligent hand,*
But the hand of the diligent makes rich."

Paul Koptak: This verse in Hebrew is structured chiastically, with terms for poverty and wealth coming at beginning and end, the contrast between slack and diligent hands adjacent to one another in the middle. The statement grows richer in meaning when set alongside its adjacent verses and in its larger context of **10:1–5**. Its general truth about the **value of hard work** should not be taken as a promise that God is constrained to fulfill but as a description of what generally happens in life. Murphy reminds us that "no proverb says it all."

Verses 4–5 also relate to one another in chiastic or mirror fashion—the laziness, poverty, and shame of **10:4a** and **10:5b** contrasted with the diligence, wealth, and wisdom of **10:4b** and **10:5a**.

Caleb Nelson: What does diligence look like? It looks like showing up on time, doing your work with excellence, speed, and focus, and constantly thinking about how to do your work better.

b. (:5) Diligent Foresight vs. Slothful Procrastination
"*He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely,*
But he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully."

Tremper Longman: This proverb is a specific application of the more general principle of the previous verse and may well be placed in this context with the intention of having both read together. Insight is a quality of the wise; disgrace is a moral evaluation of the fool. The contrast is between an industrious son and a slacker. The diligent one works hard and presumably thrives, whereas the lazy son's actions will certainly lead to poverty and ultimately to hunger.

B. (:6-14) Wisdom and Communication

Bruce Waltke: The subunit on communication features body parts in the first verse of each quatrain: "*head*" and "*mouth*" (**v. 6**), "*heart*" and "*lips*" ("*babbling*," **v. 8**), "*eyes*" and "*lips*" ("*babbling*," **v. 10**), "*mouth*" (twice, **v. 11**), "*lips*" and "*back*" (**v. 13**). The section falls into two equal halves of four antithetical proverbs (**vv. 6–9, 11–14**) around a janus pivot (**v. 10**). "*The mouth*" is specifically mentioned in the introduction to both of its halves (**vv. 6b, 11a, b**); its mention again in **v. 14b** forms an inclusio around the section. **Verses 6–9** focus on the **effects of good and bad communication on oneself**, and **vv. 11–14** on their **effects on others**. The center verse chiastically reverses this pattern, pointing to the pain of poor communication on others in verset A and on oneself in verset B. Both halves are introduced by juxtaposing the righteous person with wicked people (**vv. 6, 11**) in connection with a striking pun. Using the same syntax, their nominal clauses in versets A describe the state of the righteous and their verbal clauses of their B versets the fate of the wicked. In addition to the main topic advocating **wise speech**, the topic of **wisdom's values** punctuates the whole, especially in the rearing sayings of the quatrains (**vv. 7, 9, 13**), the same as in **ch. 5**.

Caleb Nelson: Wisdom will give you a truckload of blessings; folly will take everything you've got.

I. What Wisdom and Folly Offer You, **vv. 6-10**
   - A. A Blessed Life
   - B. A Secure Life

II. What Wisdom Gives Others**, vv. 11-14**
   - A. Life
   - B. Forgiveness
   - C. Wisdom
   - D. Knowledge

1. (:6-9) Effects of Communication on Self
   a. (:6) Blessings vs. Violence

"*Blessings are on the head of the righteous,*
But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence."

Bruce Waltke: Blessings (*berākôt*) denote the filling of a person with the potency to reproduce life, to produce wealth, and to overcome enemies. The plural denotes both their quality and quantity (i.e., all sorts of blessings, e.g., childbearing and the increase

of herds and crops). Its notion of wealth forms a janus between the preceding unit on wealth and this one on speech. Prudent hands and a prudent mouth produce blessings. . .

Violence [see **3:31**] *overwhelms* essentially means to put violence over the surface of the wicked. . . The mouth (see **2:6**) is a metonymy for their hostile words. The injurious curses that went forth from their mouths boomerang against them and silence them (cf. Hab. 2:17).

Allen Ross: behind the speech of the wicked is aggressive "*violence*" (*ḥāmās*), so they cannot be trusted (McKane, 422).

Lindsay Wilson: The blessings being on the *head* of the righteous is a way of claiming that the plans, words and thoughts (i.e. what comes from the head) of the righteous lead to success (**v. 6a**). The focus appears to be on the thoughts that are expressed through words, since the second half of the verse points to the mouth of the wicked. The (dissembling) words of the wicked hide a real intent to tear down and destroy others (*ḥāmās*, *violence*, **v. 6b**).

b. (:7) Blessing vs. Putrification
"*The memory of the righteous is blessed,*
But the name of the wicked will rot."

Paul Koptak: Instead of the expected opposite "curse," the "blessing" of the first colon is contrasted with a name that rots, a vivid description of social shame. Like the human body, reputations can putrefy and then disappear.

Bruce Waltke: In sum, verset A means, "*The name of a righteous person is mentioned to invoke a blessing on someone.*" By contrast, the fate of selfish, wicked people beyond death matches their worthless lives: both are naught. Their name represents their character and functions; it is not merely a label of identification. In many instances "*name*" is also the equivalent of **memory** (cf. **Exod. 3:15; Pss. 97:12; 102:12[13]; Hos. 12:5[6]**).

Barrow: No spices can so embalm a man, no monument can so preserve his name and memory, as a pious conversation [conduct], whereby God has been honored, and man benefited. The fame of such a person is in the best judgments far more precious and truly glorious than is the fame of those who have excelled in any other deeds or qualities.

Lindsay Wilson: **Contrasting outcomes** are in view here. The lasting legacy of the righteous (continuing the blessings of **v. 6**) is to leave behind a pattern to follow (**v. 7a**), but the reputation or name of the wicked will decompose rather than endure (**v. 7b**). . . The character or reputation of the wicked will not last or be remembered for long, for no-one will seek to emulate such a person.

c. (:8) Edification vs. Destruction
"*The wise of heart will receive commands,*
But a babbling fool will be thrown down."

Bruce Waltke: Whereas the wise in heart are characterized by continual inner, spiritual growth that leads to wise speech (**16:23**), the babbling (lit. *"lips"*) fool despises wisdom and discipline (**1:7**). The fool is so full of himself that instead of having the capacity to accept wisdom he dangerously prattles out his own "clever opinions," which are devoid of true wisdom (cf. **10:13**) and scorch like fire (cf. **16:27**). By his undisciplined words he entangles himself and comes to ruin (*yillābēṭ*; see **Hos. 4:14**). . . The proverb implies that **accepting commands** reveals that the wise in heart and the prattling fool can be recognized by the fact that they do not obey any commands.

Jonathan Akin: Here is the point, and this is a major theme in Proverbs: If you are the kind of person who loves to hear the sound of your own voice and who speaks more than you listen, then you're probably a fool. You are probably worshiping the idol of self.

How many of you know people who, when you have a conversation with them, they look like they are not listening to a word you are saying at all but rather are just waiting for you to take a breath so they can speak? They want to tell you their thoughts on things, but they do not want to hear your thoughts at all. Maybe you are that kind of person. If you are the kind of person who loves to talk and cannot receive commands or advice from others, then you are a fool and it will end up hurting you. You will come to ruin. Why? Because if you cannot listen to someone else's instructions, you will never learn from your own mistakes.

d. (:9) Security vs. Exposure
"*He who walks in integrity walks securely,*
But he who perverts his ways will be found out."

Paul Koptak: The Hebrew wordplay can be translated literally, "*Who walks right walks safe*," reminding the reader of wisdom's promises of protection (**1:33; 4:6**; cf. **3:23–26**). The contrast between a walk of integrity and ways that are crooked reminds the reader of the <u>two roads</u> seen so often throughout **chapters 1–9**. The contrast of final destinations warns against **loss of reputation**, not the physical danger that a reader might expect. This exposure to social disapproval echoes the judgments of **10:5** and **7.** The Hebrew word for "*integrity*" (*tom*) is repeated in **10:29**, translated as "*righteous*."

Charles Bridges: The man of integrity walks under the shield of the Lord's protection, his providence, and the shadow of his promises. There will be difficulties, but a deliverance will be provided, just as the Babylonian exiles were delivered through the fire form the infinitely greater danger of apostasy (**Daniel 3:21-29**).

Tremper Longman: This proverb is an observation on the difference between those who live openly and honestly and those who live deceptively. "*Innocence*" (*tōm*, see **2:7**) is a

relative term in the OT. The point of the verse seems to be that an easy conscience allows one to live life openly and with boldness. The second colon issues a warning to those who live deceptive, evil lives that they pass off as innocent. The warning is that, though they try to hide it, their evil will be found out. They do not have the moral foundation to live with openness and confidence. The proverb does not specify how those who are deceptive will be discovered; it assumes that **evil behavior cannot be hidden forever.**

2. (:10) Damaging Effects of Bad Communication

"*He who winks the eye causes trouble,*
And a babbling fool will be thrown down."

Lindsay Wilson: The image of winking the eye in **verse 10a** is less clear, but probably involves some secret deal or deceitful conduct (NIV, '*winks maliciously*' seeks to capture this; it is linked with **deceiving** in **6:13; 16:30**). Such dissembling will cause grief or trouble, probably to others.

Bruce Waltke: The synthetic parallels of **v. 10** present as complementary topics two kinds of bad communication: malicious, secretive gestures and prattling chatter. Its predicates assert their **damaging effects**: pain to others and ruin to the speaker.

Charles Bridges: The intended contrast here is between the man who brings trouble on his fellowmen and the man who brings trouble on himself. The first is a plague to his neighbor because he is God's enemy. And because the fool despises wisdom (**1:7**), he comes to ruin.

3. (:11-14) Effects of Communication on Others

a. (:11) Life vs. Violence

"*The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,*
But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence."

Bruce Waltke: Flowing well water is particularly precious (cf. **Jer. 2:13**), and people gather around it. The open, benevolent speech of the righteous is just as necessary for a community, offering everyone abundant life—temporal, intellectual, moral, and spiritual. The right word, spoken at the right time (**15:23**) and in the right way (**15:1; 17:27**), supports or corrects a community in a way that promotes its life (**10:10b**).

b. (:12) Strife vs. Harmony

"*Hatred stirs up strife,*
But love covers all transgressions."

Bruce Waltke: Love withdraws the burning wood of gossip (**17:9; 26:20–21**), but the quarrelsome and hot-tempered fuel the conflict into disastrous proportions, producing still further transgressions (**26:21–22**). The saying must be held in tension with the truth that a spiritual friend corrects the sinful offender (cf. **Lev. 19:17; Prov. 7:6; Gal. 6:1**).

Allen Ross: the wicked are motivated by hatred that brings dissension but the righteous by love that is harmonious. Love's covering wrongs is harmonious with forgiveness (see **1Pe 4:8**).

c. (:13) Discernment vs. Lack of Understanding

"*On the lips of the discerning, wisdom is found,*
But a rod is for the back of him who lacks understanding."

Paul Koptak: There are two contrasts in this saying, the first between the wisdom that is found on the lips and the punishment that falls on the back, the second between the person who has discernment and the one who lacks judgment (lit., "*lacks heart*"; cf. **9:4**). The proverb joins with those that have come before to point out the pipeline that connects heart and lips (**10:6, 8, 10, 11**). The person of discernment has wisdom to give from a heart that has stored up knowledge (cf. **2:1–2; 3:1; 4:20–21**); the person lacking in heart has nothing to give but only receives punishment. Perhaps the contrast also means to show that the wise understand sound speech while fools only understand punishment (cf. **9:12**).

Tremper Longman: The reference to the rod may also indicate the kind of physical punishment that was doled out to those who did not get the lesson (see **13:24; 14:3; 22:8, 15; 23:13, 14; 29:15**; and the closely related **26:3**).

d. (:14) Knowledge vs. Ruin

"*Wise men store up knowledge,*
But with the mouth of the foolish, ruin is at hand."

Charles Bridges: Solomon showed that he deserved the title of "wise man" by the way he used to store up knowledge. No wonder that wisdom is found on the lips, for "*out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks*" (**Matthew 12:34**). Jerome mentions about his friend Nepotian, "By daily reading and meditating in the sacred volume, he had made his soul a library of Christ." If you store up knowledge when you are young, what a valuable treasure will be accumulated, although it will only be enough to meet the coming trials. Add something every day to your storehouse. For lack of sound wisdom the fool only opens himself to his own ruin, for he is in constant rebellion against God.

Lindsay Wilson: Words are powerful forces for either building up or tearing down.

II. (:15-21) WISDOM REFLECTED IN SECURITY AND RIGHT SPEAKING

A. (:15-17) Wisdom and Security

1. (:15) Security vs. Poverty

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

In other contexts, wealth is viewed from a **negative light** [so Bruce Waltke: His wealth deceives him into thinking that it provides real security (**18:11**); seduces him into becoming wise in his own eyes (**28:11**), a state worse than that of a fool (**26:12**); and leads him to lord it over the poor (**22:7**; cf. **2 Sam. 12:1ff**.) and to give him harsh replies (**18:23**)]. But here it seems to be viewed in a positive light. Both states are in need of God's saving grace and providential protection. It would be folly for the rich to trust in their riches and for the poor to despair as being without hope in this world.

Paul Koptak: This proverb is linked with **verse 14** by the catchword "*ruin*" (*meḥittah*) and by the comparison of the wise who store up knowledge with the rich who store up wealth as fortification. Here the contrast lies in the security wealth provides for the rich with the assault of poverty on the needy. One protects, the other attacks (cf. "*ruins*" in **Ps. 89:40–41**); the same is true of wisdom and folly.

Lindsay Wilson: Poverty here is not being morally evaluated, but **its effects on the poor** are being described. Poverty means that there is no buffer or protection when disaster strikes, and this leads to ruin. This description of the powerlessness of the poor (without moral evaluation) is picked up elsewhere: they are friendless (**14:20; 19:7**); their pleas are not listened to (**18:23**); they are dominated by the rich (**22:7**).

2. (:16) Life vs. Punishment

"*The wages of the righteous is life,*
The income of the wicked, punishment."

Paul Koptak: Righteousness can offer some sense of security that ill-gotten wealth cannot; in fact, the income of the wicked leads to disaster. While wealth can protect, that protection becomes a metaphor for the results of righteous action. Only the wages of righteousness can give final security.

Tremper Longman: This verse assumes that both the righteous and the wicked may gain some material substance, but contrasts the value that it has for them. Money in the hand of the righteous person is a positive thing, but money in the hand of a wicked person is a negative thing. The contrast in consequences is interesting and somewhat unexpected. The natural contrast would be between life and death, but here it is between life and sin.

The idea is that the righteous will use it for things that enhance life, whereas the wicked will apply their wealth toward things that harm life. One can think of many examples of the latter, including obsessive gambling, overeating, using prostitutes, or drinking too much. However, there is a purpose why the proverb remains unspecified. It can be any of a number of things. The same is true for the way the wages of the righteous lead toward life. The principle could be illustrated by acts of philanthropy, paying for education that broadens the mind, enrichment programs for one's children, or, again, any number of things.

3. (:17) Heeding Instruction vs. Forsaking Reproof

"*He is on the path of life who heeds instruction,*

But he who forsakes reproof goes astray."

Lindsay Wilson: This is a **hinge verse**, picking up the ideas of life and sin from **verse 16** (where they were connected with character), but now linking them to how people respond to words that instruct and reprove. This picks up the thought of **9:7–9**, where a litmus test of whether we have chosen the path of wisdom or that of folly is how we respond to correcting and rebuking (verbs from the same roots as the nouns *mûsār* and *tôkaḥat* in **v. 17**). The way of folly, of rejecting correction, is not only damaging for ourselves, because our words and example also lead others astray (**v. 17b**; better than '*goes astray'* . . .), with **others** being implied here.

B. (:18-21) Wisdom and Right Speaking

1. (:18) Duplicity and Slander

"*He who conceals hatred has lying lips,*
And he who spreads slander is a fool."

Bruce Waltke: hatred inspires slander informed by innuendoes, half-truths, and facts distorted and exaggerated beyond recognition (cf. **6:17, 19**). In other words, this fool spreads slander, concealing his hatred with lying lips.

2. (:19) Uncontrolled Speech vs. Controlled Speech

"*When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable,*
But he who restrains his lips is wise."

Paul Koptak: Words are like sheep; the more there are, the better the chances that some will go astray.

Bruce Waltke: Sin is not stopped by **multiplying words** because sin is a matter of the heart, and, furthermore, when words are multiplied, they cannot be thought through sufficiently and precisely (cf. **29:20**). Once released, they cannot readily be negated. By contrast, whoever *restrains* (*ḥōśēk*, i.e., exercises self-control to hold them back) is prudent because he has no confidence in himself and knows that the good and effective word is from the LORD (**16:1**). He also knows the lethal power of rash words.

Tremper Longman: Proverbs consistently teaches that fewer words are better than many words (see also **13:3; 17:28**). Words are powerful and should be uttered circumspectly. The more one says, the more problems may arise. The wise person, here called insightful, is one who chooses words very carefully. The time and situation must be right for the words that are spoken. In addition, Proverbs teaches that speech must follow reflection about the impact of one's words; blurting out an answer is considered total folly (**15:28**).

3. (:20) Valuable vs. Worthless

"*The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver,*
The heart of the wicked is worth little."

Paul Koptak: To be lacking in heart is to lack judgment and character (**10:13**; cf. **4:23**).

4. (:21) Nourishing Others vs. Starving Self

"*The lips of the righteous feed many,*
But fools die for lack of understanding."

Paul Koptak: Readers would expect a contrast between wise lips that nourish others and a foolish heart that does not, but as is often the case in these proverbs, the second line highlights the negative consequences that fall back on the fool. The word "nourish" comes with the image of the shepherd who feeds the sheep, contrasted with the fool who cannot even feed himself. The wise speak in a way that benefits others; the fool speaks in a way that leads to his own ruin (cf. **10:10**).

Allen Ross: what the righteous say is **edifying** -- it enhances (*yir ʿû*; "*nourishes*," NIV) common life. "*Fools*" (*ʾewîlîm*), characterized by a lack of discipline and little wit, ruin their lives and others as well.

III. (:22-32) RIGHTEOUS / WICKED CONTRASTS

Caleb Nelson: God protects His people and gives them delight in doing good and working hard.
I. God Gives Financial Protection, **v. 22**
II. Wisdom's Delight: Goodness, **v. 23**
III. God Gives Protection from Ultimate Disaster, **vv. 24-25**
IV. Wisdom's Delight: Hard Work, **v. 26**
V. God Gives a Future, **vv. 27-30**

A. (:22) Unmitigated Blessing

"*It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich,*
And He adds no sorrow to it."

Paul Koptak: The blessing of Yahweh brings wealth that does not come with the trouble that comes with the wealth the wicked obtain.

Charles Bridges: We were told in **verse 4** that diligent hands bring wealth. Here we see that the blessing of the Lord brings wealth. There is no inconsistency here. The one notes the primary source of wealth; the other points to the instrumental source of wealth. Neither can be effective without the other. The sluggard looks for prosperity without diligence; the atheist looks for prosperity only from being diligent. The Christian, armed with God's blessing, is diligent. This wise combination keeps him active and at the same time humble and dependent on God (**John 6:27**).

Tremper Longman: The present proverb is an aspect of the truth, not the whole truth. All things being equal, those who are blessed by God, and presumably associated with wisdom, will be rich. After all, the wise are hard workers, not lazy. They do not fritter

their wealth away on meaningless luxuries. However, things are not always equal, and injustice (**13:23**), among other things, can enter the picture. In any case, it is better to be wise, and **it is more likely that people will succeed in life if they live in conformity with the way God created the world**. The proverb also should lead the godly rich to look not at their own efforts but rather to God for the reason for their well-being.

B. (:23) Wickedness vs. Wisdom

"*Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool;*
And so is wisdom to a man of understanding."

Tremper Longman: The proverb contrasts what brings pleasure to a fool and to a wise person, here referred to by a closely related word, "*competence*" (see **2:2**). The word "*sport*" may also be translated "*pleasure*" or "*laughter*." The idea is that doing evil is something that fools actually relish, not something that circumstances force on them.

The proverb suggests that there is something in fools that makes evil a natural outflow of their character, and then it compares this with wisdom in the lives of competent persons. As Murphy (*Proverbs*, 75) points out, things like justice bring "*joy*" (*simḥâ*) to a righteous person (**21:15**).

C. (:24) Fears vs. Desires

"*What the wicked fears will come upon him,*
And the desire of the righteous will be granted."

Bruce Waltke: This verse nuances **v. 23** by affirming that although the fool presently takes pleasure in doing wrong, he suffers from well-founded anxiety and pangs of a bad conscience that hound him to his dire destiny (cf. **Gen. 4:13–14**). By contrast, the competent person will be fully rewarded for aspiring for that which presently gives him pleasure.

Tremper Longman: This proverb contrasts the wicked and the righteous in terms of what they will get out of life. Everyone has fears and desires, but this verse intends to motivate toward righteous behavior and away from wicked behavior by saying that the wicked will get what they fear and not what they desire, and vice versa for the righteous.

D. (:25) Vapor vs. Lasting Foundation

"*When the whirlwind passes, the wicked is no more,*
But the righteous has an everlasting foundation."

Allen Ross: Survival in catastrophes of life is reserved for the righteous, for they are properly prepared to meet the real tests of life (Plaut, 132**). Matthew 7:24–27** addresses the same point: If people base their lives on temporal values, they must know that they can be quickly swept away.

E. (:26) Laziness

"*Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes,*
So is the lazy one to those who send him."

This is the only one in the series that does not present a righteous / wicked contrast.

Paul Koptak: Read from two different points of view, the proverb sends two slightly different messages. From the perspective of the one sending, wisdom suggests that the sender should consider what is fitting and weigh outcomes when choosing a representative. But the one who is sent should also consider outcomes and determine what kind of messenger one will be. Who, the proverb asks, would choose a sluggard to be a messenger? So diligence in learning wisdom is recommended via a negative example.

Bruce Waltke: Formally **v. 26** (cf. **26:1**) consists of a double comparison for emphasis. It compares two things vexing and hurtful to the body (**10:26a**) with that which is frustrating and damaging in social relationships (**v. 26b**). The point of the comparison as … so has to be inferred (*ka … kēn*; cf. **v. 23**). What acidic vinegar to poor teeth, smoke to eyes, and a sluggard to a sender have in common is **unexpected irritation and hurt.**

F. (:27-28) Future Outcomes

1. Life vs. Death

"*The fear of the LORD prolongs life,*
But the years of the wicked will be shortened."

Tremper Longman: Everything being equal, **living in a way that conforms to God's will results in a longer life.** After all, such a one lives in conformity with the way God set the world up at creation. To take one example, the law and wisdom in Proverbs insist that it is God's desire that sex be enjoyed within the commitment of marriage. The fools who ignore this command bring great danger on their lives, whether from sexually transmitted diseases (known in antiquity) or from the revenge of the other woman's husband (**6:30–35**). Though not specified by the proverb, it is also possible that Yahweh himself will cut short the days of the wicked, either through human means or by direct intervention. The purpose of this proverb is to **motivate people toward fear of Yahweh**. Since all things are not equal and therefore sometimes God-fearers die young, Van Leeuwen perceptively states: "The problem's ultimate resolution requires a developed view of life after death."

2. Gladness vs. Frustration

"*The hope of the righteous is gladness,*
But the expectation of the wicked perishes."

Bruce Waltke: The contrasting destinies of the righteous and the wicked is now expressed in terms of fulfilled versus unfulfilled expectations and hopes, foreshadowing the topic of **11:23–27**. Expectation (*tôḥelet*) designates the action of the verb *yḥl* ("to

wait for," "to hope for" something better). In **Ps. 39:7(8)** *tôḥelet* is parallel with *qāwâ*, "*to hope*," suggesting that there is nothing odd in the Hebrew parallels of "joy" and "perishes." Of the righteous (*ṣaddîqîm*), none excepted, qualifies the hope as that which honors God and prospers the community. Its goal, joy (*śimḥâ*), is a metonymy of result for all future blessings when the righteous triumph over the wicked (cf**. 3:34**). *Śimḥâ* denotes being glad or joyful with the whole disposition, as indicated by its association with the heart (cf. **Exod. 4:14; Pss. 19:8[9]; 104:15; 105:3**) and *nepeš* (i.e., desire and appetites, **Ps. 86:4**).

G. (:29-30) Security

1. Fortress vs. Vulnerability

"*The way of the LORD is a stronghold to the upright,*
But ruin to the workers of iniquity."

Allen Ross: The "*way of the LORD*" refers to God's providential administration of life. Thus divine justice will be security for the righteous and disaster for the wicked.

Lindsay Wilson: The plans of the wicked will die with them rather than come to fruition. Another way of putting this is that God's purposes and plans (*the way* [*derek*] *of the Lord*, **v. 29**) will both preserve the blameless and destroy the evildoers. In the light of **verse 28**, these two types of people are the same as the righteous and the wicked. The stance of the righteous will lead to life and joy; that of the wicked will result in a life cut short and in hopes being dashed.

2. Permanence vs. Impermanence

"*The righteous will never be shaken,*
But the wicked will not dwell in the land."

Tremper Longman: When negated, the verb "*to be shaken*" (from *môṭ*) indicates tremendous security. When one is shaken, it is the result of great trouble. On the other hand, the wicked will live lives of **instability.** In particular, they will not be allowed to grow roots in the land. The land implied by this statement is, of course, the promised land, Israel. We have seen this threat leveled against the wicked already in **2:21–22** (see also the related thought in **10:25**). This proverb draws a relatively rare explicit connection between proverbial wisdom and **land theology**. The principle behind this proverb is developed at greater length in **Ps. 37**.

H. (:31-32) Speech

Paul Koptak: The last two proverbs of **chapter 10** deal with the topic of **speech**. This final proverb pair in the chapter should be read together, since the second lines of both describe misuse of the tongue and mouth as "*perverse*" (**2:12, 14; 6:14; 8:13; 10:31–32; 16:28, 30**). Notice also the contrast between the mouth of the righteous and the mouth of the wicked in **10:31a, 32b**.

Lindsay Wilson: The righteous are using speech for its God-given purposes; the wicked twist speech for their own ends. Most importantly, there are set out here great incentives to belong to the righteous rather than be among the wicked.

1. Wisdom vs. Perversion

"*The mouth of the righteous flows with wisdom,*
But the perverted tongue will be cut out."

Bruce Waltke: The speech of the righteous, which is implicitly likened to fruit, is eaten with pleasure and revives whoever feasts on it. The perverse speech of wicked people, by contrast, seeks to overthrow this ethical order upheld by the LORD and expressed by his revealed wisdom (see **2:12; 8:13**). Such speech, since it does not conform to Ultimate Reality, is a lie (see **6:24**). The LORD is the Agent who cuts their tongue out, as indicated by the introductory Yahweh sayings (**vv. 22, 27**; cf. **v. 29**). He will uphold his government by purging the subversive speech that defiles his good earth, damages the community, and defies his sovereignty.

Tremper Longman: "*To be cut off*" is used throughout the Hebrew Bible to refer to punishment for unethical and uncovenantal behavior.

2. Acceptable vs. Perverted

"*The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable,*
But the mouth of the wicked, what is perverted."

Bruce Waltke: This verse now defines people's character by the nature of their speech. Seneca, the Roman philosopher of the first century B.C., observed, "Speech is the index of the mind."

TEXT: Proverbs 11:1-14

TITLE: RIGHTEOUS FUNDAMENTALS, OUTCOMES AND SPEECH

I. (:1-3) RIGHTEOUS FUNDAMENTALS

Caleb Nelson: **Honesty, the Best Policy, vv. 1-2**
A. In Commercial Dealings, **v. 1**
B. In Self-Evaluation, **v. 2**

A. (:1) Honesty in Business

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

Allen Ross: The Scriptures throughout condemn dishonesty in business (see **Lev 19:35–36; Dt 25:13–16; Am 8:5**; et al.).

Bruce Waltke: The explicit mention of the LORD's moral repugnance in **11:1**, entailing his judgment, underscores that he is the Agent determining the destiny of the righteous and the wicked. Otherwise, apart from **11:20**, he is mostly hidden in the shadows of this subunit on security and transience. . .

Ancient weights were stones … carved in shapes with a flat base, which made them easy to recognize (e.g., turtles, ducks, lions). They were often inscribed with the weight, and the standard followed. Weights were carried in a pouch or wallet (**Deut. 25:13; Mic. 6:11; Prov. 16:11**) in order that the purchaser could check with the weights current among the merchants at a given place (**Gen. 23:16**). A deceitful trader carried in his pouch differing weights (**Deut. 25:13; Prov. 16:11**), a too heavy one for purchase and a too light one for selling. Dishonest merchants outwardly defraud their neighbors and inwardly deny God. The Creator and Upholder of the moral order is repulsed by them, and his offended moral sensibility demands his active response.

Caleb Nelson: Whenever I'm filling up my car with gas, I contemplate the little stickers that say the name of the state inspector and indicate when that particular pump was last inspected. It always makes me feel good: Here, if anywhere, is a government activity we can all get behind. God loves the little "inspected" stickers. A just meter is His delight.

B. (:2) Humility in Self-Evaluation

"*When pride comes, then comes dishonor,*
But with the humble is wisdom."

George Mylne: Pride is joined with folly and ends in disgrace. The humble man is wise, and shall be exalted to honor.

Pride consists in an immoderate self-esteem and places its happiness in esteem and honor from others. No sin is more foolish than pride! It springs from ignorance of God, of ourselves and other men and by the very means which it uses for the accomplishment of its ends, ensures disappointment. In seeking glory it finds disgrace. Pride made Nebuchadnezzar a brute. Pride destroyed Herod with worms. Pride turned Lucifer into Beelzebub. By other sins, man rebels against God by pride, he usurps God's crown and dignity. No wonder, then, that God looks upon all those who are proud, and disgraces them.

Paul Koptak: *Pride* in the Old Testament is often different from our ideas of vanity and conceit (**11:2**). It points to the folly and arrogance of those who believe they can abuse others and not be brought to account. "*See what they spew from their mouths—they spew out swords from their lips, and they say, 'Who can hear us?' But you, O LORD, laugh at them*" (**Ps. 59:7–8**). Wisdom, its opposite, knows we have to give answer for our actions and therefore has a sense of boundaries.

Bruce Waltke: *Pride* (*zādôn*) denotes a psychological state of an **exaggerated opinion of oneself** that does not correspond to social reality. Its personification by the verb *comes* (*boʾ*) implies that hubris finds favor with the wicked. *Disgrace* (*qālôn*, i.e., social failure; see **3:35**) comes because the presumption of self-importance entails usurpation of authority that rightfully belongs to the LORD and others in authority, and connotes defiance and even rebellion against their rule (see **13:10; 21:24**; cf. **6:17; 16:18–19; 18:12**). The wicked invite pride to come as their guest, but, like an inseparable twin, disgrace comes along with her as an uninvited guest. The repetition of the word *then comes* (*wayyābōʾ*; see **6:11**) and the alliteration of *zādôn* and *qālôn* emphasize the inseparability of the welcome and unwelcome guests.

Allen Ross: "*Pride*" (*zādôn*; GK 2295) is literally a *boiling up*; and so hubris, an overstepping of the boundaries and insubordination, is meant. Humility describes those who know their place; but those who are proud, says Plaut, 136, are inflated to the level of self-bestowed divinity. The proud will have their egos deflated (*qālôn*, "*made light of, disgrace*").

C. (:3) Integrity in Conduct

"*The integrity of the upright will guide them,*
But the falseness of the treacherous will destroy them."

Paul Koptak: This contrast in **11:3** is between **guidance** and **destruction**. It imagines roads filled with dangers or rushing white water rivers filled with treacherous rocks. One would be glad to have a guide in such situations, and integrity promises to be that companion. The duplicity (*selep*) of the unfaithful is twisted, just as a bribe twists the words of the righteous (**Ex. 23:8; Deut. 16:19**). The verbal form of this word appears in Proverbs 13:6: "*Righteousness guards the man of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner*."

Bruce Waltke: The *integrity* (*tummat*, i.e., a wholeness, a completeness, a totality that has consequences in concrete deeds; see **2:7**) of the *upright* (*yešārîm*; see **1:3**) *leads them* (*tanḥēm*; see **6:22**) through adversity to the destined haven. The lifestyle of complete loyalty to the LORD and others is the inalienable possession of those who by definition do not stray from the divinely revealed straight path. The result of enjoying freedom within form and liberty within law leads them as a shepherd in the way of safety and salvation. Joseph's "*straight*" path to the throne of Egypt led through enslavement and prison, even as the LORD's path to the heavenly Jerusalem led through Jerusalem's cross and tomb. By contrast, the perfidy of the disloyal will boomerang with such ferocity that it will utterly devastate them.

Charles Bridges: Integrity is a most valuable guide in every perplexing situation. The single desire to know God's will so that we may do it will always bring light on our path (**Psalm 143:10**). The unfaithful who indulge in duplicity neglect this godly principle and so are destroyed.

Tremper Longman: Again, this is another permutation on the contrast drawn between the wise and the foolish. In particular, the proverb highlights **innocence** and **duplicity** as their respective traits. Innocence implies a kind of transparency that is completely missing from the duplicitous. It is used of Job in **Job 1:1** and **9:21–24** and has nothing to do with the sense of innocence that implies naïveté. **What one sees and hears honestly reflects those with integrity**. After all, they have nothing to hide. On the other hand, the faithless dissimulate. Part of this strategy may be self-protective. If people really knew what was in the minds of the faithless, they would be threatened. But according to this proverb, it is their deceit that actually leads to their destruction.

Caleb Nelson: Well, the integrity of the upright guides them. Where should I go? What career should I pursue, college should I attend, house should I buy? If you walk uprightly with God, your own integrity will guide you in answering these questions. Conversely, the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them -- in other words, the leading provided by the uprights' integrity will lead them into wholeness, prosperity, success, everything that is the opposite of destruction. Right? We can say "The principle of hedonism guides me" and "the principles of Christianity guide me." In one sense, you could pick either one of these as your moral system and let it guide you. But one will guide you to destruction, while the other will guide you to everlasting life. So seek personal integrity! It will guide you in every situation to do the right thing, the wise thing, and that practice in turn will lead you on to life. Yes, in the short term showing integrity might lead to job loss or (in some places) to martyrdom. But that is not ultimate destruction; ultimate destruction takes place when you land in Hell.

II. (:4-8) RIGHTEOUS OUTCOMES

Paul Koptak: Each verse describes either the bad consequences that come on the wicked, the rescue of the righteous, or both. There may be a chiasm; **verses 6** and **8**

seem to match regarding escape for the righteous, while **verse 7** repeats the sad end of the wicked.

Caleb Nelson: **Righteousness, the Best Protection, vv. 3-8**
A. It Guides, **v. 3**
B. It Delivers from Death, **v. 4**
C. It Protects from Sin's Snares, **vv. 5-6**
D. It Grants Enduring Hope, **v. 7**
E. It Delivers from Trouble, **v. 8**

A. (:4) Delivers from Death

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

Bruce Waltke: **God's wrath** is in view, for it is equated with death in verset B, and God alone has the power of life and death. When used in relation to God, *ʿebrâ* is a synonym of *ḥēmâ* ("*wrath*"; see **6:34**), but adds the nuance of **fierceness** to it; it expresses an overwhelming and complete devastation (**Isa. 13:9**). God's wrath burns, overflows, and sweeps away everything before it (cf. **Ezek. 22:21, 31**). On the day of the Lord's *ʿebrâ*, nothing stands before it. The wicked, who up pile wealth through injustice and oppression to protect themselves, so displease the LORD that when he releases his pent-up anger against their fortified city, it cannot save them (cf. **10:15**). The parallel "*from death*" allows one to think either of any catastrophe that strikes down wicked individuals (cf. **Isa. 10:3; Ezek. 7:19; Zeph. 1:14–18**) or of a final calamity that will happen to the wicked when the righteous will be left on the earth (see **2:21–22**).

Lindsay Wilson: The *day of wrath* (*yôm ʿebrâ*, **v. 4a**) does not refer to an end-time judgment (not a focus in the wisdom books), but rather to a **future time of disaster** such as military invasion, famine or other crisis that can sweep away carefully gathered wealth. It is a parallel expression to being destroyed in **verse 3b**. In such situations, which raise the possibility of death (**v. 4b**), what is of value is a person's righteousness or character – what we cannot lose even if everything else is taken from us.

George Mylne: Though we should allow that [riches] are of some little use in the time of prosperity, they are altogether useless in the time of calamity. When God punishes a land riches only make their owners a fairer mark, and a richer booty to the spoilers. When conscience stings its wounds are poisoned by reflections on the abuse of riches. They make death more terrible. To the wicked who possessed wealth, it shall be said at the last judgment, "*I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat*." Nothing of the world shall follow them to Hell but the bitter remembrance of the good things they possessed, and the guilt contracted by the influence of such a possession.

B. (:5-6) Smooths the Way and Delivers

Paul Koptak: **Verses 5–6** form a pair contrasting the fates of the righteous and the wicked, each beginning with the same word, "*righteousness*." "*Righteousness of the*

blameless" (**11:5**) repeats in reverse the same Hebrew roots used for "*integrity of the upright*" in **11:3** and repeats the image of the straight and safe way. . .

There is some wordplay between **11:5** and **6**; the same Hebrew root (*yšr*) is used with the righteousness that "*makes straight*" and the righteousness of "*the upright*." The contrast in the two proverbs is clear; righteousness keeps its bearer safe and free while wickedness ensnares and destroys.

Bruce Waltke: These verses are related by their common theme (i.e., **righteousness saves and apostasy damns**), by their similar syntax, and by the anaphora of initial *ṣidqat* ("*righteousness of*") in their A versets and *be* ("*by*"/"*through*") in their B versets. Both assert the contrary principles that inform the blameless/the upright and the wicked/the treacherous, linking them to **v. 3**. **Verses 5** and **6** differ essentially only in their metaphors: "*way*" (of a journey) and "*captured*" (of an animal). The straight progress of the upright along the way in **v. 5a** is escalated to their deliverance from death in **v. 6a.** The linkage shows that the straightness of the path must be evaluated in light of its outcome. The wicked of **v. 5b** are defined more precisely as **feckless apostates** in **v. 6b**, and their wickedness is traced back to **unrestrained greed**. Both verses reinforce the appeal to be wholly committed to what is right.

1. (:5) Smooths the Way

"*The righteousness of the blameless will smooth his way,*
But the wicked will fall by his own wickedness."

Tremper Longman: The righteous are on the straight path that leads to life, and the wicked are on a crooked path. Typically, the book teaches that God makes the path of the righteous easy (**3:6**), but here we learn that it is a **synergistic effort** because the behavior of the wise (here referred to as "*the innocent*") apparently makes one's life easier. That human effort does not nullify divine sovereignty may be seen in a passage like **Phil. 2:12–13**, as well as in holy-war theology, where God wins the battle but demands human participation.

2. (:6) Delivers

"*The righteousness of the upright will deliver them,*
But the treacherous will be caught by their own greed."

Lindsay Wilson: The precise scenario of **verse 6b** is not set out, but the unrestrained pursuit of lustful desires seems to be a weakness of the wicked which will be exploited by their enemies (**5:22**). Lust is both self-focused and insatiable.

C. (:7-8) Mitigates Present Trouble by Focusing on Hope of Escape

Lindsay Wilson: The **finality of death** is an important reminder, as death puts an end to any future plans and money-making schemes.

1. (:7) Expectation of the Wicked Extinguished at Death

"*When a wicked man dies, his expectation will perish,*
And the hope of strong men perishes."

Paul Koptak: This proverb reflects on the experience of hope and rewards. Because the wicked have no desire for the enduring treasures of wisdom, their hopes and dreams die with them.

Tremper Longman: Rather than an antithetical parallelism, it is a good example of a parallelism where the second colon specifies the thought of the first colon. The teaching of the proverb serves as a **warning against putting hope in the power of money**.

George Mylne: Men derive almost the whole of their happiness, from the hope of some future good. The wicked man laughs at the righteous, because he lives by hope. The wicked man himself does the same, with this difference that while the hopes of the righteous are eternal, those of the wicked are bounded by time. The expectation of the one has for its object things heavenly and durable while that of the other is fixed on objects circumscribed by the present life.

The present situation of the wicked man never yields him the pleasure which he wishes and expects but there is ever something in view, in which, could he but obtain it, he would find rest. If his hopes are deferred his heart is sick; if they are accomplished he is still unsatisfied; but he comforts himself with some other hope, like a child, who thinks he sees a rainbow on the top of a neighboring hill, and runs to take hold of it but sees it as far removed from him as before.

Thus the life of a wicked man is spent in vain wishes, and toils, and hopes until death kills at once his body, his hope, and his happiness.

2. (:8) Escape for the Righteous

"*The righteous is delivered from trouble,*
But the wicked takes his place."

Bruce Waltke: **V. 8** functions as a janus between **vv. 1–8** and **9–15**. **Verse 9** is linked with **vv. 10–15** by the theme of "*words in community*" and other poetic features.

Tremper Longman: This optimistic proverb suggests that **in the end people get what they deserve**. It implies that the righteous sometimes find themselves in distress, trouble of some sort that arouses anxiety. However, eventually they will be delivered from that distress. Even more encouraging to those who desire to see things work out so that the righteous get their reward and the wicked get their just punishment, the wicked will eventually get what they deserve: distress!

Such teaching would help the righteous get through their struggles. We see this developed in **Ps. 73**. The psalmist confesses that at one point he was confused and even angry as he struggled in life but saw his wicked neighbors living what seemed to be

carefree lives. Finally, through what seems to amount to a divine revelation of sorts, he recognized that present realities obscured the real nature of things. **Ultimately, everyone gets what they deserve.**

If this proverb does not assume a concept of the afterlife, serious reflection would have led to the conclusion that it could only really be true if there were an afterlife. After all, experience teaches us that some godly people go to the grave steeped in trouble, whereas some wicked people prosper till the bitter end.

III. (:9-14) RIGHTEOUS SPEECH

Caleb Nelson: God blesses a whole society through the words and for the sake of the righteous people within it.

I. Godless Talk Destroys One's Neighbor, **v. 9a**
II. Righteousness Blesses One's Neighbor, **vv. 9b-11**
    A. Knowledge Delivers the Righteous, **v. 9b**
    B. The Prosperity of the Righteous Brings Joy to the Community, **v. 10**
    C. Righteous Speech Exalts the Community, **v. 11**
III. The Wisdom of Keeping Quiet About Your Neighbors, **vv. 12-13**
    A. Fools Show Contempt for their Neighbors, **v. 12a**
    B. The Wise Remain Silent, **v. 12b**
    C. Fools Reveal Others' Secrets, **v. 13a**
    D. The Faithful Keep a Confidence, **v. 13b**
IV. The Wisdom of Speaking to Your Neighbors, **v. 14**
V. The Wisdom of Hating Co-Signing for your Neighbor, **v. 15**

Paul Koptak: These next six proverbs are clustered around the theme of **speech**; all except **verse 13** begins with the Hebrew letter *bet*. The first four are placed in a chiastic order according to key words: neighbor (**11:9**), wicked/city (**11:10–11**), neighbor (**11:12**). The last two contrast the time to keep a secret quiet (**11:13**) and a time to make good counsel public (**11:14**). Perhaps readers are meant to read **11:12–14** together as they develop the theme of helpful and damaging use of speech set out in **11:9.** If we take **11:9–14** as a section, the theme of speech that destroys is viewed from a number of angles and set in contrast with a number of virtues.

Peter Wallace: **Verses 9** and **14** again bracket this section with their concern for the contrast between the effects of wise and foolish speech upon the community. **Verses 12-13** then move from the city to the neighbor.

A. (:9) Contrast: Damaging vs. Helpful Speech

"*With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor,*
But through knowledge the righteous will be delivered."

B. (:10-11) Righteous Speech Blesses Your City

Bruce Waltke: The first quatrain is tightly yoked together by catchwords or synonyms, syntax, and theme. The first half of each of their four versets states **the cause**, their second halves **the consequence**. The just fates of the righteous and the wicked cause the community to rejoice (**v. 10**) because its well-being depends on them. These verses strengthen the appeal to be righteous, not wicked, by contrasting the social assessment of their fates. The righteous prosper with the community's full approval (cf. **10:8; 28:12, 28; 29:2, 16**), but the wicked perish in opprobrium.

1. (:10) Brings Joy to Your City

"*When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices,*
And when the wicked perish, there is glad shouting."

Allen Ross: The common theme of this line is **joy**; it comes from either the success of the righteous or the ruin of the wicked (so an antithetical idea is present). Examples are found in **2 Kings 11:20** and **Esther 8:15**. Kidner, 91, notes: "However drab the world makes out virtue to be, it appreciates the boon of it in public life."

Caleb Nelson: So if you care about your city, but you have to choose, what should you pursue: Community activism or personal holiness? You won't find a lot in Proverbs about community activism. You won't see many verses about how the righteous demonstrate with street signs while the wicked stay home and do their own work. But you will see statements like this one, that do in fact say that the best thing you can do for your city is to be righteous. When you as a righteous person experience God's blessing, that raises your whole community.

2. (:11) Exalts Your City

"*By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted,*
But by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down."

Paul Koptak: The life of the **city** is affected for better or worse by the character of its citizens. The blessing of the upright is most likely the good (*ṭob*) that their ways bring about in **11:10**. The righteous not only bring good on themselves but on others. Here is good news that may even have an element of surprise, even while the contrast is obvious; the destructive talk of the wicked does widespread damage.

Allen Ross: The "*blessing of the upright*" (*birkat yešārîm*) consists in the beneficent words and deeds that bring enrichment to a community. But the words of the wicked have a disastrous effect on society, endangering, weakening, and ruining it with demoralizing, slanderous, and malicious criticism.

C. (:12-13) Righteous Speech Exercises Self-Restraint Towards Your Neighbor

Bruce Waltke: The quatrain further describes the character and speech of the wicked and the righteous (cf. **vv. 9, 10b, 11b**) and protects **vv. 10–11** against abuse. **Verses 12–**

13 teach self-restraint in speech "and the destructive effects on the community of derogatory comments by individuals." The offensive remarks of the slanderer (**v. 13a**) stand in sharp contrast to the silence of the wise in the face of insults (**v. 12b**). The pairing suggests that slander (**v. 12a**) is rooted in contempt (**v. 13a**), while prudent silence (**v. 12b**) is rooted in a faithful spirit (**v. 13b**). The alliteration of *ḥārēs* "*tear down*" and *ḥāraš* "*keep silent*" also binds the verses. . . The causes of contempt versus faithfulness frame the pair (**vv. 12a, 13b**) and their results of prudent silence (**v. 12b**) versus foolish slander (**v. 13a**) form its inner core. These verses continue to imply that the righteous must endure the temporary triumph of the wicked.

Lindsay Wilson: Two practices to avoid are **belittling/deriding** (*bāz*) your neighbours (**v. 12a**) and **slandering** them (*rākîl*, **v. 13a**; see **20:19**). In any community you become aware of the failings of others, but there is a real choice over whether to broadcast them publicly. A wise person (one of understanding, *tĕbûnâ*, **v. 12b**) remains silent about such matters. Living in community sometimes makes us aware of the secrets that others hide, which may have the potential to cause them great damage if the secret becomes more widely known. Those whose habit is to malign others (lit. '*walking slander'*, **v. 13a**, meaning that this is their way of life; niv '*gossip*' is a little weak) expose what was said to them in confidence or in secret. **Verse 13b** highlights that it is a matter of character (being trustworthy in spirit) to keep such a thing covered (provided keeping silent will not damage others), rather than delight in bringing another person down (**10:12**).

1. (:12) Don't Speak with Contempt against Your Neighbor

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

Paul Koptak: The words of the wicked destroy by deriding others or by breaking confidence; thus, **11:12–13** go together. The discerning and trustworthy person keeps silent on both counts.

Charles Bridges: Pride and uncharitableness show a man to be devoid of judgment. He is ignorant of himself, his neighbor, and his God.

2. (:13) Don't Gossip about Your Neighbor

"*He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets,*
But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter."

Allen Ross: **Verse 13** contrasts the gossip and the "*trustworthy man*" (*neʾeman-rûaḥ*; lit., "*trustworthy spirit*"). The talebearer goes from one to another and speaks disparagingly about someone in a malicious manner; he cannot wait to share secrets that should be kept (see **Lev 19:16; Jer 9:3**). The talebearer is despised because he cannot be trusted.

D. (:14) Listen to an Abundance of Wise Counselors

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

Peter Wallace: What voices are you listening to? If you only listen to voices that agree with you -- then you do not really have an *abundance of counselors*! I want my governors and presidents listening to a wide variety of experts. I don't expect that the experts will govern the country. No -- that is the magistrate's job! Epidemiologists and experts in infectious disease are important [speaking in the context of the COVID pandemic]. But so are experts in business and economics. A wise leader needs to listen to all the best information he can find and make his decisions based on "*an abundance of counselors*."

Tremper Longman: The point of this observation is clear. **Planning is pivotal for the survival of a city**. In this, we seem to be getting back to the topic of **vv. 10** and **11**, where it is the wise who are good for society. Without guidance a city falls, but with counsel the city will have victory. The language suggests a **military situation** and reminds us of Qoheleth's anecdote in **Eccles. 9:13–15a**:

> *Moreover I observed this example of wisdom under the sun, and it made a big impression on me. There was a small city and there were a few people in it. A great king invaded and surrounded it. He built huge siege works against it. A poor but wise man was found in it, and he rescued the city by means of his wisdom. . . .[13]*

Guidance (*taḥbulôt*) and *counsel* (*yʿṣ*) come only from those with wisdom, after all. So it is the wise who are needed at times of crisis. Guidance may have the specific sense of military strategy here and in **20:18** as well as **24:6** (the latter is very close to **11:14** in thought as well as wording). Qoheleth's anecdote goes on to show the **limitations of wisdom**, at least for the one who possesses it:

> *. . . but no one remembered that poor wise man. And I said, "Wisdom is better than power." But the wisdom of the poor man was despised! His words were not heeded.* **(Eccles. 9:15b–16)**

Proverbs, though, is not concerned about the ultimate value of wisdom in and of itself. It simply makes the point that **military planning by those who possess wisdom is a valuable, indeed lifesaving commodity.**

George Mylne: But in the affairs of countries, public calamity must be the inevitable consequence of the sovereign's being not wise enough to know his need of asking and following the advice of wise men. If he asks the advice of wise men and yet follows that of fools, he is no better than Rehoboam, who by such conduct divided his kingdom, and but for the kindness and faithfulness of God to David, in reserving two tribes to his grandson, would have lost it all!

Solomon had wisdom not only to teach but to practice this maxim. He had wise counselors under whom his kingdom flourished, and their counsels might have preserved the kingdom in the hands of his son. But God confuses those whom he intends to punish; and there is not a plainer evidence of confusion than when men presume on their own judgments, or prefer the counsel of the vain and foolish, to that of the sober and the wise. Great is the judgment with which God visits a land, when he removes wise and faithful counselors from the management of its concerns. In our intercession for kings, then, let us pray that God may furnish them with good counselors, and with wisdom to make a proper use of them.

Dennis Sherman: **Conclusion**: In light of **Proverbs 11:1-13**, ask yourself:

- Am I honest in all of my dealings with others?
- Does pride rear its ugly head in my life?
- Is there self-love, self-centeredness and/or self-promotion in my life?
- When people observe me, do they see much righteousness?
- Is the community where I live benefited by my presence?
- Does what comes out of my mouth express contempt for others or love and kindness?

TEXT: Proverbs 11:15-31

TITLE: NOBILITY OF CHARACTER AND GENEROSITY WILL BE REWARDED

(:15) TRANSITION

"*He who is surety for a stranger will surely suffer for it,*
But he who hates going surety is safe."

Bruce Waltke: This verse is a janus, forming a transition between speech that harms oneself, unlike the safety of counselors (**vv. 8–14**), and the danger of benevolent but risky wealth (**vv. 15–21**). "The use of wealth requires good sense not to squander it on kind but risky causes such as going bail or guaranteeing a loan for a stranger." The next subunit contrasts kindness with ill-gotten wealth.

Charles Bridges: He who puts up security for another will surely suffer, but whoever refuses to strike hands in pledge is safe. This is a repeated warning against putting up security for another (see **6:1-5**) and is meant to inculcate circumspection, not to excuse selfishness or to dry up the sources of helpful sympathy. This must not be done for a stranger (**27:13**) whose character is unknown to us. For such incautious kindness, too often done at the expense of the family, will make us suffer.

Tremper Longman: The book of Proverbs calls on people of means to be generous toward those in need (**29:7, 14**). However, it frequently warns against helping others make loans. In the first place, the Torah is against loans with interest to fellow Israelites (**Exod. 22:25–27**). Apparently, the Hebrew Bible does not have the same scruples when it comes to outsiders. The tenor of this proverb seems to be that a person could lose money from securing a loan for a non-Israelite. The potential downside erases any possible upside. See also **6:1–5; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26; 27:13**.

I. (:16-22) VIRTUE OF NOBILITY OF CHARACTER LINKED TO JUST REWARDS

Caleb Nelson: **The Character Qualities that Get Results, vv. 16-22**
A. Graciousness, Not Violence, **v. 16**
B. Mercy, Not Cruelty, **v. 17**
C. Sowing Righteousness, Not Doing Shoddy Work, **v. 18**
D. Righteousness, Not Evil, **v. 19**
E. Blamelessness, Not Perversion, **v. 20**
F. Righteous Childrearing, Not Movement Creation, **v. 21**
G. Discretion, Not Beauty, **v. 22**

Righteousness really gets results. Righteousness has surpassing cash-value. That is the message of most of our passage. But our passage also winds up with a reminder that whether you desire righteousness is an outstanding predictor of your future. The

message here is not just that it's good to be good, but even that to be good and to want good is to experience greater earthly success and receive an eternal reward.

Peter Wallace: **Verses 16-22** form an inclusio with the references to the gracious woman and the woman without discretion.

But our **chiasm** works its way in as **Verse 17** speaks of the kind man and the cruel man, while **verse 21** speaks of the evil man and the offspring of the righteous.

> **Verses 18 and 20** contrast the wages of the righteous and the wicked (**V18**) and the way the LORD looks at them (**V20**).
>
> > At the <u>center</u> of the chiasm is **verse 19**—which puts the focus on life and death, reminding us of **Proverbs 1-9.**
> >
> > *Whoever is steadfast in righteousness will live,*
> > *but he who pursues evil will die.*

A. (:16-17) Practicing Graciousness and Mercy

<u>1. (:16) Graciousness</u>

"*A gracious woman attains honor,*
And violent men attain riches."

Bruce Waltke: A single gracious woman gains glory and wealth, but many powerful men gain merely temporary wealth. Social esteem is of greater value than wealth gained by "*rude victories*" (see **11:28; 22:1; 30:8**). The greater gain of a single woman over fierce men (pl.) signals the superiority of "*grace*" to brute force. Although *gracious* (*ḥēn*; see **3:4, 22**) could refer to her physical beauty (as in **31:30**; see **4:9; 5:19**), more probably her **inner beauty** is in view. **Prov. 31:31** in fact discounts physical beauty, and the indiscreet beauty in **11:22** has as much honor as a ring of gold in a swine's snout (cf. **Eccl. 8:1; 1 Tim. 2:9, 10; 1 Pet. 3:3, 4**). Her **noble traits of character**, such as loyalty to her husband, win the community's favor (see **31:10–31**) *Woman* (*ʾēšet*) contrasts with "*violent men*"; both in gender and in number she is physically weaker than they. Nevertheless, through her nobility she lays hold of and *retains* (*titmōk*; see **3:18**) *honor* (*kābôd*), which entails wealth (see **3:16; 8:18; 22:4**). In opposition to her stand the *violent men* (*ʿārîṣîm*). The verbal root of *ʿārîṣîm* means "*to tremble*," "*to fear,*" and BDB glosses it by "*terrifying*" (**Ezek. 28:7**), "*ruthless*" (**Ps. 37:35**), and "*awe-inspiring*" (in the bad sense, **Isa. 25:3**), to which the NIV adds "*fierce*" (**Isa. 49:25**), "*cruel*" (**Jer. 15:21**), and "*mighty*" (**Jer. 20:11**) and *HALOT*, "*tyrant*." Here it is bound with "*cruel*" (**11:17**). Arrogance is the inalienable possession of this formidable enemy (**Isa. 13:11**; cf. **Ps. 86:14**). Their breath is like a storm driving against a wall (**Isa. 25:4**). Its parallels are "*wicked*" (*rāšāʿ*, **Job 15:20; 27:13**), "*mocker*" (*lēṣ*), "*those who have an eye for evil*" (**Isa. 29:20**), and "*men without regard for God*" (**Ps. 54:3[5]**). Despots *lay hold of* (*yitmekû*) wealth (*ʿōšer*), which often has a favorable sense (**Prov. 3:16; 8:18; 13:8; 14:24; 22:4**) but does not necessarily bring social esteem (**22:1**), can alienate from God (**30:8**), and can provide a false security

(**11:28**). The tyrants' best achievement becomes an invidious enemy of their lives; they possess neither the lasting fame nor the true fortune they sought (see **10:2; 11:4**).

Charles Bridges: *A kindhearted woman gains respect, but ruthless men gain only wealth*. Everywhere the great value of godliness greets us. What admirable characteristics it gives to women (**31:10**). A kindhearted woman is known, not by her outward beauty, but by her "**inner self**" (**1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Peter 3:3-4**).

- Deborah was "*a mother in Israel*" and the adviser of a wayward people (**Judges 4:4; 5:7**).
- Esther used her influence over her heathen husband for the good of her nation (**Esther 7:3-4; 9:12-13, 25**).
- Dorcas was commended for her active usefulness (**Acts 9:36**).

Such people should always receive honor and respect.

Tremper Longman: "*graceful*" is clearly contrasted with "*violent.*" Someone who is characterized by grace, thus making that one graceful (*ḥēn*), is someone who acts for the benefit of others, not expecting a return. The reward that comes to such a woman is honor. She is respected and loved by others for her actions. On the other hand, "*violence*" implies a willingness to take what is wanted, by force if necessary. The ending on the participle of the verb for "*violent*" (*ʿrṣ*) is masculine plural, thus providing a contrast with the singular woman of the first colon. The reward of such violence is wealth, which sounds good on the surface, but to make sense of the contrast, I think we must understand "**only wealth**." That is, **wealth without honor**. To be sure, Proverbs does not regard wealth as bad in and of itself, and in the right context it indeed signifies a blessing of God (**3:9–10; 8:17–21**). But Proverbs also recognizes that evil people can get wealth (**13:11**) and that such wealth often will harm those who have it (**21:6**). Indeed, when riches are said to be a blessing, it is often said to be accompanied by honor (**3:16**). It is, after all, much better to be poor with honor (and wisdom) than rich without it (**15:16, 17; 16:8, 16; 17:1; 22:1; 28:6**).

2. (:17) Mercy

"*The merciful man does himself good,*
But the cruel man does himself harm."

Bruce Waltke: Perhaps **vv. 16** and **17** are connected by *ḥēn* "*gracious*" and *ḥesed* "*kind*."

Charles Bridges: *A kind man benefits himself, but a cruel man brings trouble on himself.* Kindness is not natural benevolence, without God or godliness. It is the fruit of the Spirit, the image of our Father, and being gripped by the love of Christ (**Galatians 5:22; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Colossians 3:13**). It is not pity in words and looks. It is when our neighbor's trouble descends into the depths of our hearts and draws out from there our inner compassion. On the great day God will hoor this before the assembled universe (**Matthew 25:34-36**).

Allen Ross: This saying contrasts the consequences of dispositions: "*kindness*" (*ḥesed*) is healthy, but anger brings trouble. One's health and well-being are at risk if the personality is volatile. We may say that such raging works against a person as a part of divine justice.

Tremper Longman: Two classes of people are contrasted in this proverb. It offers itself as an observation, but as such it also clearly intends to give implicit advice. After all, one course of action leads to benefit, while the other to harm. The observation, then, is how certain actions lead to certain benefits.

The first class is composed of people whose lives are characterized by "*covenant love*" (*ḥesed*). This is the kind of love that God shows to people who are bound in a covenant relationship with him. It is a love where the interests of the other party are paramount. A person who loves another in such a way protects and does not harm the other (so other translations interpret this word as "*kind*" or "*merciful*"). This would be contrasted to cruel people, who harm others for their own gain.

The paradox of the proverb is that those who look out for others because of covenant love find that their lives are better in some unspecified way. On the other hand, those who are cruel to others end up hurting themselves.

As McKane rightly points out, this proverb shows that "there is a harmony between enlightened self-interest and the common good." In other words, community and the individual are not always pitted against each other.

Lindsay Wilson: The contrast in verse 17 is between kindness which leads to benefit, and cruelty which leads to hurt. This receives an interesting twist in noting that people who are kind benefit themselves . . . and, similarly, cruel people hurt themselves. The focus is not on God rewarding or punishing such people, but rather that **a person's character leads to certain consequences.**

B. (:18-19) Practicing Righteousness

1. (:18) Sowing Righteousness

"*The wicked earns deceptive wages,*
But he who sows righteousness gets a true reward."

Charles Bridges: The wicked man earns deceptive wages, and his life ends in disappointment (**Hebrews 3:13; Romans 6:21**). . . But the **sure reward** of the righteous makes a great contrast. . . It will probably be given to us as it is given to the farmer who has to patiently wait for the harvest. But whenever it is given, no matter how long it is delayed, it is a sure reward. Remember, righteousness is the seed,and happiness is the harvest.

Bruce Waltke: The metaphor evokes several truths.
(1) Sowing entails timely effort and investment with the hope of a reward (see **11:27**; cf. **Ps. 126:5; Matt. 6:20; Luke 16:9**). "There is no conflict between striving after the

highest degree of self-realization and serving the common good."
(2) One reaps what one sows; "*Sow for yourself righteousness* [*šedāqâ*], *reap the fruit of kindness* [*ḥesed*]" (**Job 4:8; Hos. 10:12; Prov. 22:8; 2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:7**).
(3) One reaps in fact a hundred times more than one sows (**Matt. 19:29**).
(4) The picture of broadcasting seed invokes the notion of performing many kind acts everywhere.
(5) The "*sower*" depends on God, who mysteriously provides the increase.
(6) The temporal distance between the sowing and reaping suggests that the righteous waits for his reward (**Jas. 5:7, 8**). The word "*true*" is necessarily added because in the agricultural realm the harvest is somewhat uncertain; not so in the moral sphere (cf. **Pss. 19:11[12]; 37:3–6; Isa. 32:17–18; Rev. 22:12**).

2. (:19) Steadfast in Righteousness

"*He who is steadfast in righteousness will attain to life,*
And he who pursues evil will bring about his own death."

Paul Koptak: the point is clear that immediate pursuits determine ultimate destinations.

Tremper Longman: This observation, like the previous two, clearly describes **opposite actions that lead to opposite conclusions**. Once again, the consequences are such that they are intended to influence behavior. The nature of righteousness and the pursuit of evil are not specified, but the rest of the book fills out the picture.

C. (:20-21) Blameless Life Leads to a Blessed Legacy

Bruce Waltke: God's attitude toward individuals (disgust/pleasure) in **v. 20** corresponds to the outcome of their lives (inescapable trouble/deliverance) in **v. 21**.

1. (:20) Blameless Life

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

Bruce Waltke: The heart is the source of moral conduct. The LORD is the final court of appeal, and although he alone can evaluate the heart, one's way proves whether the heart is blameless. Only he hands out life and death. The proverb calls for a transformation of human affections to correspond with God's affections. One must be sincere in his heart and constant in his way. No in-between ground is granted.

Allen Ross: The "*perverse heart*" is a twisted mind, i.e., the whole spiritual being is influenced toward evil. This inclination is an abomination to the Lord. Conversely, to please God one should follow a blameless course of life (see **2:21; 17:20**).

2. (:21) Blessed Legacy

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

D. (:22) Summary Metaphor – Inward Grace Is What Counts

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

Paul Koptak: The proverb stands out against the background of its context just the way the beauty of a gold ring stands out against the background of an ugly snout. The picture of a beautiful ornament placed where it will be covered in mud and swill suggests that **physical beauty without character is also not fitting**, out of place. "*Shows no discretion*" is (lit.) "*turns away from discernment*"; the root meaning of the verb *ṭʿm* is "*to taste*" (as in "*taste and see that the LORD is good*," **Ps. 34:8**). The meaning was extended to include "*discernment*," as in **Psalm 119:66**: "*Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commands.*" Beauty and good judgment were both found in Abigail (**1 Sam. 25:3, 33**).

Bruce Waltke: The metaphor involves the pig's obnoxious habit of eating swill and rooting in dung and its insensibility in wasting and tarnishing the precious ornament. . . Having left whatever sensible judgment of moral behavior this woman once cultivated and/or had, it implies that she has turned herself into a boorish animal in her dress, speech, and behavior. In fact, she is worse than a pig. The sow by nature is boorish, but this woman "turns aside" from her dignity. The misplaced ornaments, instead of enhancing her beauty, make her look foolishly wasteful, grotesque, and repulsive. Instead of gaining honor by her natural gift, she wins ridicule (**11:16**). The proverb instructs youth to **give priority to inner grace**, not outward beauty.

Charles Bridges: Beauty is indeed to be honored as a gift from God. Yet in itself it is a fading vanity. If the woman lacks discretion, her beauty is as misplaced and as unbecoming as a gold ring in a pig's snout. Is the ornament going to make the filthy animal beautiful? No. This unnatural combination makes it forever an object of disgust. All the charms of beauty are lost on a foolish woman. Instead of retaining her honor, she only brings disgrace on herself.

Tremper Longman: The sage, though, is writing from the perspective of the man. As one looks at a pig and sees only the gold ring, so is a man who is so enamored by a woman's physical beauty that he does not recognize her lack of discretion. The sage is warning those who will listen that the beauty is not worth all the problems that a woman's indiscretion will bring to him. Later, in the poem concerning the virtuous woman, the sage will affirm that what is really important is not charm or beauty, but rather a woman's fear of Yahweh. "Beauty without wisdom is the height of incongruity."

II. (:23-27) VIRTUE OF GENEROSITY LINKED TO FULFILMENT OF DESIRES

Chiastic structure in this section with **verse 25** receiving the focus at the heart.

Bruce Waltke: **Verses 23** and **27** form a frame around this subunit. They are yoked together by the catchword *ṭôb* "*good*" (**vv. 23a, 27a**) and by generalizations about the topic of desires and their paradoxical fulfillment. Within this frame, **vv. 23–25** flesh out the paradox that the giver gains and the victimizer victimizes himself (see **vv. 17–21**). More specifically, the liberality of the giver in **v. 25** elaborates on his generosity in **v. 24a**, and his hoarding in **v. 26a** elaborates on his stinginess in **v. 24b**. Catchwords unite the quatrains of **vv. 23–24** and of **vv. 25–26**.

Peter Wallace: **Verses 23-31** continue the theme of **benevolence in community**, focusing around the question of **how do you use your wealth in this life**?

We see the familiar eschatological focus in **verse 23** the desire of the righteous ends only in good; the expectation of the wicked in wrath.

What is your attitude toward your wealth? One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.

Do not hoard grain in order to drive up prices, but sell it so that others may live and bless you!

Do not trust in your riches, because in the end, they will fail. Rather — use your riches to love God and neighbor!

Verse 30 comes to the heart of the matter: *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and whoever captures souls is wise*.

Jesus has borne good fruit—because he is indeed the tree of life.

A. (:23) Seeking Good Should Be the Goal

"*The desire of the righteous is only good,*
But the expectation of the wicked is wrath."

Paul Koptak: The righteous desiring good, receive good; the wicked, hoping for gain, receive their own destruction in return. In this way, the hope or expectation of the wicked dies with them. This verse makes the connection of the verses in **11:20–23** clear, pitting good desires against wicked hope.

Bruce Waltke: The *desire of the righteous* (*taʾawat ṣaddiqîm*; see **10:24b**) denotes their aspirations rooted in their nature to do good to others. . . The wrath the wicked hoped to inflict on others comes on them. They hoped for prosperity by overthrowing others, but they are rewarded instead with God's wrath.

Allen Ross: The consequences of hope are determined by moral character. God rewards the righteous with prosperity; wrath eventually comes on the wicked.

Lindsay Wilson: The desire of the righteous – which might include pleasing God, having your character shaped by wisdom, and treating others rightly – results in what is good. On the other hand, the self-focused hope or expected outcomes of the wicked lead only to wrath, which seems elliptical for (a day of) wrath or judgment (see also **11:5–8**). The implication is clear: make your goals those of the righteous, not those of the wicked.

B. (:24) Liberality Rewarded over Withholding – Hoarding Makes You Poor

"*There is one who scatters, yet increases all the more,*
And there is one who withholds what is justly due, but it results only in want."

George Mylne: **Liberality** is one eminent branch of the character of the righteous but because there are many objections in the heart of man against the practice of it, urgent motives are here addressed to us. The instructions delivered in this and the four following verses, will, if they are but believed, be a sufficient answer to every objection.

Jonathan Akin: Some things that seem wise in human eyes are actually foolish in God's economy. Human wisdom would say being stingy with wealth is a way to hold on to is, but divine wisdom says giving wealth away is what will enrich a person. That instruction may seem counterintuitive, but it is godly wisdom.

C. (:25) Generosity Rewarded with Prosperity – Generosity Makes You Rich

"*The generous man will be prosperous,*
And he who waters will himself be watered."

Bruce Waltke: This verse elaborates the truth of reciprocity (**v. 24**) by <u>two images</u>:

- "*fat*" from the realm of animal husbandry and
- "*drench*" from the realm of horticulture.

The double image functions to underscore the certainty of reciprocity for being generous (see **10:26**).

D. (:26) Liberality Rewarded over Withholding

"*He who withholds grain, the people will curse him,*
But blessing will be on the head of him who sells it."

BruceWaltke: The paradox that **generosity gains** and **niggardliness negates** is now put in terms of selling grain, presumably at normal market value versus hoarding it implicitly in starvation to drive up the price. As for the one who *withholds* (*mōnēaʿ*; see **1:15**) refers to the trader who holds back from sale life's subsistence, exploiting the need of others to advantage himself.

Tremper Longman: As with the previous two verses, the teaching encourages generosity or at least distribution over against hoarding. The principle again is that good benefits accrue to those who have the interests of the community in mind.

E. (:27) Seeking Good Should Be the Goal

"*He who diligently seeks good seeks favor,*
But he who searches after evil, it will come to him."

Bruce Waltke: The synonyms for seeking, both of which connote energetic activity to fulfill desires, show that the benevolent serve the needy out of the desires of the heart, not out of duress, self-interest, or hypocrisy. Moreover, they are pious because they seek God's favor, though they win human applause. The proverb admonishes its audience to be like Jesus, who went about doing good and was rewarded with eternal life (cf. **Matt. 25:35, 36; Jas. 1:27**). The truth, "*seek, and you will find*," takes on new meaning: what you seek for others, you will find for yourself (cf. **Matt. 6:33; 7:7**).

Charles Bridges: All of us are living with a stupendous measure of vital activity for good or for evil. Man was never intended, least of all the Christian, to be idle. Our divine Master went about doing good, always actively helping people. Anyone who dos not live like this is a counterfeit. Usefulness is everything. We should feel ashamed of our depravity – that we could ever spend a day without seeking good. Nor must we wait to have opportunity brought to us. We mut seek it diligently, getting up early and springing with joy to the work. Let us wake to the conscious responsibility of having the means of blessing our fellow sinners in our hands. Let us each do what we can. Whether this is a little or a lot, do it prayerfully, and faithfully. Do not be put off by trifling obstacles. Do not let your inability to do a great deal prevent you from doing what you are capable of. God honors a little strength (**Revelation 3:8**), the single talent (**2 Corinthians 8:12**), provided that it is dedicated to his service.

III. (:28-31) VIRTUE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WILL BE REWARDED

A. (:28) Focus of Faith Determines Success

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

Allen Ross: Security and prosperity are determined by the object of faith. The righteous trust in the Lord and flourish. The image of the "*green leaf*" is a figure of prosperity and fertility throughout the ancient Near East. The image of falling uses the analogy of the physical act to portray coming to ruin in life.

B. (:29) Futility of the Foolish

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

Lindsay Wilson: This makes good sense if **finances** are still in view, rather than describing the kind of trouble people may bring to their household. The foolish use of money would lead to them being shut out from receiving any substantial inheritance – all they get is wind! Such a person is the fool of the second half of the verse and will rightly be only a servant to those who are wise of heart.

George Mylne: A man is a plague to his family:

- when he is of a domineering and quarrelsome temper bursting into passion at every trifling omission of his will and pleasure;
- when by covetousness he oppresses his servants and children with bondage and hard labor, scarcely allowing them to enjoy life;
- when by prodigality he wastes the bread and portion of his children;
- when, by his disregard to mercy and justice he brings the curse of God on himself and his house;
- when, by impiety he neglects the spiritual welfare of his family, and encourages them in evil by a bad example.

The troubler of his house shall possess vanity, disappointment, and misery. The evils that he brings to his dependents, are doubled to himself. Those who might be his best friends he makes his enemies. And his vices, so troublesome to others produce in the end torment and ruin to himself. He has all the marks of a fool, and through the natural consequences of his folly, and the merited judgment of God he is likely to be reduced to a slavish dependence on the wise of heart, who show their wisdom by such a government of their families, as promotes the holiness and happiness of those whom Providence has entrusted to their care.

Caleb Nelson: Solomon says that the fool who lacks the capacity for self-direction toward the good will end up as a slave to a wiser person. In our society, this slavery takes the form of terrible credit scores, welfare checks, and subsidized housing or even outright homelessness — but it is nonetheless a form of slavery in a very real sense. Be a fool, and become a slave.

C. (:30) Fruit of the Righteous

"*The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,*
And he who is wise wins souls."

E. (:31) Just Retribution for Both

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

Lindsay Wilson: As a summary of the chapter, this verse affirms that the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked punished in this life (on earth). This reveals that the focus of wisdom is on **retribution in this life**, which is developed in NT terms to focus also on the life to come.

Paul Koptak: it seems clear enough that a straightforward statement of **just rewards** both summarizes the theme of the chapter and lends its assurance that Yahweh hates perversity and loves righteousness; therefore, rewards will be forthcoming (cf. **Prov. 11:21**).

Tremper Longman: The verse addresses the issue of **retribution**. The rhetorical question format of the verse may assume that there was some question about this, as

surely there must have been and as books like Ecclesiastes **(7:15–18**) and Job seem to confirm. Proverbs suggests that if all things are equal, retribution will happen on earth.

However, one might misunderstand this verse to say that the righteous are paid back with blessing and the wicked with punishment. The verse may actually suggest that even the righteous are paid back for their less heinous offenses (see **Eccles. 7:20** for the acknowledgment that the righteous also commit offenses). If so, how much more will those who are worse get what is coming to them?

This seems to be the understanding of **1 Pet. 4:18**, which quotes the Greek version:

> *If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner*? (**NRSV**)

George Mylne: Believers smart for sins committed through infirmity, fully forgiven through the blood of Christ, and sincerely lamented by themselves. But who knows the power of God's anger in crushing the wicked, when the day of grace is past, and the time is come to make the praise of God known in the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction! "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved then what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

TEXT: Proverbs 12:1-12

TITLE: ROOTED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS – STABLE, UPRIGHT AND FRUITFUL – EXERCISING DISCERNMENT

I. (:1-3) STABILITY IN LIFE

A. (:1) Embrace Discipline

"*Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge,*
But he who hates reproof is stupid."

Paul Koptak: There is a difference between loving discipline -- teaching and correction that warn of possible errors -- and correction, which speaks to errors already committed. "*Discipline*" (*musar*) has appeared in every previous chapter except chapters 2 and 11 and it will appear again in **13:1**. The first line of **12:1** repeats "*love*" for emphasis, for readers know how rare that love is. Those who pride themselves on knowledge often avoid correction, yet those who love the truth want to learn when they are in the wrong.

Allen Ross: Those who wish to improve themselves must learn to accept correction and learn from it. This proverb adds the contrast that to refuse correction is brutish ("*stupid*" is *bāʿar*, descriptive of a dumb animal). It is almost as though one distinction between the human and the brute is this rational feature of being able to receive discipline.

George Mylne: But he who hates instruction, and cannot endure the reproof of love is brutish. He is like the horse or the mule, which bites and kicks at the man who performs a painful operation upon it, though absolutely necessary for removing a dangerous distemper. Or he is like a dog, or sow, which will show as much rage at the man that casts a pearl before it, as if he were killing it with a stone. He is surely a brute, and not a rational creature, who has swallowed poison, and will rather allow it to take its course, than admit the necessary relief of medicine, lest he should be obliged to confess his folly, in exposing himself to the need of it.

Lindsay Wilson: The idea of the first half is that discipline leads to greater knowledge (see also **9:9**), while the implication of what follows is that those who reject or resist (hate) correction do not grow in understanding. It is not simply that they make a stupid decision in rejecting reproof, but that the result of their decision is that they end up being less wise.

Tremper Longman: The sages felt that **mistakes provided opportunities for learning**. They also apparently assumed that everyone would make mistakes along the way. What they could not tolerate, however, was an **attitude of defensiveness** that refuses to admit mistakes. True learners, truely wise persons, are those who desire to know when they have done wrong so that they can change their behavior. Thus, the wise person loves "*discipline*" (*mûsār*, see **1:2**) and "*correction*" (*tôkaḥat*, see **1:23**). It is stupid to resist criticism because it means that a person will perpetuate wrong behavior. The word

"*dullard*" (*bāʿar*) is strong and refers to a person "who does not have the rationality that differentiates men from animals (**Ps. 73:22**)."

The principle expressed here reminds us why the book of Proverbs so prizes humility over pride. Humility allows one to hear words of criticism and creates an openness to change, whereas pride does the opposite. Humility and the ability to hear correction thus provide the road to success and life; pride leads to failure and ultimately death.

Caleb Nelson: A rooted life grows in the soil of hearing rebuke. Intellectual discipline begins with learning that you're wrong. Now, obviously you shouldn't throw out everything you know every time someone says "I think that may not be correct." You'd change your opinion twenty times a day. But the minimum that's being talked about here is giving fair consideration to it every time someone tells you that you're wrong.

Because really, honestly, if you can't hear you're wrong, you're stupid. We have all been taught for our whole lives that folly is a moral condition, not an intellectual one, and that some very smart people can be fools. But brothers and sisters, that's not the whole story. **Moral conditions become intellectual conditions** . That's the point of this verse. The person who is sunk in pride to the point where he can't hear that he's wrong is stupid. He's not just morally evil. He's not just wrong. He's not just arrogant. He's also a dummy.

This is true across the board — individually, ecclesiastically, socially, politically. The person who can't hear that he's wrong is morally evil and intellectually blighted. Brothers and sisters, to reject discipline and refuse to learn from it, to reject correction and refuse to change, is to be like a brute, as the KJV has it. It's to be stupid. And we wonder why the products of an educational and political system saturated with moral folly are intellectual pygmies. It's no mystery. And if we submit to that system, if we embrace the folly of arrogance, the folly of socialism, the folly of prelacy, the folly of intersectional feminism, the folly of race-baiting or racism, then we too will be first evil and then stupid.

B. (:2) Exercise Discernment

"*A good man will obtain favor from the LORD,*
But He will condemn a man who devises evil."

George Mylne: When our Lord was upon earth, he revealed and condemned the corrupt hearts of many hypocritical rogues and at the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, no vain pretender to goodness shall stand in the congregation of the righteous. Even those who refused to minister to the necessities of others, shall be commanded to Hell. How shall they escape, whose hearts were pre-occupied with wicked devices, to the ruin or damage of those who were made of the same blood with themselves!

C. (:3) Endure Steadfastly -- Stand Firm

"*A man will not be established by wickedness,*
But the root of the righteous will not be moved."

Peter Wallace: What does it mean **to be established**? (In Hebrew the word means "*to be firm, to be grounded, to be anchored*".)

Paul Koptak: The Hebrew phrase "*root of the righteous*" repeats in **12:12**, where that root flourishes, another symbol of **endurance**. Here that root is (lit.) "*never moved*." Yahweh told the prophet Jeremiah that he would pull up the roots of those who wanted to establish themselves through wickedness (**Jer. 1:9–10**); those who would make themselves as strong as trees turn out to be nothing more than weeds. The presence of Yahweh named in **Proverbs 12:2** lingers in this saying. It reminds the reader that no one lives independently, especially the wicked. In fact, the wicked can be sure they will perish, as has already been stated in **10:30**.

Tremper Longman: What constitutes **stability** is not clearly stated, but we may presume that the lives of the righteous are not rocked by troubles and setbacks as envisioned for the wicked. There may be a paradox involved here. People perform wicked acts to get ahead in life (steal money, cheat others, lie to cover their tracks), but according to the sages, these acts do not lead to stability but to trouble. Wickedness complicates life by making it tumultuous. The proverb is an observation that serves to motivate its hearers toward righteousness.

Charles Bridges: The condition of the righteous is firm and cannot be shaken. Their leaves may fall in the wind. Their branches may tremble in the storm. But they are rooted in God and cannot be moved. This is a bright prospect for the church, against whom not even the gates of hell can prevail (**Matthew 16:18**).

II. (:4-8) UPRIGHT IN CHARACTER AND SPEECH

A. (:4) Virtuous Wife

"*An excellent wife is the crown of her husband,*
But she who shames him is as rottenness in his bones."

Paul Koptak: Once again, the focus is on the man's decisions about character. While we may rightly reject the thought that a woman only exists to do a man good, we do not have to reject the principle of choosing one's life partner wisely, true for both men and women. Directed toward men, this proverb urges its young readers to value character above beauty (cf. **31:29–30**), but all readers are instructed to hold character as the most important quality to seek in a mate.

Allen Ross: The moral character of a woman affects her husband's enjoyment of life. The contrast is between a wife of noble character (*ʾēšet-ḥayil*, as in **31:10**) and a "*disgraceful wife*" (*mebîšâ*, lit., "*one who puts to shame*," i.e., lowers her husband's standing in the community). A "*crown*" is a symbol of honor and renown; but the

negative side, using the figure of "*decay in his bones*," is that the disgrace will eat away her husband's strength and destroy his happiness.

B. (:5) Righteous Intentions

"*The thoughts of the righteous are just,*
But the counsels of the wicked are deceitful."

Lindsay Wilson: A contrast is made between the '*plans*' (niv, *maḥšěbôt*, better than *thoughts*, esv) thought up by the righteous and the expressed thoughts (counsels/advice) of the wicked (**v. 5**). These thoughts are set out respectively as either *just* or *deceitful*.

Tremper Longman: Again, this proverb contains a general observation, in this case to serve as a warning when listening to the advice of others and perhaps to motivate sages to be just in their own giving of advice. The righteous help people navigate life not just for their own benefit but also for the benefit of others. On the other hand, there are hidden motives behind the advice that the wicked give a person about the future.

C. (:6) Impactful Words

"*The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood,*
But the mouth of the upright will deliver them."

Tremper Longman: The proverb is an observation on the consequences that flow from the speech of the "*wicked*" and from those "*with integrity*," two words used to indicate the realms of fools and the wise. As we might expect, the words of the wicked lead to a negative end, even a violent death. It is a little unclear, perhaps intentionally, whether the ambush comes on those who listen to the advice of the wicked, whose guidance is fraudulent (see the previous verse), or on the wicked themselves. Certainly, the teaching of Proverbs affirms both results (**11:9**).

In the same way, it is not clear whether the words (indicated by the mouth from which the words flow) of those with integrity saves them from jams or saves those who listen to their advice. But again, the sage would affirm both results. Like the previous verse, this proverb serves to warn its hearers to **be discerning** as they listen to the speech of others (**12:13**).

D. (:7) Enduring Stability

"*The wicked are overthrown and are no more,*
But the house of the righteous will stand."

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 7** gives a summary verdict of the outcome of these two competing options. The wicked who sought to ambush with their words (**v. 6a**) are themselves overthrown and destroyed (**v. 7a**), but the righteous will stand firm (**v. 7b**).

George Mylne: Evil shall slay the wicked, so that they shall have no more existence in that world where their hopes and happiness lay and their existence in the eternal world

shall be an everlasting curse. But the righteous shall be established, and their seed with them.

E. (:8) Wise Insight

"*A man will be praised according to his insight,*
But one of perverse mind will be despised."

Allen Ross: This saying makes a point about the **appreciation of clear thinking**. Praise for a person is in proportion to or "*according to*" (*lepî,* from *peh*; lit., "*mouth*") one's wisdom. The term for "*wisdom*" (*śekel*, lit., "*intelligent*," as in **1Sa 25:3**) refers to the capacity to think straight. The "*warped mind*" is *naʿawēh-lēb*—i.e., a crooked heart that lacks the ability to see things as they really are and so makes wrong choices. No praise exists here.

Lindsay Wilson: *Good sense* (*śēkel;* niv, '*prudence*'; it can mean intelligence, craftiness, success) is commended and contrasted with a mind twisted or made crooked – one that does not see things as they are. This provides a criterion for evaluating various thoughts and actions. Do they conform to **good sense** or are they the result of twisted thinking?

Tremper Longman: A **distressed mind** would not think clearly and thus would not arrive at the same helpful insight expected to come from the individual in the first colon. Thus, instead of praise, this person would receive shame.

Dennis Sherman: Even people in the world often highly regard the common sense of a person who fears God:

- Joseph praised by Pharaoh – **Genesis 41:39**
- Daniel praised by Nebuchadnezzar – **Daniel 1:9ff**
- The shrewd manager by his master (parable told by Jesus) – **Luke 16:8**

III. (:9-12) FRUITFUL IN OUTCOMES

A. (:9) Reality More Important than Appearances

"*Better is he who is lightly esteemed and has a servant,*
Than he who honors himself and lacks bread."

Allen Ross: The point seems to be that some people live beyond their means in a vain show (*mitkabbēd*, "*pretend to be somebody*," a Hithpael participle from *kābēd,* "*to be weighty, honored*"), whereas if they lived modestly they could have some of the conveniences of life, e.g., a servant.

Lindsay Wilson: The issue of **status** emerges. A comical picture is drawn of the one who tries to project an image of being successful (v. 9b, *play the great man*, esv; '*pretend to be somebody'*, niv), but uses all his resources on keeping up appearances so that he has no food. In the first 'better than' proverb of the sentence sayings, such a person is contrasted with a lowly person of good sense who is content with his actual

position, and so is still able to afford a servant. It is a **contrast between image and real benefit.**

George Mylne: Oh! how much better and wiser were it to revere the providence of God, which fixes the lot of men and to accommodate our minds to our circumstances, however narrow! In this way, we may hope to enjoy the comforts, or at least the necessities of life with composed minds, and be able to serve the Lord without distraction. If men should despise us because we cannot live as wealthy men do, it is not difficult to determine whether their opinion or our own peace of mind, is to be preferred. Whatever men may say at present yet afterwards shall a man be commended according to his wisdom.

To live above our income, that we may be admired in the world, is to rebel against divine providence, and to forget him who used to feed on barley bread and fish, while employed in accomplishing the work of human salvation.

B. (:10) Compassion for Animals (Inferiors) Demonstrates Inward Character

"*A righteous man has regard for the life of his beast,*
But the compassion of the wicked is cruel."

Allen Ross: Compassion for animals indicates one's character. The righteous are kind to all God's creation (see **Dt 25:4**) because they have received his bounty. Toy, 248, suggests the analogy that if one is kind to animals, one will surely be kind to humans. Greenstone, 129, adds that even when the wicked are moved to compassion, they often manifest it in a cruel way.

Tremper Longman: The contrast is between the **opposite sensibilities** of the righteous and the wicked. Righteous persons are so sensitive to others that they are sensitive even to their animals. One can imagine just how carefully they would treat their fellow human beings. On the other hand, even the compassion of the wicked is cruel. That is, even their best efforts are dangerous. That *cruelty* (*ʾakzārî*) can lead to violence is seen in **11:17**. We are not to restrict the statement about the cruelty of the wicked only to their actions toward animals.

George Mylne: A righteous man's mercy diffuses itself not only over the most abject of his neighbors but even to creatures without reason. He will not deprive his animal of its food and rest, nor oppress it with unreasonable toil, nor sport himself with the misery and pain of those creatures which God has subjected to his power. He considers them as servants to be employed for his advantage but not to be tyrannized over.

Dennis Sherman: God has compassion for animals and in the Law He commanded Israel to share His Sabbath with them. Providing for the needs of the working ox functions in the law as a proverb for taking care of one's workers – **Deuteronomy 25:4; 1 Corinthians 9:9-10**

C. (:11) Work Ethic Should be Coupled with Contentment

"*He who tills his land will have plenty of bread,*
But he who pursues vain things lacks sense."

Allen Ross: One ensures income through diligent work and not through unfounded speculation. *Rêqîm* means "*vain things*" or "*empty things*"; here it refers to "*fantasies*" (so NIV). Plaut, 145, advises that on the basis of this truth people should do their work and not run after some dream of a quick profit.

Tremper Longman: The emphasis here is not so much on lack of exertion, but rather that **energy is misdirected**. Fools, here characterized by lack of heart, exert energy ("*pursue*"), but what they pursue lacks substance. Perhaps it may be said that those who lack substance (heart) pursue that which lacks substance ("*emptiness*"). That emptiness is not specified is intentional and can be concretized to fit the situation.

George Mylne: The business of the farmer is so honorable, that it is here used by Solomon to signify every useful profession. Kings themselves are served by the field, and the only two universal monarchs practiced farming.

The Spirit of God here teaches us, that we ought to have a useful profession, and to follow it with diligence, minding our own business, and not meddling with affairs in which we have no concern.

That we shall be **satisfied with bread**, is the encouragement held out to pursue such a course as this. Some people think that they cannot have enough, unless they have more than the necessities and decent comforts of life; but we are here instructed that bread should satisfy our desires, unless God is pleased to bestow more upon us. Having food and clothing, **let us be content**. There are few who lack these and yet few are content. There are others who think that they will not be able to live by their business, without over-reaching their neighbors, by means of those underhand practices which custom has interwoven with many professions. But says the wise man, "*He who works his land shall have enough*;" and Paul tells us, that he may have something more to give to him who is needy.

To be satisfied with bread, is a happy temper of mind, and is commonly the portion of the man of industry, which not only procures bread but gives it a relish unknown to men that are above labor. A dinner of green herbs is commonly a sweeter meal to the laborer, and followed by more refreshing sleep than all the luxuries of high life to a man of fortune.

"*But he who chases vain* (or idle) *fantasies lacks judgment*." The idle man deserves the name of a fool; nor can he clear himself of it by alleging, that the love of company, or the example of others, allures him to this course of life. It must be both sin and folly for a man, whatever reasons he pretends for it, to indulge himself in a vice by which he endeavors to elude the sentence passed upon fallen man, and breaks so many commandments of God. The idle person weakens the powers of his mind, and destroys

the vigor of his constitution. He exposes himself as a prey to disgrace, and his soul to the temptations of the devil. He wastes his precious time, and lays himself open to all the miseries of a self-procured poverty. In short, all the creatures in Heaven, earth, and Hell, proclaim the folly of the idle man. Let us, therefore, avoid it, as a nursery of vice and misery, and fill up our days with the useful labors of our calling, and the more important concerns of our souls.

D. (:12) The Antidote for Envy = Fruit of the Righteous

"*The wicked desires the booty of evil men,*
But the root of the righteous yields fruit."

Paul Koptak: This verse restates and summarizes the **theme** of the section, this time comparing the life and work of the righteous to a root, that part of the plant that goes deep into the earth to find water and nourish the plant and its good fruit. Righteousness bears fruit, but wickedness only desires what others have caught in their snare. In other words, the righteous work for what they own, but the wicked want what belongs to others, a theme that first appeared in chapter 1. "*Root*" echoes the "*root of the righteous*" in **12:3**.

Lindsay Wilson: The final proverb generalizes about the wicked and righteous, the categories used in **verse 10** as well. Someone who has twisted thinking (*the wicked*, *rāšā*ʿ) will envy the short-term dishonest gain of wrongdoers (**v. 12a**). In the second half of the proverb the image is of the righteous person who shows good sense in sending down roots where he is (a tree seems in view) and so bearing fruit. The contrast appears to be between one who shows good sense by consistent, long-term thinking, and another who is enticed by the latest money-making scheme and flits from one mirage to the next.

Tremper Longman: Those who love wickedness are going to find evil or trouble and thus their lives will be unstable. This is contrasted to the lives of the righteous, whose lifestyle leads to stability. However, every interpreter, including the present one, must fully acknowledge the tenuousness of one's proposed understanding because of the **difficulties with the text.**

George Mylne: The original word, which in the 24th verse of this chapter is rendered *slothful*, signifies also *deceitfulness*, for slothfulness and deceit often accompany each ether. Wicked men have more enlarged desires after earthly things than the righteous, and their hands often refuse to labor for necessary things.

What, then, shall they do? Their lusts must be gratified at the expense of conscience and honesty, and so they desire the plunder of evil men. Then they ensnare others, and drag their property to themselves, that their portion may be fat, and their food plenteous.

But a righteous man is above the temptations that lead men to over-reach their neighbors, for he has an inward principle of integrity and contentment, which tends to moderate his desires, and directs to praise-worthy means for the enjoyment of them.

Thus, by the blessing of God, he obtains what is needful for himself, and something also to give to him who is in need.

TEXT: Proverbs 12:13-28

TITLE: DILIGENT HANDS AND PRUDENT LIPS

Paul Koptak: We must remind ourselves that our desire to find an outline or rhetorical structure may not catch the spirit of discovery and gamesmanship that the sages required of their readers. We suggest outlines and arrangements to appreciate the recurrence of catchwords and themes, but **many of the associations do not fit as easily within our orderly arrangements**. Proverbs are often linked together by **catchwords**.

I. (:13-23) PRUDENT LIPS

A. (:13-14) Evil Words vs. Good Words

1. (:13) Trap of Evil Words

> "*An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips,*
> *But the righteous will escape from trouble.*"

Paul Koptak: Here is an ancient version of "**what a wicked web we weave, when first we speak to deceive**." Continuing the imagery of trapping from **12:12**, this proverb contrasts the snare of the evil person's words with the escape of the righteous, echoing the theme of **12:6**. This proverb explicitly shows the trap of evil words. The righteous, who do not lay such traps, never get caught in them, and the proverb suggests that they also escape the traps set by others. But those who use their words to "*lie in wait*" (**12:6**) end up being ensnared by them.

Allen Ross: People who are righteous will not get themselves into a bind *(ṣārâ*; "*trouble*," NIV) by what they say.

Tremper Longman: The offense is not specified, but the situation will make it concrete. Perhaps the offense is gossip or slander (**10:18; 11:13; 18:8; 20:19**) or simply saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. In any case, saying something offensive will bring harm on the speaker.

While the second colon does not specifically mention a speech situation, the first colon has already provided the context. In other words, we are to understand this proverb as saying that the righteous can use their power of speech to get themselves out of tough situations.

2. (:14) Fruit of Good Words and Deeds

> "*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.*"

Paul Koptak: The metaphor likens the rewards of hard work (cf. **12:11**) with the fruit of good speaking, linking hands and mouth *(peh*). Just as speaking is a form of doing, so both hands and mouth can be put to purposes good or evil.

Allen Ross: Proper speech and diligent work result in good things. If one's conversation is wise, intelligent, and honoring to God, it will result in blessing, i.e., good things will come of it.

Tremper Longman: This verse deals with **consequences or retribution in both speech and action**. With its reference to mouth, the first colon is concerned with speech. The fruit of the mouth is the consequence that flows from the words one utters. Since the words are wise, they bring good and satisfying results to the situation as well as to the one who utters them.

The second colon says the same is true in the realm of actions. In other words, this proverb is not in an antithetic form, but in a form that furthers the thought of the first colon by applying the principle to another realm of meaning.

Whatever one does will have consequences for that person. Presumably, if the actions are good, then the consequences will be good. The same reciprocal action is true if the works are bad. If they are, then the consequences will also be bad.

B. (:15-16) Arrogant Fool vs. Prudent Man

1. (:15) What Counsel Do You Listen to?

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

Allen Ross: People demonstrate their maturity by how well they respond to sound advice. Reasonable people (i.e., "*wise*") will recognize and accept good advice, even if they themselves often give advice to others. "*Advice*" (*ʿēṣâ*) is an application of wisdom and knowledge to a specific situation, either by astute observation or well-thought-out opinion. The fool, however, is set in his own ways and will not listen to advice. "*The way of a fool*" (*derek ʿewîl*) describes the headlong course of actions not abandoned even when good advice is offered.

Charles Bridges: The fool's conceit hinders his wisdom. He needs no guidance; he never asks for advice. He sticks to his own ways because they are his. He has no doubt about heaven. Instead of the way being so narrow that few people find it, in his view it is so easy to find that few people can miss it. Thus all his religion is **self-delusion**.

Tremper Longman: The proverb is about remaining open to hearing the counsel of other people, which involves humility and the lack of pride.

2. (:16) How Do You Handle Offenses?

"*A fool's vexation is known at once,*
But a prudent man conceals dishonor."

Paul Koptak: **Verses 15** and **16** are linked by the catchword "*fool*." The contrast in both verses is between the loud fool, blindly self-directed and easily provoked, and the silent

sage, who listens to counsel and conceals an insult. The prudent person appears again in **12:23**, where again silence demonstrates understanding and builds up relationships instead of breaking them down.

Allen Ross: Those who are mature are able to handle criticism without responding instinctively and irrationally. McKane, 442, says that the fool's reaction is "like an injured animal and so his opponent knows that he has been wounded." The wise man does not give the enemy that satisfaction. It is not so much that the wise man represses anger and feelings but that he is more shrewd in dealing with them.

Charles Bridges: **Self-control**, which covers rising anger, is true Christian prudence. So when we feel that we are becoming angry, we must at once cry to him who stills the storm (**Matthew 8:26; Psalm 65:7**). We do well to keep before our eyes his blessed example who, when he was reviled, did not retaliate (**1 Peter 2:23**).

Tremper Longman: This proverb values repression over impulsive display of emotion. It thus is similar in principle to those proverbs that value silence over much speech (**10:14; 13:3, 16; 17:27, 28**). In other words, there is benefit for those who do not let their rivals know how upset they are. If one's intent is to hurt another person, then the victim's immediate display of negative emotion will be received and celebrated as a victory. **Prudence is the ability to regulate one's emotional display for one's own advantage.**

Caleb Nelson: **Ignore It When Insulted**
Meanwhile, when insulted, keep your mouth shut as well — not by taking the insult to heart, but by keeping your annoyance bottled up and taking it to the Lord. Who gets all hinked up about an insult? A fool does, that's who. Wise people doesn't get bothered by insults. They overlook them. They prefer to let their character speak for itself.

George Mylne: A fool disgraces himself by giving way to the impetuous sallies of passion. He reveals his temporary madness, by his reddened countenance, his quivering lips, and his flashing eyes. His tongue, having thrown out the reins of reason, pours forth torrents of rage, and perhaps of oaths and imprecations thus announcing to every one that he meets, that he is a fool. It is with difficulty that his hands are restrained from doing that which in a short time would become the source of bitter and unceasing remorse.

"*But a prudent man overlooks an insult*." When he finds his passions beginning to ferment, he does not give them full scope but considers whether he does well to be angry, and how far it is lawful and safe for him to give way to this turbulent passion. He does not cover his wrath, that it may have time to work, and draw the powers of reason into its service, that it may break forth with more effect on some other occasion. But he overlooks an insult, that he may have time to suppress and destroy it, by considering its folly and wickedness, by meditating on the example and grace of Christ, and by fervent supplications for the support and assistance of the Spirit of meekness.

By such means as these, the prudent man preserves own honor, and covers the shame of his neighbor, who is likely to be gained by gentleness and meekness. Thus the noblest of all victories is gained, while the Christian subdues, not only his own spirit, but the stubborn soul of his adversary, and covers, by his charity, a multitude of sins.

Josh Moody: A fool is someone who gets angry quickly. He "shows his annoyance at once." Note, a wise person also feels annoyed at times, but he does not show his annoyance at once. A fool then is someone who cannot "overlook an insult." As we jostle through life, we are bound to receive insults—some deliberate, some unintentional. There is nothing to be gained by giving in to vitriol. Read the biographies of the great leaders—Winston Churchill, for instance. What is stunning is their ability to overlook personal insults for the task of a greater cause: building a coalition to accomplish an important end. The prudent overlook insults. Be prudent and overlook an insult that you have received this week.
https://godcenteredlife.org/devotional/proverbs-1215-28-wise-up/

C. (:17-19) Helpful Speech vs. Harmful Speech

1. (:17) Speech Can Be Truthful or Deceitful

"*He who speaks truth tells what is right,*
But a false witness, deceit."

Paul Koptak: The honest testimony is "*righteous*" (*ṣedeq*), while the false witness spreads "*deceit*" (*mirmah*; cf. **12:5, 20**). Most likely the situation depicted is the settlement of a business dispute, though other settings are possible (cf. **Deut. 19:15–18**).

George Mylne: Men, destitute of a principle of integrity, may be guilty of much iniquity in witness-bearing, while they flatter themselves that they are speaking nothing but the truth. A true and faithful witness will deliver his testimony fully, clearly, and impartially. He will not only tell the truth but all the truth that he knows about the point in question, as far as it will open up the merits of the cause. He will use no language that may be misunderstood by the judges, nor dissemble matters so as to favor even that cause which he supposes to be the right one. He will give no unfair representation of matters, to gratify or serve a good man, or one who is his best friend. Nor will pity constrain him so to disguise facts as to serve the cause of the poor man, or him who is in danger of being condemned. If one should offer him a bribe, he will shake his hands from holding it, and shut his ears against every attempt made to bias his mind.

"*But a false witness tells lies*." He utters falsehood, or turns truth into a lie, by his manner of telling it. Doeg the Edomite, by a real fact misrepresented was the death of eighty-five priests of the Lord. And those who bore testimony against our Lord, are called false witnesses, though they repeated our Lord's words with but little if any variation, because the little difference in words made a complete change in the sense. It is necessary for us to consider exactly what we say, when the character or happiness of others is at stake, and to be cautious whom we trust, lest by artful misrepresentations we be persuaded to do injuries to our neighbors, which we cannot repair.

2. (:18) Words Can Hurt or Heal

"*There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword,*
But the tongue of the wise brings healing."

Allen Ross: The words are healing because they are faithful and true, gentle and kind, uplifting and encouraging.

Caleb Nelson: But not only does the truth reveal your character. It also **creates health**. Reckless people stab at random with their words, not really caring who they hurt. Those people are fools, and their words can destroy or badly hurt the people around them.

How do you speak? What do your words produce in the lives of those who hear them? If you are wise, your words will be producing health. They will be making people whole, giving them greater psychological and even physical integrity. The words of Jesus create health in us — spiritual health first and foremost, and then psychological and physical health to some degree too. Can you live without the words of Jesus, or do you have a deep hunger for the word of God? Brothers and sisters, the tongue of the wise is health. It brings healing. It makes whole.

Charles Bridges: Who has not felt the piercings of false, unkind, inconsiderate words? How keenly have the servants of God suffered from this sword! Many will speak daggers without compunction who would be afraid to use them. Surely it was not without reason that our Lord accused an angry word or tongue with the guilt of murder (**Matthew 5:21-22**). Indeed, "a great and almost incredible calamity it is that man, who was created for humanity, should be so corrupted that no animal in the world is more ferocious and malignant" (Daille).

Wisdom is the guiding principle of the tongue that brings healing. It is full of discriminating tact, directing us, how, when, what, and to whom to speak. This is no negative responsibility. It is not enough that there is no poison in the tongue. **It must bring healing.**

3. (:19) Permanent Value of Speaking Truth

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

Tremper Longman: A lie might last for a moment in the sense that a lie may be thought to be true at first, but the idea is that a lie will eventually be found out. On the other hand, truth endures; that is, time will side with the truth.

Paul Koptak: The contrast is again between the brief and fleeting existence of the wicked and the staying power of the righteous. Lies may look as though they can feather one's nest and bring security, but in fact, they build the nest on a precarious branch. It sometimes takes time for truth to show itself strong, but as Van Leeuwen

observes, “What goes counter to reality is shattered by it in a moment, like a ship on the rocks.”

Allen Ross: Truthfulness will outlive lies—forever. Or, conversely, as Plaut, 147, says, “Lies have generally limited staying power.” The LXX saw the setting for this proverb in the courts of law: “True lips establish testimony, but a hasty witness has an unjust tongue.” The little expression “*only a moment*” is literally “*till I wink again*” (*ʾargîʿâ*, a denominative verb from *regaʿ*); it forms a circumlocution for the idea.

Lindsay Wilson: The precise nature of the contrast in **verse 19** is not immediately apparent, but the point is that speaking truthfully builds up your enduring character (for ever, *ʿad*, can simply mean ‘*ongoing*’), while a lie only gains a person an advantage for an instant.

D. (:20-21) Pursue the Path of Peace and Security

1. (:20) Counsel Peace, Not Deceit

> “*Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil,*
> *But counselors of peace have joy.*”

Tremper Longman: The difference between planning evil and advising peace seems to be that the former leads to social disintegration but the latter to social cohesion.

Paul Koptak: “*Deceit*” (**12:5, 17**) lives in the heart of those who devise evil, always looking for its chance to do harm. By contrast “*joy*” dwells in the heart of one who (lit.) “*counsels peace*” (*yoʿaṣe šalom*). The word for “*promote*” is related to the “*advice*” (*ʿeṣab*) of **12:15**, suggesting that the wise one absorbs what is heard so it can be offered to others and the joy shared.

Charles Bridges: Deceit takes many forms: falsehood, exaggeration, and deliberate perversion.

Lindsay Wilson: **Peace** has a fuller sense than in English, implying not only the absence of harmful relationships, but also the active presence of wholesome attitudes and responses.

2. (:21) Avoid the Trouble Caused by Wickedness

> “*No harm befalls the righteous,*
> *But the wicked are filled with trouble.*”

Tremper Longman: The proverb form does not lay claim to universal truth. This statement of **v. 21** is true if all other things are equal. And the rewards and penalties that accompany the actions of the wise and righteous on the one hand and the fool and wicked on the other are not to be understood as promises, but rather as **generally true principles** by which to live. It is more likely that life will be easy for the righteous than it is for the wicked. The intention behind stating this principle so boldly is to encourage righteous rather than wicked behavior.

E. (:22-23) Loose Lips Must Be Zipped

1. (:22) Hate Lying

"*Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD,*
But those who deal faithfully are His delight."

2. (:23) Control Your Speech

"*A prudent man conceals knowledge,*
But the heart of fools proclaims folly."

Paul Koptak: Just as the "*prudent*" person covers over an insult (**12:16**), so that person also keeps knowledge covered as well (*koseh* in both verses). The link with the earlier verse not only marks a frame or inclusio, it points up a particular virtue of prudence, the wisdom of knowing when to be silent and when to speak. As in **12:16**, the fool simply blurts out what is inside without any consideration of its effects on others. The mention of "heart" points to the connection the ancients made between the contents of the heart and its gateway through the mouth and lips. This proverb provides a humorous explanation for why knowledge so often seems in short supply! It may also warn against talking too much.

Tremper Longman: It is not that prudent people do not act on their knowledge; they just do not make a big deal about it. However, by proclaiming their stupidity, fools let everyone realize just how stupid they are. The idea expressed by this proverb is similar to yet another important theme in the book, the contrast between the silence of the wise person and the chattiness of the fool (**10:14; 12:18**; etc.).

Caleb Nelson: Our Father loves prudence too. He delights in it when we control our tongues, when we are able to conceal our knowledge. This doesn't mean that we never tell people what we know and what they need to know. Instead, it means that the wise are able to hold back information until they know whether it ought to be divulged. Fools, though, simply let their folly out. They can't help themselves.

The Lord loves it when we control our speech. He delights in our ability to speak wisely.

II. (:24-27) DILIGENT HANDS

Paul Koptak: These last five verses contrast diligence and laziness (**12:24, 27**) as well as the distinct ways of righteousness and wickedness (**12:26, 28**). This parallel structure is interrupted by an unusual proverb about fear and worry (**12:25**) that commands our attention.

A. (:24) Diligence Rules

"*The hand of the diligent will rule,*
But the slack hand will be put to forced labor."

Allen Ross: Diligence at work determines success and advancement. To put it bluntly, the diligent rise to the top and the lazy sink to the bottom. At the bottom they may be forced to work as though they owed it. For other proverbs extolling the virtue of industry, see **6:6–11; 10:4; 12:27; 13:4; 19:15; 21:5.**

B. (:25) Anxiety Weighs Down

"*Anxiety in the heart of a man weighs it down,*
But a good word makes it glad."

Paul Koptak: A proverb about worries and encouraging words seems out of place in the sequence, but the saying does relate to the larger context. The double use of "*heart*" and "*joy*" in **12:25** and **20** suggest they must be read together as a statement and development of a theme. The thread common to both is the **positive result of good speaking**; it brings "*joy*" to the speaker in **12:20** and "*joy*" to the listener in **12:25**. Anxiety, by contrast, causes the heart (lit.) "*to bow down*" like prisoners before their captors (cf. **Isa. 51:23**). Speech to oneself from within, from the anxious heart, is contrasted with the external word that brings joy (**Prov. 14:13; 15:23**). Again, as in **12:20**, the work of a good person bears good fruit. The translation preserves some of the wordplay in the contrast between "*weighs down*" (*yašḥennah*) and "*cheers up*" (*yeśammeḥennah)*.

Tremper Longman: The Hebrew word "*anxiety*" (*dĕʾāgâ*) refers to one's emotional response to a threat to one's well-being. **Anxiety arises because of uncertainty about the future. Persistent anxiety leads to depression**. This proverb provides an observation on life that suggests an antidote to depression: **encouraging words**. The "truth" expressed in this proverb is rather self-evident, but its statement reminds the hearer of it.

A "*good word*" is a rather general category that can be filled out in a variety of ways, depending on the situation. Perhaps it is a statement that points out strengths of a person, or perhaps it is simply a bit of positive news. This proverb fits in with the general teaching of the book about the impact that speech has on people. It also registers the sages' concern for people's psychological state.

C. (:26) Encourage Righteous Living

"*The righteous is a guide to his neighbor,*
But the way of the wicked leads them astray."

David Guzik: *The righteous should choose his friends carefully*: This is good advice for both the righteous and those who have the wisdom to seek after righteousness. It has been rightly said, show me your friends and I will show you your future.

Tremper Longman: Righteous people benefit not only themselves but also other people. They lead their neighbors on the right path.

On the other hand, while righteous people and those they influence move in the right direction, the wicked have no certain guide and thus **wander aimlessly**. This observation has as its purpose the promotion of righteous behavior.

D. (:27) Value Diligence

"*A slothful man does not roast his prey,*
But the precious possession of a man is diligence."

Paul Koptak: Humorous proverbs about the sluggard typically make a serious point; like the wicked, lazy people have nothing to give others, for they cannot even take care of themselves!

(:28) CONCLUSION – LINK BETWEEN RIGHTEOUSNESS AND LIFE

"*In the way of righteousness is life,*
And in its pathway there is no death."

Allen Ross: "*No death*" (*ʾal-māwet*) may be taken to mean "*immortality*" (so NIV); but it can also mean **permanence and stability in this life** (see M. Dahood, "Immortality in Proverbs 12:28," Bib 41 [1960]: 176–81).

Paul Koptak: The image of "*the way*," seen previously in the negative portrait of the fool and wicked person (**12:15, 26**), reappears here. "*Way*" and "*path*" are clear parallels, as are "*life*" and "*death*" (note that "*immortality*" is lit., "*not death*"), suggesting that the two lines contrast the way of life with the path of evil. In Proverbs, life is "*not death*"—that is, **many years lived in health and security**—rather than life eternal. Note that the life and death contrast is only used here in the last verse in this chapter. While the themes of life and death run throughout, this statement of the obvious stands alone and sums up all that has gone before, highlighting the image of the way. This last saying, more than any other, connects the themes of this chapter with the instructions of **chapters 1–9** and the recurring motif of **the two ways, life and death**.

Charles Bridges; The way of righteousness is the way of God's salvation, in which God's children come to him; and it is the way of his commands in which they walk. Enjoying the sense of God's love, confiding in his unimaginable, satisfying friendship, consecrating ourselves in spiritual devotion to his service, anticipating the fullness of his eternal joy – this is life and immortality. For where the life of grace is possessed, the life of glory is secured.

TEXT: Proverbs 13:1-25

TITLE: DISCIPLINE AND SUFFICIENCY

Peter Wallace: I had originally planned on preaching **topically** through **Proverbs 10-31**, but the more I dig through it, the more convinced I am that there really is a structure and pattern in these chapters that gets lost when you bounce around!

Right now we are in the "*proverbs of Solomon*" (**10:1 - 22:16**). The first section -- **10:1 - 15:29** -- consists of largely antithetical proverbs -- proverbs that contrast the two ways: **the righteous and the wicked**, the diligent and the sluggard, the wise and the fool. And, as you have no doubt noticed by now, each chapter talks about words, deeds, and ends. What you say and what you do are important in shaping where you are going. The pattern may vary, but plainly these chapters were set up intentionally to be literary units. When we get to **chapter 16**, we will see a switch from **antithetical** to **synthetic** proverbs -- where the second line adds to the first, rather than contrasts with it.

We have seen a pretty regular pattern in this opening part of the proverbs of Solomon. What you say – and how you live – form the pattern of your life. If you don't like the trajectory – then turn – repent – change your path. How do you do that? Change your words. Change your actions.

I. (:1-6) DISCIPLINE AND SUFFICIENCY

Caleb Nelson: **Talking Well and Eating Well**
I. The Foundation of Everything: Listening Well, **v. 1**
II. How You Talk, What You Eat, and How You Handle Yourself are All Connected, **vv. 2-3**
III. Wanting without Working is Meaningless, **v. 4**
IV. Righteous Talking Protects, Evil Putrefies, **vv. 5-6**

A. (:1) Contrasting Responses to Discipline

"*A wise son accepts his father's discipline,*
But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke."

Allen Ross: The point of this antithetical saying is **teachability**. The "*scorner*" (*lēṣ*; "*mocker*," NIV; GK 4370) is the highest level of a fool. He has no respect for authority, reviles religion, and because he thinks that he knows what is best, is not teachable (Whybray, 77). The use of *geʿārâ* ("*rebuke*") shows that the mocker does not respond to any level of discipline.

Tremper Longman: This proverb provides an antithesis between wisdom and folly, here represented by one of its more extreme forms, the "*mocker*" (*lēṣ*). There is no verb in the first colon, but the idea is certainly that the wise son is wise because he is open to

his father's "*discipline*" (*mûsār*; see **1:2**). Discipline entails verbal and physical corrections. The wise son is one who pays attention when his father corrects him, and thus is not apt to repeat the same wrong behavior. A mocker is someone who resists correction. Indeed, the act of mocking is a way of attacking those who might offer advice. The mocker refuses to admit wrongdoing and so cannot tolerate a rebuke that points out mistakes. Accordingly, the mocker cannot improve behavior.

B. (:2) Contrasting Appetites

"*From the fruit of a man's mouth he enjoys good,*
But the desire of the treacherous is violence."

Allen Ross: Words and wishes find their just rewards. This saying concerns the **outcome of conduct**; as Alden, 104–5, says, a common theme in Proverbs is that you get what you deserve.

Paul Koptak: This proverb contrasts the "*fruit of the mouth*" (*peri pi*) by which a person "*eats good*" with hunger for violence, implying that the treacherous person both speaks and eats this dangerous fruit (cf. 10:11); the pairing of "*good*" (*ṭob*) and "*unfaithful*" (*bogedim*) appears again in **13:15.**

Tremper Longman: The proverb begins by commenting on the **consequences of speech** (see a similar statement at **12:14**). The assumption is that the speech is wise and helpful, and as a result the speaker eats well. Good advice brings its rewards to the one who gives it. The second colon contrasts negative with positive, but they are not exactly parallel. We might expect a comment on how foolish words lead to hunger. But the contrast is drawn in a different and more interesting fashion. The faithless prefer violence to satisfy their appetite. They would prefer to hurt others with their words.

Lindsay Wilson: If you use your mouth properly, you will prosper and so have plenty to eat. While the words of such a person are wholesome, a deceitful or treacherous person (niv, '*unfaithful*') seeks only destruction and violence (**v. 2b**). The implication is that the violent actions that will follow are the fruit of the treacherous. The contrast between the consequence of preserving life or leading to ruin is then drawn out in **verse 3**.

C. (:3) Contrasting Control of Speech and Destinies

"*The one who guards his mouth preserves his life;*
The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin."

Paul Koptak: These two sayings [**vv. 2-3**] caution us to watch what our mouths put out in speech as well as what they take in to satisfy their desires.

Tremper Longman: This proverb fits in with the teaching on using words sparingly (**10:14; 12:18; 13:16; 17:27, 28**). It employs antithetical parallelism to contrast the consequences of infrequent speech with verbosity. Talking too much leads to all kinds of problems. It is not that wise persons never speak, but they choose their words very carefully. As Van Leeuwen astutely states, "**Verse 3** follows logically upon **verse 2**.

Since speech bears good or bad fruit, the organs of speech must be carefully controlled."

D. (:4) Contrasting Work Ethics and Fulfillment of Desires

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

Peter Wallace: The question is what do you desire? How do you desire it? And how do you go about seeking that which you desire?!

Allen Ross: Rather than spend all day hoping for things they do not have, the diligent work toward realizing their dreams. McKane, 458, writes, "Laziness is barren and encourages escapism; the illusory world of desire unrelated to attainment is a prison."

Paul Koptak: Here "*desire*" (*nepeš*) by itself brings nothing; it must be accompanied by **industry**, which (lit.) "*fattens*" or fills one's desire. The person who eschews violence and sloth in word and deed is rewarded accordingly.

David Guzik: It isn't that the lazy man or woman lacks desire; they wish for many things. Yet they have nothing because they cannot or will not apply themselves to the work required to take desires to reality.

E. (:5) Contrasting Approaches to Falsehood and Shameful Behavior

"*A righteous man hates falsehood,*
But a wicked man acts disgustingly and shamefully."

Paul Koptak: The contrast in **verse 5** pits falsehood against its result of shame and disgrace, with the implication that one leads to the other and the wicked bring both with them wherever they go. "*What is false*" is *debar-šeqer*, a false word or deed. The word for shame can be translated as "*smell*" or "*stink*."

David Guzik: The implication is that wicked men and women love the lie, and this makes them loathsome and repulsive. This will surely bring them to shame.

Caleb Nelson: Are you willing to lie? Don't be. Lying produces disgusting, disgraceful results. Your reputation will be destroyed, and so will your character. You will be an objectively shameful condition because you are not what you ought to be. Ultimately, the liar will be destroyed by his own wickedness. Again we hear this theme sounded. God usually punishes sinners simply by letting their own sins get the best of them. The more you give yourself over to sin, the greater the risk that that sin will destroy you. Conversely, righteousness is the best protection. It's how God takes care of His wise sons.

F. (:6) Contrasting Paths and Protections

"*Righteousness guards the one whose way is blameless,*
But wickedness subverts the sinner."

Tremper Longman: Here is a further contrast between two groups of people: the innocent, obviously on the side of the wise, and the sinners, obviously connected to fools. The verbs contrast the consequences in store for the two groups. The righteous are protected, and the sinners are misled. The verse utilizes the two-path theology of the book to make its point. The proverb thus expresses a general principle that needs to be filled out, based on the broader teaching of the book. Murphy believes that the abstract principles of righteousness and wickedness are here personified.

Allen Ross: This little contrast shows that righteousness, like a fortress, protects the man of integrity (see **2:11; 4:6**). This may work through divine intervention or natural causes. "*Righteousness*" (*ṣedāqâ*) refers to that which conforms to God's law and to order; so it would be natural to expect that the perfect walk (*tām-dārek*, lit., "*the way of integrity*"; "*the man of integrity*," NIV) would be safe. By contrast, perverse and malicious activity (*rišʿâ*, "wickedness") plunges one into sinful activity.

Charles Bridges: Righteousness is steady conformity to God's mind. We do not exalt it by any meritorious efficacy or put it in the place of simply looking to Jesus for life and salvation. When a Christian lives as a man of integrity, he never loses his sense of sin or forgets his need of mercy. This righteousness is not perfection. Yet, blessed by God, the uprightness is accepted, and the fault is covered (**2 Chronicles 15:17**).

II. (:7-11) RICHES AND VIRTUES

Lindsay Wilson: **Wealth** is a theme of a number of the proverbs (**vv. 7–8, 11**) in this part of the chapter, but each makes a different observation about money. What emerges in this section is an acknowledgment of wealth's value, but also some mention of its downside and a reminder of the need to combine it with righteousness and wisdom.

Caleb Nelson: **The Relative Advantages of Wealth**
Proposition: Wealth is a powerful tool, but don't worship it, because Wisdom and righteousness are better than wealth.

I. Wealth: Not Ultimate, v. 7
- A. It can be defined in various ways
- B. It can be faked

II. Wealth: Highly Advantageous, v. 8
- A. It can buy your life, **v. 8a**
- B. It makes you learn better, **v. 8b**

III. Wealth: Upstaged by Jesus, vv. 9-10
- A. Righteousness supersedes wealth, **v. 9**
- B. Listening brings Wisdom and therefore peace**, v. 10**

IV. Wealth: How you got it matters for whether you'll keep it, v. 11

A. (:7) Appearances Can Be Deceiving

"*There is one who pretends to be rich, but has nothing;*
Another pretends to be poor, but has great wealth."

Paul Koptak: **Verses 7** and **8** are linked by the catchwords "*poor*" and "*rich*" to show that riches are not as clear an indication of status and worth as we often believe (though we do not often admit it). In both cases, the "*poor*" come off better than those who have riches or desire them. **Appearances can be deceiving**, as **verse 7** shows, and riches are no guarantee of safety, a concern of **verse 8**.

David Guzik: "Our own age abounds with men who have made themselves rich, and yet have nothing. They have amassed great wealth, and yet it has no purchasing power in the true things of life. It cannot insure health, it brings no happiness, it often destroys peace." (Morgan)

And one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches: There are those who willingly make themselves poor on a material level, and do so out of generosity to others or out of fixed spiritual priorities. Such ones have great riches in this life and in the life to come.

"To make self rich, is to destroy the capacity for life. To make self poor, by enriching others, is to live." (Morgan)

The greatest occasion of anyone making himself poor, yet gaining great riches through it was that of Jesus Christ. *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich* (**2 Corinthians 8:9**).

B. (:8) Riches Can Invite Attacks

"*The ransom of a man's life is his riches,*
But the poor hears no rebuke."

Allen Ross: The rich person is exposed to legal and powerful assaults and uses his wealth as ransom. The poor person is free from blackmail and so ignores the attack and endures the consequences of difficulties.

Paul Koptak: This verse allows that riches can get one out of trouble, but only as it reminds us that it is better to hear no threat of trouble at all. The source of this **security** is not stated, perhaps because the poor have nothing to covet or steal or because the poor are protected along with the righteous (**13:6**). The word for "*ransom*" is the same one used for "*compensation*" of the jealous husband in **6:35** and should therefore be understood as payment for damages or trouble, a release from obligation rather than a release from bondage (but see **21:18**).

In any case, the poor do not have money to buy their way out of legal entanglements and other difficulties, but they may not need to as often as those with money do.

C. (:9) Consequences of Righteous vs. Wicked Behavior

"*The light of the righteous rejoices,*
But the lamp of the wicked goes out."

Tremper Longman: An antithetical proverb expressing the contrary consequences of righteousness and wickedness (the ethical reflex of the bipolar contrast between wisdom and folly). "*Light*" here appears to be a metaphor for life energy, and when the lamp of the wicked is extinguished, it signifies at least removal of well-being if not death itself. This metaphor is used elsewhere (**Job 18:6; 21:17; Prov. 20:20; 24:20** [where colon 2 is verbatim what we have here]). As in many other proverbs, this one is stated quite generally, but it serves to encourage ethical behavior.

Charles Bridges: The wicked have their lamp, a cold profession of the name of religion. But as it has no oil, it quickly goes out (**Matthew 25:8**). But even while it lasts, they do not rejoice. Their lamp sheds no light on the soul. It guides no fellow pilgrim with its light. Its end will be dreadful.

D. (:10) Submit to Wise Counsel

"*Through presumption comes nothing but strife,*
But with those who receive counsel is wisdom."

Tremper Longman: **Insolence** is a pride that will not listen to other people, especially criticism of behavior or thought. On the other side are those who are open to correction and new ideas. The latter is the way of wisdom, and the implication is that the way of wisdom avoids "*quarrels*" (*māṣṣâ*). Compare **12:15**.

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 10** concerns interpersonal relations, with the valuing of advice by others being the hallmark of wisdom, and contrasted with a presumptuous self-confidence that rudely rejects the suggestions of others. Riches can also lead to self-sufficiency, but those who take advice acknowledge their need of others.

E. (:11) Avoid Get-Rich-Quick Schemes

"*Wealth obtained by fraud dwindles,*
But the one who gathers by labor increases it."

Tremper Longman: It appears to be a contrast between two different ways to accumulate wealth, one right and one wrong. The wrong way is by a get-rich-quick scheme (see also **20:21**): easy come, easy go. The second colon suggests that a methodical accumulation of capital will last the test of time. Perhaps haste also suggests a "kind of disreputable action."

Lindsay Wilson: *Hebel* has a range of meanings, but its core meaning (outside Ecclesiastes) is '*vapour*'. The image is thus one of wealth coming out of nothing (like a

win in a lottery), and the warning given here is that it will disappear just as it came. Yet the steady, regular gathering of wealth (presumably through the diligent work of our hands) will endure.

III. (:12-19) DESIRES FULFILLED

Bruce Waltke: **Fulfillment through Wisdom versus Frustration through Folly**

Caleb Nelson:
Proposition: Depending on whether you want to listen or want to keep on sinning, getting what you want will be the greatest blessing you could experience — or the greatest curse.

I. Getting What You Want, vv. 12, 19

II. Wanting to Listen to the Word, vv. 13-19
- A. Depicted
  1. The Tree of Life, **v. 12b**
  2. The Fountain of Life, **v. 14a**
  3. Tasting Sweetness, **v. 19a**
- B. Described
  1. Being Rewarded, **v. 13b**
  2. Being Favored, **v. 15a**
  3. Being a Sensible Person Acting Knowledgeably, **v. 16a**
  4. Bringing Health, **v. 17b**
  5. Being Honored and Enriched, **v. 18b**

III. Wanting to Ignore the Word, vv. 13-19
- A. Death and Destruction for the Poor Listener, **vv. 13-15**
- B. Poor Health for the Wicked Messenger/Speaker, **v. 17**
- C. Poverty and Shame for the Poor Listener, **v. 18a**
- D. Wanting to Flaunt Your Folly, **vv. 16b, 19b**

A. (:12) Desires Long for Fulfillment

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

Allen Ross: It is invigorating to realize one's hopes; to fail to do so can be discouraging or depressing (*maḥalâlēb*, "*makes the heart sick*"). This is a general saying applicable to believers and unbelievers alike. Plaut, 153, elaborates that people can bear frustration only so long; they must have encouragement to continue.

Paul Koptak: This proverb looks at the more basic and general topic of **desire** and **hope**, a larger category that includes our desire of material goods. The sages were not ascetics, but neither were they acquisitive. **Verses 11** and **12** seem to be linked in a way

similar to comparison between the tree of life and material wealth in **chapter 3**. The tree of life in Proverbs is associated with wisdom herself (**3:18**) and the speech of the righteous (**11:30; 15:4**). Here it speaks to the goodness of our longings (*taʾ ewah*; cf. **13:19**) that can be distorted by laziness and greed (**13:4**).

Tremper Longman: The idea is that anticipation or delay in the fulfillment of a desire leads to frustration, disappointment, or depression. The "*heart*" stands for the core personality of a person and here seems to connect specifically with one's emotions (see **3:1**). The fulfillment of a desire is compared to the tree of life, a very positive metaphor that points not just to physical life but also to the enjoyment of it.

Lindsay Wilson: (:**12, 19**) -- The common mention of a **desire fulfilled** suggests that this concept is crucial to both these proverbs. While the nature of the desire is not mentioned, the result is described as a *tree of life* (**v. 12b**, '*ēṣ ḥayyîm*) and *sweet/pleasant to the soul* (**v. 19a**). The image of the tree of life echoes the idyllic picture of Eden in **Genesis 2:9** and is not uncommon in Proverbs (**3:18; 11:30; 15:4**). Together with the description in **verse 19**, it implies that a deep longing that has been met is something that sustains and encourages a person. A clear contrast is made in **verse 12a** with hope deferred, which drains energy from a person. More problematic is the expression used in **verse 19b**, *to turn away from evil is an abomination to fools*. This suggests that the desire that is fulfilled may be a **desire for wisdom**, which would make good sense of the images of the tree of life and sweet to the soul. **Verse 19** would then describe the wise person who turned away from evil, embraced a desire for wisdom and found satisfaction, but such a course of action was an anathema to the fool who rejected wisdom. Such a view would also give a greater cohesiveness to this section, which would then clarify what is meant by embracing wisdom and the value of doing so.

B. (:13) Reward for Obedience

"*The one who despises the word will be in debt to it,*
But the one who fears the commandment will be rewarded."

Tremper Longman: Fools do not listen to advice, while the wise pay attention to those who guide and offer correction (**3:11–12; 9:7–9; 12:1, 15; 27:5–6**; etc.).

C. (:14) Wisdom Is Life-Giving

"*The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life,*
To turn aside from the snares of death."

Tremper Longman: The metaphor of a "*spring of life*" (see also **10:11**) is apt because water provides life, and flowing, bubbling water, compared to a stagnant pool, illustrates vitality.

D. (:15) Value of Discernment

"*Good understanding produces favor,*
But the way of the treacherous is hard."

E. (:16) Actions Display Wisdom or Expose Folly

"*Every prudent man acts with knowledge,*
But a fool displays folly."

Paul Koptak: The contrast illustrates the truth that we display either knowledge or ignorance when we act, and so we receive either favor or shame (cf. **13:15**). The public nature of a person's actions is echoed in **13:17–18**.

F. (:17) Faithfulness = Key Trait for a Messenger

"*A wicked messenger falls into adversity,*
But a faithful envoy brings healing."

Allen Ross: The faithfulness of the messenger determines the success of the mission.

Paul Koptak: Faithful messengers do more than avoid causing trouble; they smooth it over. If you sent someone into a conflict situation, you would want one who would make it better, not worse.

Tremper Longman: Messengers played an important role in human relationships in an age long before email. They might be given a letter or perhaps an oral message to deliver. A reliable envoy would be one who delivered the message in a timely and accurate fashion. A wicked messenger could fail to deliver the message, delay it, or garble its content. In any case, according to the proverb, these wicked messengers could bring trouble on themselves by their actions, even conceivably as a direct result of their bad actions. On the other hand, the reliable envoy becomes a vehicle of healing, presumably for both the sender and the recipient of the message.

G. (:18) Response to Discipline

"*Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects discipline,*
But he who regards reproof will be honored."

H. (:19) Desires Long for Fulfillment

"*Desire realized is sweet to the soul,*
But it is an abomination to fools to depart from evil."

Allen Ross: One can surely say that Proverbs teaches people to make their desires good so that fulfilling them is cause for joy.

Paul Koptak: With the phrase "*longing fulfilled*," this saying marks the end of a frame with **13:12**, but it is also linked with **13:20** by the catchword "*fools*." What is implied in **13:12** is explicit here as desires are fulfilled or frustrated, depending on one's response to instruction and correction. Fools who refuse to turn from evil will certainly not enjoy the sweetness of fulfilled desire; their actions will bear their fruits, but will they be sweet? According to **20:17**, they will taste like gravel. Only a fool would fail to appreciate this truth after so many repetitions! The point is reinforced by the **assonance**

between the Hebrew for "*desire*" (*taʾewah*) and "*detest*" (*toʿebah*; the w and b are both sounded as v in Hebrew), making the **rhyme** a strong component of the rhetoric.

IV. (:20-23) PROSPERITY AND INHERITANCE

Caleb Nelson: **Who You Are, Who You'll Be (:20-25)**
Proposition: The righteous will be satisfied, but the wicked will hunger eternally.

I. The Company and the Destination, v. 20

II. The Long-Term Consequences of Sin and Righteousness, v. 21
- A. Righteousness Produces a Material Inheritance for Grandchildren, **v. 22**
- B. Wickedness Produces Material Hunger, **v. 23**
- C. Righteousness Produces a Moral Heritage for Children, **v. 24**
- D. The Wicked will Hunger Eternally, **v. 25**

A. (:20) Impact of Associations

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

Allen Ross: Proper company contributes to safety and growth. This verse advises association with the wise and not with fools. The wordplay in the second line stresses the power of association. . . The point cannot be missed: Examine who is influencing you.

Paul Koptak: Fools not only refuse to turn from evil, they also fail to choose good company. The first line shows the result in character; the second, the result in outcome. The truth that even one's choice of companions has its consequences is harder to see for those making the decision, as both parents and their children know. Together, **13:19** and **20** connect wisdom and longing, encouraging the learner that having desires is not bad but good, yet those desires must be pursued in wise ways.

Tremper Longman: The most natural way of understanding this verse is that the virtues or vices of those with whom one associates will rub off on the person. But perhaps people are attracted to those who are like them, so then this observation is simply on the natural order of things. Like attracts like. Woman Wisdom herself keeps company with virtues like prudence, knowledge, and discretion; she avoids contact with pride, arrogance, evil behavior, and perverse speech (**8:12–13**).

Charles Bridges: Walking with the wise, under their instruction, encouragement, and example, makes us become wise. Note, young people, the responsibility of the choice of friends. The world may allure, the ungodly may mock, the evil heart may consent to their voice. But you must seek strength from God and resolve to walk with the wise.

If we can live among the worldly without feeling out of our element, if we can breathe a tainted atmosphere without awareness of infection, if we can familiarize ourselves with the absence of religion in ordinary life, unsubdued worldliness has us in its grip. The first warning to sinners just rescued from the fire was to save themselves from this wicked generation (**Acts 2:40**).

B. (:21) Just Recompense

"*Adversity pursues sinners,*
But the righteous will be rewarded with prosperity."

C. (:22) Commensurate Inheritance

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

D. (:23) Impact of Injustice

"*Abundant food is in the fallow ground of the poor,*
But it is swept away by injustice."

Paul Koptak: The blessings of God and nature may favor the poor, but an astute observer will also note that their gain can be taken by injustice. The pessimism of this saying stands out from its context, yet its realistic outlook provides a counterbalance to the optimism of **13:22**. We may say that **verse 22** looks at the ultimate outcome while **verse 23** looks at situations we often encounter in life. Proverbs describe what usually happens, not what always must happen. Said another way, it is true that we often see situations that look like **verse 23**, yet the unseen resolution of **verse 22** is the one to bet on. Once again, learners are challenged to practice foresight, patience, and faith while maintaining a strong sense of justice.

Tremper Longman: While according to Proverbs the foolish behavior most commonly resulting in poverty is laziness (**6:6–11; 10:4, 5; 19:15; 22:13**; etc.), other reasons for poverty are also given, including indulgence (**21:17**). However, here folly is not in mind at all, but rather, poverty is the result of some form of injustice perpetrated toward the poor. The assumption is that some persons have worked hard and done everything within their power to gain material prosperity, but forces beyond their control have robbed them of it. The result is called a "*lack of justice*." The wording makes it unlikely that a natural disaster (e.g., flooding) is in mind here, but rather some type of human malice. However, the verse gets no more specific than this because injustice can come in many different forms, for example, an exploitative landlord or unfair government taxation. This verse is significant because it acknowledges that it is not only the godless fool who can be poor.

V. (:24-25) DISCIPLINE AND SUFFICIENCY

A. (:24) Discipline Motivated by Love

"*He who spares his rod hates his son,*
But he who loves him disciplines him diligently."

Tremper Longman: one can imagine how a person who understood the importance of discipline for oneself might yet hesitate to apply it to a son. After all, it is difficult to inflict discomfort of any kind on a child that one loves. However, this admonition points out that more harm is done to a child by withholding discipline than by applying it. The sage would understand reluctance to apply discipline, whether physical or verbal, to be child neglect and child abuse.

Lindsay Wilson: Children or youths who are left to follow their own desires will usually be self-indulgent rather than self-disciplined. Echoing **verse 1**, we all need discipline to become the people God wants us to be, and this takes effort (e.g. **2 Pet. 1:5–8**). The proper exercise of discipline is not an abuse of power, but rather the **outworking of loving concern** for those entrusted to our care.

B. (:25) Sufficiency Provided to the Righteous

"*The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite,*
But the stomach of the wicked is in want."

Allen Ross: Righteousness is rewarded by the satisfaction of one's physical needs. This saying is another general one based on the law's teachings about God's blessings (**Lev 26**). It could also be implying that what the righteous acquire will prove satisfying to them because they are righteous.

Tremper Longman: All things being equal, God will satisfy the hunger of the "*righteous*," but the "*wicked*" (a common variant of "*fool*," emphasizing its ethical nature) will go hungry. The fool is lazy (**6:6–11** etc.) or indulgent (**21:17**) and so lacks the wherewithal necessary to grow or to acquire food.

However, as we have just seen, all things are not always equal. One may be poor and not have anything to eat not because of being wicked, but because of someone else's wicked actions (**13:23**).

Charles Bridges: There is such a chaos of desires in the soul of the wicked that no abundance can satisfy his hunger. Ahab's crown could give him no rest without Naboth's vineyard. For the ungodly heart is full of insatiable cravings. But how intolerable will be this conscious lack throughout eternity, when a drop of water to cool the tormented tongue will be denied (**Luke 16:24-26**).

TEXT: Proverbs 14:1-7

TITLE: WALKING IN WISDOM

Caleb Nelson: **Walk in Wisdom**
Proposition: To walk in wisdom, be sure to protect yourself, enrich yourself, and to look who's talking.

I. Protect Yourself, vv. 1-3
- A. Through Wisdom, **v. 1**
- B. Through Uprightness and the Fear of Yahweh, **v. 2**
- C. Through Wise Lips, **v. 3**

II. Enrich Yourself, v. 4
- A. No mess, no fuss, no wealth
- B. Hard-working Ox, Abundant Harvest

III. Look Who's Talking, vv. 5-7
- A. Is this witness a liar?, **v. 5**
- B. Is this seeker a scoffer?, **v. 6a**
- C. Is knowledge easy for me?, **v. 6b**
- D. Is this imparter of knowledge a fool?, **v. 7**

I. (:1-3) RIGHTEOUS WORDS AND DEEDS

A. (:1) Priceless Value of a Wise Wife

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

Charles Bridges: We have seen that the wife can be a blessing or a curse to her husband (**12:4**). Such is she to his house as well. Through her wisdom she may supply many of his defects, while all his care and prudence may be nullified by her folly. The godly woman is the very soul of the house. She instructs her children by her example no less than by here teaching. She educates them for God and for eternity – not to shine in the vain show of the world, but in the church of God. Her household order combines economy with generosity (**31:13-27**).

Richard Clifford: The verbs "*to build*" and "*to tear down*" are a fixed pair, as in **Jer. 24:6; 42:10; 45:4**. In **1 Cor. 14:4**, Paul speaks of building the church.

Caleb Nelson: **How does wisdom build a house**? Well, wisdom always knows what to say. Wisdom knows how to listen. Wisdom knows how to love, and how to feed children. That's why she builds a house.

Ernest Lucas: In the context of Proverbs as a whole the purpose of this proverb is to stress that care is needed in choosing a spouse.

Matthew Henry: A foolish woman, that has no fear of God nor regard to her business, that is wilful, and wasteful, and humoursome, that indulges her ease and appetite, and is all for jaunting and feasting, cards and the play-house, though she come to a plentiful estate, and to a family beforehand, she will impoverish and waste it, and will as certainly be the ruin of her house as if she plucked it down with her hands; and the husband himself, with all his care, can scarcely prevent it.

Bruce Waltke: eventually her house is gone (cf. **9:13–18**); destroyed with her own hands—due to her own incompetence, her arrogance and incorrigibility, poor speech, hot tempter, and lack of self-control.

George Mylne: A wise woman is frugal, and saves. She is industrious, and gains. She is pious and charitable, and brings down a blessing from Heaven upon her family. If the houses of Laban and Potiphar were blessed for the sake of pious servants, a house must be still more favored by Providence, for the sake of a pious wife.

B. (:2) Your Conduct Reveals Whether You Fear or Despise God

"*He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD,*
But he who is crooked in his ways despises Him."

Lindsay Wilson: Our characteristic way of life (walks, ways), not our isolated actions, makes us wise or foolish.

Matthew Henry: *he that is perverse in his ways*, that wilfully follows his own appetites and passions, that is unjust and dishonest and contradicts his profession in his conversation, however he may pretend to devotion, he is a wicked man, and will be reckoned with as a despiser of God himself.

Charles Bridges: Grace in the heart is the spring of those who walk in an upright way. The proof that we believe the reality of religion is that we are in it all day long. Man may boast about his moral uprightness and that he would scorn to act in a mean way. But the Savior searches the heart, exposes the root of all worldly selfishness, and reveals that a man's ways are devious if he despises God.

Tremper Longman: The **fear of Yahweh** is a basic concept in the book of Proverbs (see **1:7**; also **9:10; 10:27; 31:30**; etc.). From these passages, we see that there is an intimate connection between one's basic religious attitude (fear of Yahweh), ethics (walking in virtue), and wisdom. Walking in virtue indicates a moral lifestyle. The verb "*walk*" implies a path that becomes explicit in the second colon. As is typical in this part of Proverbs, the second colon creates an antithetical parallelism. The word "*virtue*" in colon 1 can have the meaning "*straight*," so the opposite would be wandering off the path, taking a **crooked route**. Those who do this, implying **unethical behavior**, show that they despise Yahweh.

George Mylne: **Upright walking** is a sure and true evidence of the fear of the Lord; for that fear consists in a deep impression of the divine excellency and authority, by which men are disposed to abstain from whatever God forbids, however pleasing to the flesh it may be and to walk before him unto all well pleasing.

Men of corrupt minds and a perverse behavior, may speak much to the praise of God, and profess a high veneration for him but they are so far from fearing the Lord, that they despise him. Every willful sin is a plain proof that they . . .

- disregard his authority,
- defy his vengeance,
- insult his patience,
- and turn the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ into a license for sin.

Let stubborn sinners learn from this observation, the exceeding sinfulness of their perverse conduct. It contains in it a downright **contempt for God**, which is a crime that can scarcely be charged upon devils! What punishment is sufficient for such as despise the authority of their Maker, and pour contempt on the grace of a Savior? To them it shall be said, "*Behold, you despisers and wonder, and perish*!"

David Guzik: The disobedient man shows that he really despises God and His authority. They say, *we will not have this Man to reign over us* (**Luke 19:14**). This displays the sinfulness of sin; it is often not only weakness, it is **deep-seated rebellion against God**.

C. (:3) Speech Can Either Punish or Protect

"*In the mouth of the foolish is a rod for his back,*
But the lips of the wise will preserve them."

Bruce Waltke: This proverb's antithetical parallels contrast the punitive effects of the arrogant fool's talk with the protection afforded by the speech of the wise.

Richard Clifford: A proud tongue does not offer protection, for haughtiness eventually gets one into trouble. The lips (= words) of the wise, on the other hand, protect them.

Matthew Henry: The proud man with his tongue lays about him and deals blows at pleasure, but it will in the end be a rod to himself; the proud man shall come under an ignominious correction by the words of his own mouth, not cut as a soldier, but caned as a servant; and herein he will be beaten with his own rod, **Ps. 64:8**. A humble wise man saving himself and consulting his own good: The lips of the wise shall preserve them from doing that mischief to others which proud men do with their tongues, and from bringing that mischief on themselves which haughty scorners are often involved in.

Paul Koptak: The contrast between a fool's "*talk*" (lit., "*mouth*") and a wise person's "*lips*" is linked to their rewards, punishment, or protection. The phrase translated "*rod*

to his back" can also be rendered as "*rod of pride*." Whereas the rod is the parent's responsibility in **13:24**, here it is the consequence of the fool's choice.

Tremper Longman: While the speech of dupes leads to their downfall, the speech (here represented by lips) of the wise protects them. Through their verbal skill, the wise can keep themselves out of trouble.

II. (:4) PRODUCTIVE LIFE REQUIRES INVESTMENT

"*Where no oxen are, the manger is clean,*
But much increase comes by the strength of the ox."

Richard Clifford: Benefits have a cost. You don't get something for nothing.

David Guzik: Those who insist that there never be mess or disorder will miss the increase that comes from good things that can be a bit messy.

Ernest Lucas: the meaning of the proverb then seems to be, 'although the farmer can save himself work or expense by not keeping oxen, that is a false economy'. . . the proverb's message can be applied beyond the application to farming.

Paul Koptak: It is clearly better to have an ox in order to increase harvest, even if it requires some investment in feed. Today, we would speak of operating expenses and the fact that **one must spend money to make money**. The metaphor also speaks a word of humility, for as one needs the help of the ox to produce a harvest, so one needs the help of wisdom to succeed in life.

Lindsay Wilson: A cameo of folly is contrasted with the consequences of wisdom. While keeping a clean manger (a stone feeding trough for animals) seems a desirable goal, if it comes as a result of having no working animals, then it is as futile as a hospital with no patients or a school without pupils. There is no productivity or output – it is neat but fruitless. However, having oxen, and using them to plough the fields, will result in the life-giving consequence of abundant crops.

Tremper Longman: A productive life is messy. One desires a neat and tidy life, just as the ideal stall would be clean. However, a clean stall by the nature of things would mean an empty stall since oxen do not have to be in a stall long before it is messy. However, **without oxen there is no productivity**. After all, as colon 2 points out, crops do not appear magically out of thin air but rather as a result of much work.

III. (:5) CONTRAST BETWEEN A FAITHFUL AND FALSE WITNESS – ALWAYS TELL THE TRUTH

"*A faithful witness will not lie,*
But a false witness speaks lies."

Bruce Waltke: A judge can discriminate between true and false testimonies by discerning the character of the witnesses (see **12:17**). A good tree brings forth good fruit and the bad tree bad (**Matt. 7:17–18; 12:33–35**).

Paul Koptak: The false witness is (lit.) a "*lie breather*" or one who "*breathes out lies*" (cf. **14:25**; also **6:19; 12:17; 19:5, 9**). The false witness is like a club or sharp arrow (**25:18**); in a legal setting, that person will do great harm.

Charles Bridges: A truthful witness is moved neither by entreaties nor bribes, neither by promises nor threats to swerve from truth. He is a man to trust. He will not lie. But a false witness has lost all principles about truth. He will tell lies without any provocation, so long as they are to his advantage. You should run away from such people.

IV. (:6-7) 2 KEYS TO ACQUIRING WISDOM

A. (:6) Connection between Character and Learning – Make Sure You Are Teachable

"*A scoffer seeks wisdom, and finds none,*
But knowledge is easy to him who has understanding."

Tremper Longman: This proverb therefore teaches that one's ability to learn wisdom is related to one's **predisposition**.

Matthew Henry: The reason why some people seek wisdom, and do not find it, is because they do not seek it from a right principle and in a right manner. They are **scorners**, and it is in scorn that they ask instruction, that they may ridicule what is told them and may cavil at it. Many put questions to Christ, tempting him, and that they might have whereof to accuse him, but they were never the wiser. No marvel if those who seek wisdom, as Simon Magus sought the gifts of the Holy Ghost, to serve their pride and covetousness, do not find it, for they seek amiss. Herod desired to see a miracle, but he was a scorner, and therefore it was denied him, **Lu. 23:8.**

Ernest Lucas: For Whybray the point of **v. 6** is 'that wisdom is not a commodity which anyone may acquire whenever he feels the need for it: it only comes to those who by their way of life have disposed themselves to receive it'. Since the scoffer is arrogant (**21:24**) and refuses to accept rebuke (**15:12**) he is **unteachable**. Those with understanding are in a position to gain more wisdom (**1:5**).

Allen Ross: The scorner is intellectually arrogant; he lacks any serious interest in knowledge or religion. One can only guess that he pursues wisdom in a superficial way so that he might have the appearance of being wise. Plaut, 159, offers one application: those who want to read and learn will not be heard saying, "I have no time to read"; that statement is made only by those wishing to inflate their egos.

B. (:7) Connection between Associations and Learning – Stay Away from a Fool

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

Bruce Waltke: *Go* is an urgent imperative. *For you will not have known lips* (speech) *of knowledge*. The proverb uses litotes. Far from experiencing wisdom, what one will get is an abundance of folly (cf. **17:10; 22:24–25; 23:20; 28:7; 1 Cor. 15:33; 2 Cor. 6:17; 1 Tim. 6:4–5**).

Richard Clifford: If the text is sound, there may be a wordplay on the *front* of a fool, whose face (lit., "*front*") and lips are dangerous. Leave the face of a fool, for only folly is there. The Hebrew words for "*face*" and "*front*" are parallel in **Ps. 44:16**.

Paul Koptak: Once again, the proverbs recognize that the company one keeps will have its influence. Taken together, one can learn better alone than with the help of a fool.

Tremper Longman: In **13:20** we learn that those who associate with fools will become foolish themselves, and those who associate with wise people will be wise. This verse may be understood as an admonition based on the observation found in **13:20**. The idea is that one who searches for knowledge will not find it with a foolish person, so don't associate with such a one.

Caleb Nelson: The sage tells us to **stay away from a fool** because what the fool has to say will not be knowledge. Remember, the philosophers define knowledge as "true, justified belief." The fool is more than ready to tell you about his beliefs, but they are neither true nor justified. After all, he's a fool who foolishly believes falsehoods on pitifully slender evidence.

TEXT: Proverbs 14:8-15

TITLE: PRUDENT VS. THE FOOLISH

I. (:8) WISDOM OF THE PRUDENT VS. FOLLY OF FOOLS

A. Wisdom of the Prudent = Understanding

"*The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way,*"

George Mylne: We are travelers to eternity and our wisdom lies in knowing the way which leads to that world of unending bliss.

We must endeavor to be acquainted with the difficulties of our way and how to surmount them; to know the enemies that may be expected to oppose our progress and in what manner to conquer them; and what helps may be met with in the way, to animate our spirits in pursuing our journey.

It is a piece of necessary wisdom also, to acquaint ourselves with the business and duties of our own particular callings, that we may discharge them with honor and success.

Matthew Henry: Christian prudence consists in a right understanding of our way; for we are travellers, whose concern it is, not to spy wonders, but to get forward towards their journey's end. It is to understand our own way, not to be critics and busybodies in other men's matters, but to look well to ourselves and ponder the path of our feet, to understand the directions of our way, that we may observe them, the dangers of our way, that we may avoid them, the difficulties of our way, that we may break through them, and the advantages of our way, that we may improve them—to understand the rules we are to walk by and the ends we are to walk towards, and walk accordingly.

B. Folly of Fools = Deceit

"*But the folly of fools is deceit.*"

Paul Koptak: those who give thought to their way practice honesty in their words and deeds.

George Mylne: They are fools who know other people's business better than their own. Some people, if you will take their own word for it, could reign better than the king, and preach better than the minister. They know, in short, how to manage in every condition but their own! These are the busy-bodies and meddlers in other men's matters, who in scripture are condemned, and by their neighbors held in derision. . .

They mean to deceive others but they deceive themselves worse by it. They may trick their neighbors out of their money but they cheat themselves out of their souls! All that wisdom of the serpent that is not reconcilable with the harmlessness of the dove, is

folly; and every piece of deceit practiced on our fellow-men, is a dangerous infliction on our own souls.

Tremper Longman: Folly may hold out the promise to be the solution to life's issues, but in reality folly fails people and thus is a fraud. Rather than guiding people, it misleads them. For "*fraud*" (*mirmâ*), see **11:1; 12:5, 17, 20; 14:8, 25; 20:23; 26:24**.

Charles Bridges: But while the attention of a truly wise man is occupied in understanding his way, "the arts of deceit engross the polluted minds of the wicked" (French and Skinner). Their wisdom of deceit is really folly. Gehazi's overreaching wisdom proved to be folly in the end. Ananias and Sapphira vainly endeavored to hide their covetousness under the cover of generosity. Who can deceive a heart-searching God? The attempt to do so is a fearful provocation and certain confusion.

Bruce Waltke: The shrewd choose their steps according to their moral knowledge to assure themselves of life. By contrast, fools, lacking that moral knowledge, scheme to victimize others, unaware that they are also victimizing themselves.

II. (:9) DISREGARD FOR SIN VS. PROMOTING GOOD WILL

A. Disregard for Sin

"*Fools mock at sin,"*

Lindsay Wilson: The guilt offering could be rendered as '*a sacrifice for guilt*' (as in **Lev. 5:14–19**) or simply as '*guilt*' itself, for '*āšām* is used in both senses. Yet in a wisdom context, '*āšām* most likely refers simply to guilt, which would give the sense of fools scoffing at the thought that they might be guilty. This guilt would include accountability to God, and consequent acceptance among other upright people to whom godliness matters.

Allen Ross: Folly offends, but wisdom makes amends. . . The parallelism suggests the idea that fools ridicule **reparation**, whereas the upright show **goodwill**.

Richard Clifford: The Hebrew verb in colon A, *lîṣ*, can mean "*to scorn*" as well as "*to mediate*," making possible the translation, "*The wicked scorn a guilt offering*." The meaning is either that fools scornfully refuse to take any steps to remove their guilt by offerings or that they simply continue in their wicked behavior, whereas the upright by reason of their uprightness already enjoy divine acceptance and favor.

Tremper Longman: Fools are those who disdain guilt offerings. After all, fools will not admit fault and therefore would never agree that a guilt offering is necessary. For guilt offering, see **Lev. 5:14 – 6:7**. In this case, the virtuous is pitted against the stupid person. The proverb therefore implies that virtue includes the acknowledgment of transgression and the necessity of a guilt offering.

B. Promoting Good Will

"*But among the upright there is good will.*"

George Mylne: Foolish men make a sport of their own sins, when they ought to be humbled to the dust on account of them. Because they are not presently punished they think that punishment shall never come. Or, like brute beasts, they do not consider what shall be hereafter. . .

The righteous have a **principle of charity**, that disposes them to rejoice in the goodness and happiness of others as their own. Paul scarcely begins an epistle, without strong expressions of his joy in the prosperity of his fellow-Christians. This charity completed, will multiply the blessedness of the heavenly state.

III. (:10-14) PERCEPTIVE HEART VS. SELF-ABSORBED HEART

A. (:10) Internal Emotions (from Bitterness to Joy) Are a Matter of the Heart of the Individual

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

Tremper Longman: The proverb makes the observation that no one can really know what is going on emotionally inside another person.

Richard Clifford: One's sorrows and one's joys—a merism meaning all deep emotions—cannot be completely shared with others.

Paul Koptak: The saying appears to counterbalance the picture of communal harmony of **14:9**. Even if it is good when brothers and sisters dwell in unity (**Ps. 133:1**), our inner lives are finally our own. Even while our lives are shared with others, our deepest thoughts and feelings remain hidden. Only God ultimately knows what is in the heart (**Prov. 17:3; 21:2; 24:12**).

This verse stands out as unusual, both in its lack of contrast and in its exploration of a psychological matter. It makes no prescription, but its observation does offer the reader wisdom to carry on through life. The saying illustrates how deceptive appearances can be, for there is always more than meets the eye.

Allen Ross: There are joys and sorrows that cannot be shared. People in their deepest emotional feelings of "*bitterness*" (*mārâ*) or "*joy*" (*śimḥâ*) alone can understand those feelings. The proverb forewarns against any unnatural or forced attempts to express empathy.

Charles Bridges: This is a graphic illustration of the **individuality** of each person (see **1 Corinthians 2:11**). The history of the soul is only fully known and felt by the conscious subject. Each heart knows its own bitterness, which is deep and interior. "Everyone is inwardly and the only true and faithful judge of his own joys and sorrows,

and none else can truly perceiver them" (Diodati). The most poignant sufferings often arise from reasons that cannot be told to our dearest friend. So each person must tread a **solitary path**, and in that path he must often be prepared to be misunderstood.

B. (:11) Retribution on the Wicked and the Upright

"*The house of the wicked will be destroyed,*
But the tent of the upright will flourish."

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 11** is a classical expression of the biblical doctrine of **retribution** (**12:7**), with the character of a person (wicked or upright) leading to certain consequences (destruction or flourishing). The verb used for *flourish* (the hifil of *prḥ*) evokes a picture of a bush full of buds, about to burst in flower as the expression of its life. The focus is on character, not on isolated actions, and there is no mention of God's active involvement in the destruction or flourishing. It is simply a statement of the principle, but with an implied urging to choose to take a stand with the upright.

Tremper Longman: The paradox of the verse is that the house, a stable structure, will be annihilated, while the tent, an inherently less stable structure, will prosper.

Bruce Waltke: This proverb implicitly teaches the disciple to **walk by faith, not by sight.** Paradoxically, the wicked person's house is less secure than the upright person's tent. The house connotes a more secure and grand dwelling than a tent (see David's desire to replace *I AM's* tent with a house in **2 Sam. 7:4–6**). That of wicked people will be annihilated. By contrast, the tent of upright people will *bud* (or "*sprout*"). "*Tent*" refers to a nomadic tent used as a dwelling. The metaphor "*bud*" signifies that their households burgeon with **life** and **prosperity**. The seemingly unstable nomadic tent of the upright has stood from the time of the forefathers, and its inhabitants not only remain but forever flourish with new life (cf. **Pss. 1:3; 92:12–14; John 15:1–17**).

C. (:12) Deceived Perception Vs. Tragic Reality

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

Paul Koptak: Another contrast of appearance and reality, the key word "*way*" points to the choices that require foresight, while the "*end*" describes outcomes, rewards, and reality. The contrast between that which "*seems right*" (*yšr*; cf. **14:2, 9, 11** with overtones of "*straight*") and the actual end of "*death*" reminds the reader of wisdom's words (**8:36; 9:18**). This saying is repeated in **16:25**.

Allen Ross: The issue, then, is **how deceptive evil is**. It may promise and deliver happiness, power, and the good life, but it cannot sustain what it gives.

Tremper Longman: The proverb deals with human perception versus reality. What seems the right path of life may well turn out to lead to dire consequences. The proverb calls on the wise to constantly question and evaluate their life path.

Bruce Waltke: *The end of it* is its outcome, in light of which the whole must be evaluated. Plural *ways* itemizes the way which the person thought right into its many choices—which in fact were evil, as shown by the outcome *death*. Since death is the ultimate failure, this denouement shows that the person's choices were wrong. Where a road leads is not always as it appears, because human perception of truth is partial, opaque, and often contrary to reality. Only the omniscient God knows the way of life. He reveals it through his inspired sage, and the disciple must accept that revelation by faith. Jesus Christ, the divine Sage, said that he himself is *the Way, the Truth, and the Life* (**John 14:6**).

Matthew Henry: We have here an account of the way and end of a great many self-deluded souls. Their way is seemingly fair: It seems right to themselves; they please themselves with a fancy that they are as they should be, that their opinions and practices are good, and such as will bear them out. The way of ignorance and carelessness, the way of worldliness and earthly-mindedness, the way of sensuality and flesh-pleasing, seem right to those that walk in them, much more the way of hypocrisy in religion, external performances, partial reformations, and blind zeal; this they imagine will bring them to heaven; they flatter themselves in their own eyes that all will be well at last.

Their end is really fearful, and the more so for their mistake: It is the ways of death, eternal death; their iniquity will certainly be their ruin, and they will perish with a lie in their right hand. **Self-deceivers will prove in the end self-destroyers**.

D. (:13) Expressions of Emotion May Mask Inward Reality

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

Paul Koptak: Laughter may hide present heartache, while joy may in time be replaced by grief. When read alongside **14:10**, the first and second lines correspond—the first on the theme of **inner hurt**, the second on the word "*joy*." Together they show how even **joy has its costs**; sometimes joy must remain private and hidden, and often it is temporary.

George Mylne: The joys of this world cannot make a man happy. They are often merely external and false, and they commonly end in heaviness. It is very common for men to put on a face of joy, while the heart pines away with grief.

Some put on the appearance of joy to prevent or remove suspicions about their behavior, and endeavor to cover a guilty conscience with smiles. It would surely be far better to own their sins, and to seek after the pleasures of pardon, and then they may rejoice in God for the forgiveness of their sins.

Others, from a pride of appearing happy, conceal their uncomfortable circumstances and dejected spirits under the appearances of mirth when they ought to acquiesce in the providence of God, and to seek those pleasures which the world can neither give nor take away.

There are others still, who laugh when their hearts are sorrowful, from an ambition of appearing heroes who cannot be subdued by misfortunes. They are like the Stoic philosopher, who, under a severe fit of the stone, revealed at once his weakness and his desire of concealing it by these words: "Pain, you may rack me but you shall not make me confess that you are an evil thing!" An affected joy under tribulation, is as despicable as the triumphant joy of a believer is glorious.

The end of this, and of all worldly mirth, is for the most part heaviness. In this valley of tears, our joys are few and weak, and pains tread upon their heels. Our greatest comforts are avenues to our bitterest calamities. Heaven alone is the land of real and lasting joys. The only joys on earth worth the naming, are derived from the hope of possessing them.

Tremper Longman: The insight is that surface realities, in this case what appear to be positive emotions, are not the whole story and may hide more difficult and painful feelings. According to Qoheleth, sorrow better reflects reality than joy (**Eccles. 7:2, 3, 4, 6**).

E. (:14) Self Indulgence Vs. Satisfaction in Righteousness

"*The backslider in heart will have his fill of his own ways,*
But a good man will be satisfied with his."

Lindsay Wilson: This emphasis on what is going on inside a person (**the heart**) in **verse 13** gives a subtle nuance to the reformulation of the idea of retribution in **verse 14**. The wicked is now described as the backslider in heart, one who used to be committed to doing good, but has now fallen away or '*turned his heart back*' (backslider in heart, *esv*, captures the sense better than '*faithless*', niv, or '*perverse*', nrsv). This refers to what we are like on the inside, not simply how we act on the outside. The parallel term of the good person is impliedly also a description of someone's internal attitude, and so retribution in both its negative and positive dimensions is based on a person's core character and direction in life.

George Mylne: The springs of his satisfaction are in God, and he abhors the thought of boasting, except in the Lord, and in his cross; and yet it is true that he shall be satisfied with the fruit of his ways. His pleasure does not lie in comparing himself with those who are worse than he but he proves his own work, and rejoices with the fruit of his ways. His soul is fitted for relishing true satisfaction, and filled with that holiness which is the same thing to the inner man, that health is to the body. His good works are not the grounds of his confidence but through Christ they are accepted of God, and graciously rewarded. "Say you to the righteous, It shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings."

Bruce Waltke: The inseparable **deed-destiny nexus** is here applied to abandoning wisdom. After choosing the good way, the disciple must continue in it because the Sovereign ensures that the good deeds of the faithful redound to reward them but the ways of the unfaithful, despite whatever communal good they earlier performed,

redound to punish them (cf. **Jer. 18:7–10**). Apostates will be rewarded, but not as they expected; they *will be fully punished because of their ways*. Plural "*ways*" denotes all the evil manifestations that carry within themselves the apostate's destruction. But the benevolent [*will be fully rewarded*] *for their* good *deeds*.

IV. (:15) GULLIBILITY OF THE NAÏVE VS. DISCERNMENT OF THE PRUDENT

A. Gullibility of the Naïve

"*The naive believes everything,*"

Tremper Longman: The "*simpleminded*" or "*naive*" *(petî*) are characterized by their lack of critical thinking. By not reflecting on a matter, they may well speak or act on the basis of a misunderstanding and thus say or do the wrong thing, with horrible consequences. On the other hand, the prudent think ahead. This proverb basically defines the simpleminded over against the prudent, with the intention of encouraging the attentive reader/hearer to be prudent.

Richard Clifford: The simple are gullible, giving credence to everything said by others. Oblivious of danger, they do not practice discernment. The shrewd, on the other hand, watch their own steps rather than swallowing whole what others say. The difference between the two types is nicely highlighted by the placement in the middle of each colon of the similar-sounding verbs *ya'ămîn* and *yâbîn* ("*believe*" and "*watches*").

B. Discernment of the Prudent

"*But the prudent man considers his steps.*"

George Mylne: Multitudes have been seduced into the most dangerous errors and damning sins, by seducers whom they believed, either from an implicit faith, or from lack of care in searching the oracles of truth.

The whole world was ruined by the simplicity of Eve, and the credit she gave to the serpent.

A prudent man will therefore look well to his goings. He will not risk his fortune and happiness, his life and soul, by believing groundless reports, or receiving doctrines that are destitute of sufficient proof. He will not withdraw his love from men; or do them hurt, because they have the misfortune to become the butt of slander.

There is nothing in which we are so ready to be deceived as in points of religion, and no errors are so dangerous as these. A prudent man will therefore call no man on earth master but will look upon Christ as his only Master. The Scriptures he considers as his only rule, and the Spirit who dictated them as their great interpreter. He searches the Scripture, and seeks wisdom from God by daily prayer. As Christ is the only way to the Father, the man that is spiritually wise enters into his religious course, and walks in it, depending on this Savior alone for acceptance.

Allen Ross: **Discernment, opposite of gullibility**. Wisdom prevents gullibility. This verse contrasts the simpleton (*petî*) with the prudent (*ʿārûm*), i.e., the youth who is untrained intellectually and morally contrasted with the wise person who has the ability to make critical discriminations. The saying shows that the *petî* is gullible; he believes every word, probably because he hears what he wants to hear. The prudent person, however, discerns every step.

Charles Bridges: Cautious consideration should mark our general conduct. We should try everything before we trust it. In the church we should especially think about whom we should follow. Sift the most plausible pretensions. Never set a great name against the divine testimony. Ask for wisdom from God. Put feeling on the side, and under the direction of sound judgment.

Matthew Henry: The *prudent man* will try before he trusts, will weigh both the credibility of the witness and the probability of the testimony, and then give judgment as the thing appears or suspend his judgment till it appears. *Prove all things*, and *believe not every spirit*.

TEXT: Proverbs 14:16-35

TITLE: REWARDS / VALUE OF WISDOM, FEARING GOD AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

I. (:16-19) REWARDS OF WISDOM

A. (:16-17) Avoids Calamity

1. (:16) Cautious vs. Reckless

> "*A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil,*
> *But a fool is arrogant and careless.*"

Paul Koptak: **Verses 16–17** are linked by images of hair-trigger temper and folly. . .

Matthew Henry:
1. Holy fear is an excellent guard upon every holy thing, and against every thing that is unholy. It is wisdom to depart from evil, from the evil of sin, and thereby from all other evil; and therefore it is wisdom to fear, that is, to be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy, to keep up a dread of God's wrath, to be afraid of coming near the borders of sin or dallying with the beginnings of it. A wise man, for fear of harm, keeps out of harm's way, and starts back in a fright when he finds himself entering into temptation.

2. Presumption is folly. He who, when he is warned of his danger, rages and is confident, furiously pushes on, cannot bear to be checked, bids defiance to the wrath and curse of God, and, fearless of danger, persists in his rebellion, makes bold with the occasions of sin, and plays upon the precipice, he is a fool, for he acts against his reason and his interest, and his ruin will quickly be the proof of his folly.

Charles Bridges: A wise man fears the Lord and shuns evil, but a fool is hotheaded and reckless. Fear is sometimes though to be an unmanly principle. But look at the dreadful extent of the evil that should be shunned. On the outside it is vanity and disappointment. On the inside it is the sting of guilt. So, to shun this evil – yes, to fear it – is true wisdom.

The fool, however, stout and stubborn in his mind, never fears until he falls. The voice of God is unheard in the middle of passion. He is "carried by his rash will and blind passion without understanding the end of things" (Diodati). He is hotheaded and reckless. Such a fool was Rehoboam when his self-willed confidence rejected the counsel of wisdom and experience (**1 Kings 12:13-15**).

George Mylne: Fools despise the threatenings of the Bible. They are filled with rage at those providences and reprovers which would check them in their course of sin but their confidence is daring presumption, which hurries them on to those courses that end in despair. If you would set everlasting burnings before them they will yet rush on in sin. But their haughty spirits will be tamed when they shall cry to the rocks and mountains to fall on them, and hide them from the face of the Lamb.

2. (:17) Rash Foolishness vs. Premeditated Evil

"*A quick-tempered man acts foolishly,*
And a man of evil devices is hated."

Paul Koptak: The comparison here is between one who does foolish things **on impulse** and one who does evil that has been **carefully planned and premeditated**, a product of scheming. Both ends of the temperament spectrum lead to bad ends. The intended message of the contrast may be that as bad as rash and foolish behavior is, it can be forgiven more easily than premeditated wrong.

Bruce Waltke: The **hot-tempered** one commits **folly**, a singular collective denoting many specific deeds and consequences that are done to harm others and prompted by moral insolence (see **5:23; 14:1, 8**). Hotheads are undisciplined, out of control, unpredictable, and overreact. Sages viewed anger negatively: as cruel (**27:4**), factious (**30:33**), and needing to be calmed (**15:1; 29:8, 11**). Johnson says, "The ideal of wisdom is the quiet man who does not err in anger, or as **17:27** puts it, is 'a calm and understanding man.'" Schemers, by contrast, methodically plot and carry out their ruthless plans. They are hated, a metonymy for their rejection and elimination by God and/or the community.

Tremper Longman: Perhaps there is a connection with the previous verse in the fact that the fool is one who gets easily angered. In any case, those who are quick to throw a temper tantrum also act impulsively and then do stupid, thoughtless things, which get them into trouble. However, the second colon intensifies the thought of the first line. It is one thing to be short-tempered and do stupid things; it is even worse if one commits evil acts after long reflection and planning. That is the meaning of "*scheme*" (*mĕzimmôt)* here. The word "*scheming*" is from *mĕzimmâ.* This word can have either a positive or negative meaning. In **2:11** we saw that it has the positive sense of "*discretion*," but here it is the negative idea of "*scheming*." The basic idea is, as Fox has pointed out, "private, unrevealed thought, often but not always used in scheming. As the ability to think for oneself and keep one's own counsel, it is especially valuable in withstanding temptation." Here it is negative, as in **12:2,** where the schemer is contrasted with the good person. The latter obtains God's favor, while God condemns the schemer.

B. (:18) Crowned with Knowledge

"*The naive inherit folly,*
But the prudent are crowned with knowledge."

Paul Koptak: In both lines of the saying, the rewards not only correspond to the qualities of "*folly*" and "*prudence*," they foster and nurture them.

Bruce Waltke: Their internalization of wisdom enables them to evade danger (see **v. 16**) and to win dominion and dignity.

Matthew Henry: Wisdom is the honour of the wise: The prudent crown themselves with knowledge, they look upon it as their brightest ornament, and there is nothing they are so ambitious of; they bind it to their heads as a crown, which they will by no means part with; they press towards the top and perfection of knowledge, which will crown their beginnings and progress. They shall have the praise of it; wise heads shall be respected as if they were crowned heads. They crown knowledge (so some read it); they are a credit to their profession. Wisdom is not only justified, but glorified, of all her children.

Tremper Longman: Simplemindedness produces stupidity. On the other hand, the prudent wear knowledge as an ornament: the prudent are clearly recognized and honored for their knowledge.

Richard Clifford: It is impossible that the inner quality of a person not be revealed. In this saying the inner quality of the simple and the clever are on display like clothing and jewelry. The righteous wear a crown, which is a good thing in Proverbs. It is a sign of God's blessing as a good wife for her husband (**12:4**), gray hair for the righteous (**16:31**), and grandchildren for the elderly (**17:6**).

C. (:19) Rules over the Wicked

"*The evil will bow down before the good,*
And the wicked at the gates of the righteous."

George Mylne: Wicked men follow courses which have a tendency in their own nature, and by the appointment of God, to bring them to a state of slavery and dependence.

Godly men, through the blessing of God on their virtue and industry, are often placed in circumstances that enable them to relieve the wretched and unhappy, so that their favor is humbly courted by those who once despised them.

II. (:20-25) VALUE OF WISDOM

A. (:20-21) Genuine Relationships

1. (:20) Superficial Friendship Based on Economic Status

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

Paul Koptak: **Verses 20** and **21** are linked by the repetition of the word "*neighbor*" and the theme of the "*poor*" and "*needy*." When read together, the main contrast is between the **self-interested love** shown to the rich and the **selfless kindness** shown to the poor. The contrast in **verse 20** points up the inequity; the poor who need friends have none, while those who need little have many. This sharp critique is heightened by the use of the word "*neighbor*." In ancient Israel, neighbor love included leaving the edges of one's field for gleaning, honest and just dealing, and correction (**Lev. 19:9–19**). Jesus called anyone who has need a deserving "neighbor" (**Luke 10:25–37**).

Allen Ross: **Possessions determine popularity**. This is just a statement of the reality of life. The poor are avoided and shunned (*yiśśānē᾽*, lit., "*hated*") as useless by their neighbors, but "*the lovers of the rich are many*" (lit. trans.).

Matthew Henry: There is little friendship in the world but what is governed by **self-interest**, which is no true friendship at all, nor what a wise man will either value himself on or put any confidence in. Those that make the world their God idolize those that have most of its good things, and seek their favour as if indeed they were Heaven's favourites.

George Mylne: Our love to our neighbor deserves not the name, if it is founded only upon his riches. Poverty, or distress, instead of diminishing our love to them, ought to draw it forth into action. It is base to profess love to people in the time of their prosperity, and to be cold to them in the day of their distress. All men censure Job's friends for behaving harshly to him at a time when they could not show too much tenderness and compassion.

The rich has many friends but little reason to place much confidence in many of them. They are generally not friends to himself but to his money and his table. Let him wear rags, and live on bread and water and he will find who are his real friends.

Let us test our love to our neighbors, for there is much hypocrisy in men's regard to their fellow-creatures, as well as in that respect which they show to their Maker. Sincere love to Christ cleaves to him, whether religion is well or ill spoken of; and true love to our neighbors is the same, whether they are in adverse or prosperous circumstances and love appears most when there is most need to reveal it.

The poor need not be discouraged because their friends have forsaken them. It is not true that their friends have forsaken them, if they have given them no other reason for it than becoming poor. They were not real friends, but dissemblers and it is no loss to know their insincerity.

2. (:21) Genuine Compassion for the Poor

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

Paul Koptak: The implicit point of **14:20** is spelled out here, that it is "*sin*" to "*despise*" one's "*neighbor*" by failing to help in time of need (the word "*despise*" is used in **14:2** for rejecting Yahweh and his way).

Allen Ross: *Despising* (*bāzâ*) means treating with contempt, discarding one as worthless. To ignore a neighbor in this coldhearted fashion is just as much a sin as showing favor to the poor is an act of righteousness.

Bruce Waltke: By vilifying one's neighbor, one is in violation of God's standards. By contrast, those who show favor to the poor denotes those who esteem their neighbors

and so accept them and act kindly toward them. Such freely given favor implies piety, mercy, and generosity, not preferential treatment. The laudatory exclamation blessed are they (see **3:13; 8:32, 34**) holds up the benevolent as exemplars of a right relationship with I AM now and joy in the future.

Charles Bridges: But how happy is the man who is kind to the needy. "He shall be happy beyond expression" (Stott). Does not every act of love enlarge our own happiness? Do we not ourselves richly feed on the bread with which we feed the hungry? And will not the great day declare and honor every act of love that we have done for our divine Master?

B. (:22) Pathway of Kindness and Truth

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

Paul Koptak: Those who plan evil are rewarded with going astray (cf. **7:25; 10:17; 12:26**), so it is better to plan for good and enjoy its return in love and faithfulness.

Charles Bridges: Love is the fountainhead, faithfulness the pledge and fulfillment of unchangeable mercy.

Tremper Longman: This is a proverb about **consequences**. It contrasts the end result of planning evil and planning good. Evil planners are not rooted in anything but, rather, wander aimlessly. The verb "*wander aimlessly*" (*tʿh*) may have been chosen in order to allude to the "path theology" that runs throughout the book, especially the first part. The rhetorical question presupposes a positive answer. On the other hand, those who plan good things receive good things. "*Covenant love and faithfulness*" (*ḥesed weʾĕmet*) is a frequent word pair. In many contexts, they describe the quality of God's relationship toward his creatures. He is faithful to protect them and love them. But they are also characteristics of the community of God's people. Those who plan good things receive the benefits and goodwill of others of like attitude.

C. (:23-24) Value of Diligence

Paul Koptak: **Verses 23–25** are linked by a theme; work brings wealth and even saves life, while mere talk or foolish talk only produces more of the same.

1. (:23) Fruit of Hard Work

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

Paul Koptak: In **14:23** the contrast of mere talk and effort (with overtones of toil and sorrow; cf. *ʾeṣeb* in **10:22**) is that of intention and follow through, emptiness and payoff.

Bruce Waltke: This antithetical proverb fleshes out the "*planners of good*" as those who through hard, honest work are rewarded with material and circumstantial gains (cf. **10:4–5; Isa. 49:4; Heb. 6:10**; cf. **John 6:27**). In qualifies the area of profitability as all kinds of strenuous work. There is *profit* (*môtār*; lit. "*what is left over*") signifies the axioms that within God's common grace and created order one gains more from an endeavor than what one expends in it and that the profit is realized in the future, upon completion of the work. So, people live by faith in that hope. By contrast, mere empty talk (lit. "*but words of lips*"; cf. **2 Kgs. 18:20** for the meaning of this idiom) [leads] only to deprivation and death. Metaphoric "*leads … to*" suggests a journey leading to a goal. "*Only*" highlights the unexpected destination of scarcity (*maḥsôr*; see **6:32; 11:24**), the state of lacking basic necessities.

Matthew Henry:
1. Working, without talking, will make men rich: In all labour of the head, or of the hand, there is profit; it will turn to some good account or other. Industrious people are generally thriving people, and where there is something done there is something to be had. The stirring hand gets a penny. It is good therefore to keep in business, and to keep in action, and what our hand finds to do to do it with all our might.

2. Talking, without working, will make men poor. Those that love to boast of their business and make a noise about it, and that waste their time in tittle-tattle, in telling and hearing new things, like the Athenians, and, under pretence of improving themselves by conversation, neglect the work of their place and day, they waste what they have, and the course they take tends to penury, and will end in it. It is true in the affairs of our souls; those that take pains in the service of God, that strive earnestly in prayer, will find profit in it. But if men's religion runs all out in talk and noise, and their praying is only the labour of the lips, they will be spiritually poor, and come to nothing.

George Mylne: Men must not, however, expect success in their labor without the blessing of God; and therefore, to industry must be added a dependence on God's providence, a due regard to the service of God, and a disposition to contribute a proper proportion of the fruit of their labors to pious and charitable uses. Otherwise God may blast their labors in righteous judgment, and then no diligence in business can be a security against poverty.

2. (:24) Blessing of Prosperity

"*The crown of the wise is their riches,*
But the folly of fools is foolishness."

Charles Bridges: Wealth is the crown . . . of the wise, but it cannot hide fools. It only makes their folly more apparent. Since it is wasted on their selfish gratification, it is not their crown but their folly. So whatever our talents are, let us use them for eternity; then they will be our everlasting crown.

Matthew Henry:
1. If men be wise and good, riches make them so much the more honourable and useful:

The crown of the wise is their riches; their riches make them to be so much the more respected, and give them the more authority and influence upon others. Those that have wealth, and wisdom to use it, will have a great opportunity of honouring God and doing good in the world. Wisdom is good without an inheritance, but better with it.

2. If men be wicked and corrupt, their wealth will but the more expose them: The foolishness of fools, put them in what condition you will, is folly, and will show itself and shame them; if they have riches, they do mischief with them and are the more hardened in their foolish practices.

Lindsay Wilson: The folly of fools (**v. 24b**) refers to talking but not working, and this will result in the person being shown to be a fool. Those who have worked hard will have their wealth to show, and this will be outward evidence of their wise choices. Given the idea of retribution in the book, their resulting wealth is a testimony to their wisdom. The image of crown implies a status visible to others, and recalls **verse 18** (also **4:9**).

D. (:25) Value of Truthfulness

"*A truthful witness saves lives,*
But he who speaks lies is treacherous."

Matthew Henry: How little regard is to be had to a false witness. He forges lies, and yet pours them out with the greatest assurance imaginable for the destruction of the innocent. It is therefore the interest of a nation by all means possible to detect and punish false-witness-bearing, yea, and lying in common conversation; for truth is the cement of society.

III. (:26-27) REWARDS OF FEARING GOD

Lindsay Wilson: There is less overall structure in the rest of this chapter, with only occasional pairings such as the fear of the Lord sayings in **verses 26** and **27**.

A. (:26) Confidence and Legacy

"*In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence,*
And his children will have refuge."

Allen Ross: **Exodus 20:5–6** declares that children will reap the benefits of righteous parents if they also love the Lord; parents who fear the Lord will be a refuge for their children.

Charles Bridges: He who fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge. The true fear of God is a holy, happy, reverential principle. It is not the fear that throws out love, but that which brings love in. It is reverence tempered with love. We fear because we love. We fear, yet are not afraid. The holiest and the humblest is the most steady and trusting heart. The fear of man saps our strength; but

the fear of God, such is the Christian paradox, makes us bold. Its childlike spirit shuts out all terrors of conscience, all forebodings of eternity.

Matthew Henry: The **fear of the Lord** is here put for all gracious principles, producing gracious practices.

1. Where this reigns it produces a holy security and serenity of mind. There is in it a strong confidence; it enables a man still to hold fast both his purity and his peace, whatever happens, and gives him boldness before God and the world. I know that I shall be justified—None of these things move me; such is the language of this confidence.

2. It entails a blessing upon posterity. The children of those that by faith make God their confidence shall be encouraged by the promise that God will be a God to believers and to their seed to flee to him as their refuge, and they shall find shelter in him.

B. (:27) Life and Protection

"*The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,*
That one may avoid the snares of death."

Charles Bridges: How bright is this divine principle. It is full of life – temporal life, spiritual life, and eternal life. It is the effect of the heavenly Comforter who produces water welling up to eternal life (**John 4:14**). It is not only a refuge from the snares of death, but a fountain of life. Among the countless redeemed, no one finds cover from condemnation who has not been made alive with spiritual life. This invaluable grace flows with the full streams of gospel blessing.

IV. (:28-35) REWARDS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE KING

Paul Koptak: Two sayings about the king form the outer edges of what may be a **chiasm**:

A **v. 28** King's glory
B **v. 29** Exalt [root rwm] folly
C **v. 30** Heart at peace gives life
D **vv. 31–32** Sayings on treatment and reward
C′ **v. 33** Heart a home for wisdom
B′ **v. 34** Exalt [root rwm] a nation
A′ **v. 35** King's delight

Of special interest is the appearance of **royal proverbs**, for each of the sayings in this section can apply to the responsibilities of monarch and the character qualities that are required.

A. (:28) King's Glory vs. Ruin

"*In a multitude of people is a king's glory,*
But in the dearth of people is a prince's ruin."

Paul Koptak: The larger the kingdom, the larger the wealth and status.

Bruce Waltke: The proverb implicitly encourages the disciple to be a competent person who attracts people, not a fool whom people desert.

Matthew Henry: It is therefore the wisdom of princes, by a mild and gentle government, by encouraging trade and husbandry, and by making all easy under them, to promote the increase of their people.

Ernest Lucas: **A Royal Proverb**
This proverb seems a banal statement of the obvious, that the reputation of a kingdom is related to its size and resources, of which the population is an important element. However, in a world where the emphasis was usually on the dependence of the people on the king (e.g. **1 Sam. 8:4-5; 2 Sam. 2:7; Lam. 4:20**) it provides a different perspective.

B. (:29-30) Danger of Uncontrolled Emotions

1. (:29) Temper Tantrums Exalt Folly

"*He who is slow to anger has great understanding,*
But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly."

Paul Koptak: If it is hard to believe that one displays wisdom by holding one's temper, the reverse picture of uncontrolled anger is certainly convincing.

Allen Ross: The one who is patient has "*great understanding*"; the one who has a quick temper (*qeṣar-rûaḥ*; lit., "*hasty of spirit*") exalts folly, i.e., he brings it to a full measure. So one should cultivate understanding.

Matthew Henry:
1. Meekness is wisdom. He rightly understands himself, and his duty and interest, the infirmities of human nature, and the constitution of human society, who is slow to anger,and knows how to excuse the faults of others as well as his own, how to adjourn his resentments, and moderate them, so as by no provocation to be put out of the possession of his own soul. A mild patient man is really to be accounted an intelligent man, one that learns of Christ, who is Wisdom itself.

2. Unbridled passion is folly proclaimed: He that is hasty of spirit, whose heart is tinder to every spark of provocation, that is all fire and tow, as we say, he thinks hereby to magnify himself and make those about stand in awe of him, whereas really he exalts his own folly; he makes it known, as that which is lifted up is visible to all, and he submits himself to it as to the government of one that is exalted.

Tremper Longman: The ability to control one's emotions and express them at the right time and to the appropriate degree is an important aspect of wisdom. To act impulsively, without reflection, leads to "*stupidity*," a close associate of "*folly*." Fox defines "*competence*" (*tĕbûnâ,* a nominal formed from *byn*; see also **2:2**) as "the pragmatic, applied aspect of thought, operating in the realm of action; it aims at efficacy and accomplishment."

George Mylne: A philosopher advised Augustus Caesar, when he felt himself angry, to say nothing until he had taken time to repeat all the letters of the Greek alphabet. When we find ourselves provoked, let us check our passions, until we are able, with greater coolness than Jonah, to answer that question, "*Do you do well to be angry*?"

2. (:30) Peaceful Heart Gives Life

"*A tranquil heart is life to the body,*
But passion is rottenness to the bones."

Paul Koptak: Given the picture of the interior life offered in earlier proverbs about the heart (**14:10, 13**), it appears that the ancients knew that jealousy, passion, and envy eat one from the inside out, thus rotting the bones (cf. **6:34; 27:4**).

Allen Ross: The word *qinʾâ* ("*envy*"; GK 7863) describes passionate zeal, a violent excitement that is never satisfied. One who is "consumed with envy" has no tranquility.

Bruce Waltke: The second proverb of the pair escalates the endorsement of patience by highlighting its **psychosomatic benefits**. Serenity saves; pique kills. A calm heart is life—physical life, in contrast to physical death, as shown by the qualifier in the entire body (see **4:22; 5:11**). But hot passion is rot in the bones, a condition that deteriorates to death. "*Body*" and "*bones*" refer to both the physical and psycho-spiritual aspects of human nature (cf. **12:4**). Inward turmoil from a resentful mind that is self-centered and narcissistic is like bone cancer that rots the framework of the body and shortens a person's life (cf. Sir. 30:24).

Tremper Longman: The first colon states that an emotionally healthy person enjoys physical well-being; the second colon observes that psychological turmoil results in physical illness. The "*heart*," after all, is roughly equivalent to one's core personality, including emotions (see **3:1**). A coolheaded person, an emotionally intelligent person, enjoys "*life in the body*." The latter term (from *bāśār*) focuses on the physical aspect of human existence. On the other hand, **jealousy** is an emotion that can destroy one's inner peace and have a physical effect. Murphy rightly points out that the association of jealousy with rot in the bones well indicates the nature of jealousy, which "eats away at a person."

C. (:31-32) Conduct Linked to Reward

1. (:31) Oppression vs. Graciousness

"*He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker,*
But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him."

Paul Koptak: Mistreatment of the poor is equal to insulting the one who made them and cares for them. To honor the poor is to honor God, and this may be the "*plan for good*" of **14:22**. To insult God is similar to "*despising*" him (cf. **14:2**). Reading them together, we surmise that it is the absence of fear of Yahweh that gives a person the temerity to oppress the poor whom God loves. A similar idea appears in **17:5**.

Charles Bridges: Are not the poor, no less than the rich, created in God's image? Both meet before their Maker. Both have the same nature in their hearts. Both sink to the same humiliating level in death. Both rise to the same eminence of immortality. Besides, do not the poor have a special interest in the Gospel? Was not the Gospel first spread by the Poor? Has not the voluntary poverty of the Son of God for us elevated such a lowly condition to the highest level? So what grounds are left that we should oppress the poor as if they were inferior to us? If we do this, we are guilty of showing contempt for their Maker (see **17:5**). We must not only refrain from oppressing the poor – we must have mercy on them.

2. (:32) Wicked vs. Righteous

"*The wicked is thrust down by his wrongdoing,*
But the righteous has a refuge when he dies."

D. (:33) Wise Heart Reflects Understanding

"*Wisdom rests in the heart of one who has understanding,*
But in the bosom of fools it is made known."

Allen Ross: The greatest amount of wisdom resides with those who have discernment. The second colon is a little difficult. It is normally translated as in the NIV: "*even among fools she lets herself be known*." This may be ironic or sarcastic: the fool, anxious to appear wise, blurts out what he thinks is wisdom but in the process turns it to folly.

Matthew Henry:
1. Modesty is the badge of wisdom. He that is truly wise hides his treasure, so as not to boast of it (**Mt. 13:44**), though he does not hide his talent, so as not to trade with it. His wisdom rests in his heart; he digests what he knows, and has it ready to him, but does not unseasonably talk of it and make a noise with it. The heart is the seat of the affections, and there wisdom must rest in the practical love of it, and not swim in the head.

2. Openness and ostentation are a mark of folly. If fools have a little smattering of knowledge, they take all occasions, though very foreign, to produce it, and bring it in by head and shoulders. Or the folly that is in the midst of fools is made known by their forwardness to talk. Many a foolish man takes more pains to show his folly than a wise man thinks it worth his while to take to show his wisdom.

E. Nations and Kings

1. (:34) Righteousness Exalts a Nation

"*Righteousness exalts a nation,*
But sin is a disgrace to any people."

Bruce Waltke: The contrasting subjects of righteousness and sin (see **1:10; 5:22; 10:16**) implicitly admonishes a nation to conform to God's moral standards in dealing with the citizenry. The predicates give the reason. The former exalts (see **4:8; 14:29**) a nation; the latter is a condemnation (see the translation notes), implying subjugation, enmity, and scarcity to peoples. This lesson is applied to Israel in particular (cf. **Deut. 28:1–14, 15–68; Amos 1–2**; etc.). Ultimately, a nation's exaltation depends on its piety and ethics, not on its political, military, or economic might.

Charles Bridges: If it is not beneath the dignity of statesmen to learn form the Bible, let them deeply ponder this sound political maxim, which commends itself to every instinct of the unsophisticated mind. Indeed, it would be a strange anomaly in God's order of the world if the link between godliness and prosperity, ungodliness and misery, established in individual cases, should not hold true in nations as it is for individuals. The annals of the chosen people, depending on whether they were a righteous or a sinful nation,, are marked by corresponding exaltation or reproach.

Matthew Henry:
1. Justice, reigning in a nation, puts an honour upon it. A righteous administration of the government, impartial equity between man and man, public countenance given to religion, the general practice and profession of virtue, the protecting and preserving of virtuous men, charity and compassion to strangers (alms are sometimes called righteousness), these exalt a nation; they uphold the throne, elevate the people's minds, and qualify a nation for the favour of God, which will make them high, as a holy nation, **Deu. 26:19**.

2. Vice, reigning in a nation, puts disgrace upon it: Sin is a reproach to any city or kingdom, and renders them despicable among their neighbours. The people of Israel were often instances of both parts of this observation; they were great when they were good, but when they forsook God all about them insulted them and trampled on them. It is therefore the interest and duty of princes to use their power for the suppression of vice and support of virtue.

Richard Clifford: In evaluating a nation or people, one ordinarily considers its territorial extent, wealth, history, and military might. This verse affirms that the key factors in assessing a people are "*righteousness*," that is, being in right relationship to God.

2. (:35) King's Favor vs. Anger

"*The king's favor is toward a servant who acts wisely,*
But his anger is toward him who acts shamefully."

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 35** picks up a number of themes from the preceding two verses: dealing wisely, acting shamefully and the setting of a nation under a king. The advice, directed to a servant of the king, is to act wisely. This would involve having wisdom in one's heart, and living it out in righteousness. By way of contrast, the one who acts shamefully, whose sin would bring reproach on the people, will experience the king's wrath. The way to live in community is to be a person grounded in wisdom and living in righteous relationships.

Paul Koptak: This proverb implies that a good kingdom requires good citizens, righteous people, and prudent servants. Both king and citizenry can profit from this counsel. A king will want to choose wise counselors, not merely those who flatter and say what the king hopes to hear. A people may wish for good character qualities in their leaders, but they ought to hold themselves to the same high standards.

Bruce Waltke: The proverb admonishes the king to promote competence, loyalty, and efficiency in governing and not to tolerate mismanagement and corruption (cf. **16:13, 15; 19:12**). It also admonishes officials to be competent and conscientious in their actions and to prepare for promotion by eschewing scandal and criticism.

Allen Ross: A servant's competence affects a king's attitude toward him. The wise servant is a delight, for he is the skillful, clever one (*maśkîl*); but the incompetent one (*mēbîš*; "*shameful*," NIV) is the bungler who botches the king's business and whose indiscretions and incapacity expose his master to scandal and criticism (McKane, 470).

TEXT: Proverbs 15:1-33

TITLE: THE PATHWAY OF THE WISE VS. THE WICKED

(:1-2) INTRODUCTION – WISE SPEECH

A. (:1) Soft vs. Harsh Words

"*A gentle answer turns away wrath,*
But a harsh word stirs up anger."

Paul Koptak: The Bible has many examples; Nabal's inhospitality and Abigail's appeal is probably the most famous (**1 Sam. 25:1–35**). However, the gentle answer is not weak; a soft tongue is powerful enough to break bones (**Prov. 25:15**).

Allen Ross: The way one answers another person will have an effect on the response. This antithetical proverb stresses that it is wise to use a gentle answer to turn away wrath. More than merely gentle or soft, the idea seems to be **conciliatory**, i.e., an answer that restores good temper and reasonableness (McKane, 477). To use a "*harsh*" (*ʿeṣeb*) word is to cause pain (same Hebrew word) and bring an angry response.

Bruce Waltke: This verse is a helpful sequel to **14:35**. Anger begets anger. The antithetical parallels imply that the disciple, servant, or king has the emotional restraint to give a gentle (or "*tender*"; see **4:3**) answer that in both substance and style mollifies the listener (**Job 32:3; Prov. 25:5**). This measured reaction to an opponent, without compromising truth, turns back wrath and restores the adversary. But a painful word that inflicts psychic pain stirs up anger. "*Wrath*" in verset A refers to anger's inner emotional incitement, "*anger*" in verset B to its outward expression. LXX underscores this danger of anger by adding to the proverb's beginning: "*Anger slays even the wise*" (cf. **Eccl. 10:4**). Soft speech is like oil on bruised skin that softens and heals it (**Judg. 8:1–3**); harsh speech is like oil tossed on fire (cf. **1 Kgs. 12:1–16**).

Tremper Longman: This proverb fits in with the general teaching in Proverbs that coolheadedness is superior to hotheadedness. This proverb also illustrates the book's concern for social cohesion. The proper response is one that maintains and promotes relationship.

George Mylne: Anger is a temporary madness, and when two mad people are engaged, they both are in danger or receiving deadly wounds. Let us, therefore, endeavor to bridle our passions, and guard ourselves by the meekness of wisdom from the fierce passions of other men lest, by biting and devouring one another, we be consumed one of another.

B. (:2) Knowledge vs. Folly

"*The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable,*
But the mouth of fools spouts folly."

Paul Koptak: We rarely use the word "*gushes*" for something good, whether we are speaking of blood or emotion, and this is also true when we are talking about folly. The image compares speech to water or some other rushing liquid—too much spouting out too quickly, neither controlled nor contained. Knowledge, by contrast, is (lit.) "*made good*" by the tongue of the wise, perhaps by taking the time and effort to make it attractive; when it comes out, its product is worth keeping. It comes out in moderation, not excess, so that nothing is lost.

Lindsay Wilson: Our speech is an indicator of our character, for what we are like on the inside (wise or foolish) determines what emerges in our speech. Folly pours out of the mouth of a fool, but the speech of a character shaped by wisdom adds something positive. It increases, contributes to or *commends* (esv) knowledge.

Bruce Waltke: The wise, whose tongues are controlled by love and saturated with knowledge, speak their wisdom in a way that attracts listeners. Instead of brutalizing and so repelling people with their knowledge, the wise state it kindly and tactfully, always aiming to save their audience, not to condemn and destroy it. By contrast, the mouth of uncontrolled fools gushes forth naked folly, an abstraction of their morally insolent speech that destroys individuals and the community.

George Mylne: The wise man knows when he ought to be silent and when he should speak. He will not cast his pearls before swine, and give his holy things to dogs. His words are good, for they are spoken in due season, and he knows how to address himself in a proper manner to different people, according to their tempers and circumstances.

I. (:3-9) THE EYES OF THE LORD AND THE MOUTH OF THE RIGHTEOUS

A. (:3) Accountability before the Watching Lord

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

Bruce Waltke: *Watching* [*vigilantly*], a communicable attribute, carries the nuance "evaluating" and implies that he will act appropriately (**Gen. 31:49; Job 15:22; Ps. 66:7**), in accordance with whether evil people, who destroy society, or good people, who nurture it, are under review. In this way, the unseen but not unseeing God regulates history and guarantees the moral order (see **5:23**; cf. **15:11; 16:2; 17:3; 21:2; 24:12**; cf. **20:17**).

Tremper Longman: As Van Leeuwen observes, "This verse states a fundamental precept of biblical thought, that the Lord knows all things, including the human heart." This verse supports the idea that God is omnipresent and omniscient.

George Mylne: His eyes behold the godly also and this is their great consolation when they are overlooked or poorly treated by men. God knows their integrity, and beholds with a pleasant countenance their humble and sincere endeavors to please Him, and to

do good to men. Every thought of His name, and every good word that they speak is written by Him in a book of remembrance. He beholds all their secret sorrows with an eye of pity, and puts their tears in his bottle! Not a moment does He withdraw His eye from the righteous.

B. (:4) Healing vs. Damaging Speech

"*A soothing tongue is a tree of life,*
But perversion in it crushes the spirit."

Paul Koptak: Speech that does damage is deceitful; by implication, then, speech that heals is truthful. One is a "*tree of life*," the other is literally twisted like a crooked branch.

Allen Ross: The teaching here affirms that healing words bring life to the spirit but perverse words crush the spirit. The Greek has *iasis* for *marpē'*, thus giving the idea of therapy. This thought fits well with the image of the tree of life, which signifies a source of vitality to others (see McKane, 483). The contrast is the perverse, twisted, or "*deceitful*" (*selep*) words that crush the spirit (cf. **Isa 65:14**).

Bruce Waltke: The proverb implies that the tongue of good people can heal the hurt spirit caused by the twisted tongue of the perverse (cf. **Isa. 50:4**; cf. **Eph. 4:25**).

George Mylne: The tongue that administers proper and seasonable counsels, comforts, and reproofs is a healing tongue. Unmerited rebukes, reproaches, unkind words, and cruel mockings are perverseness in that little member, which boasts and can really effect great things.

The advantages derived from a healing tongue are like the fruits of the tree of life the erring are reclaimed, the dejected are comforted, the weak are animated and invigorated by it.

When Job weak in deep distress, he was very sensible how pleasant these fruits were, which he had no opportunity to taste, and tells his friends, that if they had been in his situation, he would have strengthened them by his words, and assuaged their grief by their speech.

The words of God have a divine virtue for healing the diseases and the wounds of the spirit. This is the dispensary from which we are to derive healing words for the broken in spirit.

But perverseness in the tongue crushes the spirit. It wounds and pierces, it breaks and bruises, the heart of him who is reproached by it.

C. (:5) Proper Response to Discipline

"*A fool rejects his father's discipline,*
But he who regards reproof is prudent."

Allen Ross: How well one responds to discipline reveals character. The contrast here is between the fool who spurns it and the prudent individual who heeds it. The latter shows good sense (see also **v.20; 13:1, 18**).

Bruce Waltke: This proverb motivates the youth to internalize the parents' instruction (see **1:8**) by labelling whoever rejects it a fool and whoever heeds it prudent.

George Mylne: A father's instruction proceeds from love, and it is folly and ingratitude to despise it. Yet some children are such enemies to themselves, and so unnatural to their best friends, that they break the hearts of their affectionate parents, by spurning those admonitions that are needful for their own welfare. They are like froward patients, who are angry at the physician for giving them medicines which are beneficial but taste bitter.

In a father's instructions there is authority. The authority of parents over their children has been acknowledged by the heathen nations and is ratified in that law which was spoken by the mouth, and written by the finger of God. When they reprove their children, the authority of God is joined to the authority of parents, to enforce their admonitions. For they are expressly required to attempt the reformation of their children by rebukes and corrections.

He who despises his father's reproofs; despises not only man but God! This is folly in the extreme, and he who was a fool before he received instruction, becomes mad when be resists it! If a fool despises his father's instruction, it is not to be supposed that he will pay much regard to the admonitions of other men but a prudent man will receive correction, and be thankful for it, not only from a father but from any person, though inferior to himself in station or wisdom.

D. (:6) Righteous Wealth vs. Wicked Troubles

"*Much wealth is in the house of the righteous,*
But trouble is in the income of the wicked."

Bruce Waltke: This proverb ramps-up the motive to be righteous, not wicked, by contrasting the profit of righteousness with the loss of wickedness. It motivates the disciple by picturing the house, the locus of the righteous person, as a great store of wealth, a metaphor for a house brimming with good things (cf. **Jer. 20:5**). Such abundance is necessary so that the righteous can help others.

George Mylne: When godly men have nothing they possess all things. When wicked men have much they are in straits, for their craving desires are still larger than their possessions. And whatever they have, they lack satisfaction, and are still crying, "Give, give!" They have, besides, a bad conscience and a drop of that bitter ingredient is sufficient swallow up an ocean of earthly delights.

E. (:7) Priority of Edification

"*The lips of the wise spread knowledge,*
But the hearts of fools are not so."

Bruce Waltke: Knowledge is foundational to storing up wealth since providing for people's physical needs is temporary; making them self-sufficient is the goal. In both respects, righteous and wise people stand in sharp contrast to the wicked and fools.

Tremper Longman: The parallel between lips or tongue and heart is found elsewhere in proverbs and indicates the sage's belief that the lips normally reveal what is going on inside a person. Since the wise are wise, when they speak, it is worth listening to. However, there is nothing inside fools, so when they speak, one expects stupidity.

George Mylne: Our tongues are our glory, and should be used for the glory of God, and for the good of men. Therefore we ought diligently to store our hearts with that knowledge and wisdom which will be of infinite advantage to ourselves, and make us useful to others.

F. (:8-9) Link between Worship and Walk

1. (:8) Acceptable Worship

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

Paul Koptak: Like right sacrifices, prayers are pleasing when offered by those whose walk is upright or straight (cf. **Ps. 51:16–17**). Worship may never be divorced from our day-to-day actions (**Isa. 1:10–17; 29:13; 59:1–2**). What is detestable is "*an abomination to the LORD*," as echoed in the next proverb (**Prov. 15:9; cf. 15:26; 16:5**).

Allen Ross: The spiritual condition of the worshiper will determine the acceptability of the worship. Here, as well as throughout the Bible, sacrifices from wicked people are unacceptable because they are insincere and blasphemous (cf. **v.29; 21:3, 27; 28:9**; et al.; see also **1Sa 15:22; Ps 40:6–8; Isa 1:10–17**). But prayer from the righteous pleases God. Greenstone, 162, observes that if God accepts the prayers of the righteous, he will accept their sacrifices. Sacrifice is an outward ritual and easily performed by the wicked, but prayer is a private and inward act and not usually fabricated by unbelievers.

Bruce Waltke: The point is not that I AM prefers prayer over sacrifice but that the wicked hope to manipulate God by ritual magic instead of obtaining his mercy by confessing and repenting (**28:13**). They offer everything except what I AM asked for: their heart. By contrast, the upright rightly employ prayer and sacrifice in their pursuit of righteousness.

George Mylne: Wicked men may abound in the external acts of religion, as if they intended to compensate the defects of the inward man, by a double measure of external religiosity. By this means they flatter themselves into dangerous and presumptuous hopes of the favor of God, and sometimes gain a name among the godly, who are

neither qualified nor authorized to search the secrets of the heart. But God, who cannot be deceived, sees the insincerity of their hearts, and loathes their most splendid and costly services, as so many presumptuous attempts to bribe the great Judge into a connivance at their wickedness!

No man would chose to put himself to a great deal of trouble to no purpose. But hypocrites not only lose the benefit of their services but provoke God's indignation by them! The wicked and their sacrifices are detestable to him! He counts them a trouble, and will not long bear with them.

2. (:9) Two Ways

"*The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,*
But He loves him who pursues righteousness."

Bruce Waltke: The criterion for God's favor is not simply to scrupulously perform the rituals but to accompany them with the passionate pursuit of serving others. I AM abhors the sacrifice of the wicked (v. 8a) because the way (or lifestyle; see 1:15). of the wicked is an abomination to him.

George Mylne: The fault is in the sinner himself for his heart is polluted with iniquity, and therefore he cannot reasonably expect acceptance to his most costly religious sacrifices. The whole course of the wicked man's life is detested by God, who is of purer eyes than to behold sin, or to look upon iniquity. The sinner's principles are corrupt; his thoughts are evil continually; his words are all vain, or vile, or hypocritical; his holy things are deeply stained with his pollutions and he is abhorred by God, when he thinks he is praying. Not one of his innumerable iniquities are forgiven, for he is without Christ, and has no saving interest in the blood of atonement. If the very heavens are not clean in God's sight then how abominable and filthy is the man that drinks iniquity like water! And how detestable is the course of his life to him whose glorious holiness makes the angels to cover their faces!

II. (:10-15) DISCIPLINE AND INSTRUCTION

A. (:10) Accepting Discipline Avoids Death

"*Stern discipline is for him who forsakes the way;*
He who hates reproof will die."

Tremper Longman: This verse fits in with the extensive teaching that hearing criticism and changing wrong behavior is integral to wisdom (**3:1–11; 9:7–12**; etc.). It is stupid to put up defenses against legitimate criticism since that will just perpetuate wrong behavior and the negative consequences that follow. The proverb puts it in the strongest possible terms: death is the ultimate consequence for those who do not listen to negative comments.

George Mylne: Many men are such enemies to their own souls, that they cannot endure necessary reproofs and corrections, and would rather be allowed to go to the place of

torment at their ease than be terrified with apprehensions of their danger, while there is time to make a retreat. Let such people consider, that however grievous correction is yet Hell is much more grievous!

B. (:11) Accountability before God

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

Bruce Waltke: If God sees into the realm of the dead in the darkest depths of the earth, how much more transparent to him are surface-dwelling human hearts (**1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Chr. 28:9; Jer. 17:10; 1 Cor. 4:4–5; 1 John 3:20; Rev. 2:23**).

George Mylne: The eternal world is hidden from the eyes of all living. Many vain disputes have been carried on by men about the place and state of the departed. But this concealed region is open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. The outer darkness of the place of the damned is light before him. He knows perfectly every thought of his grand adversary, and is entirely acquainted with every design and every feeling of all the fiends of darkness. Why then do wicked men flatter themselves with the hopes of secrecy in their wicked actions? The most secret principles of their conduct, the most clandestine thoughts of their hearts are as bright as the day to his eyes! At the day of judgment there will be a revelation of the secrets of all hearts, and then it will appear, that not a single imagination of the thoughts of the heart was secret to him whose eyes are like a flame of fire. Woe to them who seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and whose work is in the dark.

C. (:12) Arrogance of Rejecting Correction

"*A scoffer does not love one who reproves him,*
He will not go to the wise."

Allen Ross: The scoffer resists all efforts to reform him. This individual is fixed in his ways and will not change to live according to the wise (lit., he will not "*walk with*" the wise).

Bruce Waltke: The arrogant mocker has no excuse for not devouring life-giving knowledge since the wise have been generously scattering it (**15:7**). The proverb provides insight into the human heart. Hating correction and shunning the company of the wise means one's heart is set on self-love, not on God, and is headed to death (see **John 3:20; Gal. 4:16**).

George Mylne: Much skill is required in dispensing reproofs, that they may not irritate instead of reforming. Yet however wise the reprover is, a scoffer will hate him, at least he will not love him. As an evidence of his aversion, he will not go to him but avoid his company as if he were an enemy, because he mortifies his pride. The scoffer is as impatient of rebuke, as if, like the Pope, he laid claim to infallibility.

D. (:13-15) Appetite for Joy

1. (:13) Impact of Heart's Condition

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

Paul Koptak: The difference between a heart that rejoices and one full of sorrow can be seen on the face and sensed in the spirit. This proverb does not contrast external joy with internal sorrow but rather the wide range of our emotional states and their effects.

Bruce Waltke: The parallels of **v. 13** assume the heart's condition affects both a person's outward appearance and inward spirit. A joyful heart denotes an enthusiastically merry psyche. Makes the face attractive (see **15:2**) assumes that all its features come alive, as the Creator intended. Heartache denotes the troubled psyche resulting from folly. It is equated with a broken spirit (**15:4; 17:22; 18:14**), resulting in depression. The next proverb explains the source of these opposite conditions (cf. **13:12, 17; 14:10, 13; 15:15, 30; 25:13, 20, 25**; Sir. 13:25–26). The proverb assumes that a person's inner spiritual state can be discovered by means of the appearance of the person's face.

2. (:14) Wisdom vs. Folly

"*The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge,*
But the mouth of fools feeds on folly."

Paul Koptak: One can choose to act on the basis of an understanding heart or an unthinking appetite. The proverb implies that a heart that seeks knowledge will find it; folly, by contrast, is hardly gourmet fare.

Bruce Waltke: the fool's mouth gratifies its appetite by spouting out folly, unlike the discerning heart's passion for the sages' knowledge.

Tremper Longman: The contrast between "*heart*" and "*face*" may contrast the depth of the wise over against the superficiality of fools. The contrast between "*seeks*" and "*feeds*" may imply that knowledge requires effort, while foolishness just partakes of whatever is there before a person.

George Mylne: When godly men meditate by day and night on the law of God the vain imagination of fools supplies them with thoughts suited to their corrupt minds, in which they delight as much as in their necessary food. God has provided marrow and fatness for the entertainment of our minds but these foolish creatures rather choose to feed on wind and chaff. Their mouth pours out foolishness, and they cannot do better, because they neither have, nor desire to have, anything better within their hearts. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth will speaks.

3. (:15) Feasting vs. Affliction

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

Allen Ross: Life can be delightful or difficult, depending on one's circumstances and disposition.

Bruce Waltke: the afflicted in health or wealth may yet have the cheerful heart that enables them to endure and to overcome their wretched circumstances (cf. **2 Cor. 4:8; 6:9–10; Heb. 10:34**). The cheerful heart of **Prov. 15:15b** overcomes all the adversities of **15:15a**.

III. (:16-18) SUPREME VALUE OF THE FEAR OF THE LORD, LOVE AND SELF-CONTROL

Lindsay Wilson: In both verses, then, a little combined with a right relationship with God and others is not only enough, but much better than more 'things' with weaker relationships.

A. (:16) Supreme Value of the Fear of the Lord

"*Better is a little with the fear of the LORD,*
Than great treasure and turmoil with it."

Bruce Waltke: The connection with **v. 15** suggests that economic poverty with spiritual gain is better than spiritual poverty with economic gain (cf. **10:2**).

Tremper Longman: The **better-than proverbs** express relative values. In other words, Proverbs affirms both the value of the fear of Yahweh and the value of wealth (cf. **1:7** and 10:22), but if a choice must be made, then there is no question but that the fear of Yahweh is much more valuable. In other words, though the book often suggests that wealth is the reward of the wise, it also makes it clear that sometimes one must choose between fear of Yahweh and wealth. The verse also implies a contrast between fear of Yahweh and turmoil. The assumption is that the fear of Yahweh brings calmness of mind as well.

George Mylne: If a Christian has but little, it is pleasant to him; because he considers it as the gift of his heavenly Father, and tastes in it the love of his Savior, through whose grace everything is pure and sanctified to him. The wicked have their food from the providence of God which rules over all but the righteous have their bread by covenant and promise. If they have little in possession, they know that they shall have everything necessary and good for them, from the possessor of Heaven and earth. And when they are pinched with straits, it is not for lack of goodwill in their heavenly Father but because his goodness to them is directed by his infallible wisdom. If they have scarcely any food at all, they have promises on which they can feed; with a pleasure never tasted by the men of the world when their grain and wine do most abound.

B. (:17) Supreme Value of Love

"*Better is a dish of vegetables where love is,*

Than a fattened ox and hatred with it."

Bruce Waltke: This proverb contrasts two meals to teach that love toward one another, which cheers the spirit and forges bonds of friendship during dire circumstances, is *better than* the best circumstances when accompanied with hatred and rivalry that breaks the bonds of friendship. A *small serving* together with *vegetables* describes the most modest meal in quantity and quality. With *love* denotes that the meal is accompanied with the passion of cherishing others and their company. A *fattened ox* represents the king of domesticated animals at its best and functions as a synecdoche for the finest foods (cf. **Luke 15:23**). *With hatred* denotes the inward emotion of loathing the others at the sumptuous banquet and of desiring to rid oneself of them.

C. (:18) Supreme Value of Self-Control

"*A hot-tempered man stirs up strife,*
But the slow to anger pacifies contention."

Bruce Waltke: The patient, who are numbered with the wise (see **14:29**), speedily contain controversy and strife to create "quietness" so that good sense will prevail and wrongdoing will cease. They are greater than the wrathful, for they can rule over the chaos caused by hotheads who cannot control their passions (cf. **25:28**).

George Mylne: It is one of the amiable glories of God, that he is slow to anger and considering how much we are indebted to his patience, we are strongly obliged to copy after him, as dear children. A hot-tempered disposition makes a man the firebrand of society but meekness makes him a blessing to his neighbors. He who appeases strife, does us as much service, as he who quenches the fire that is burning down a house. We must learn of Christ, who was meek and lowly of heart. So shall we find rest for ourselves, and pacify contentions, and enjoy a double blessing from the great Author of blessings. "*Blessed are the meek, blessed are the peace-makers*."

IV. (:19-24) PATH OF THE UPRIGHT IS JOYFUL AND PURPOSEFUL

Paul Koptak: **Verses 19–24** appear to take a **chiastic** pattern formed by repetition key words:

A Path of the upright (**v. 19**)
  B Joy of a wise son, joy of folly (**vv. 20–21**)
    C Plans and counsel (**v. 22**)
  B′ Joy of an apt reply (**v. 23**)
A′ Path of life (**v. 24**)

A. (:19) Path of the Upright

"*The way of the sluggard is as a hedge of thorns,*
But the path of the upright is a highway."

Paul Koptak: Thorns and briers in the path certainly slow the way and make traveling miserable; they may be a sign of folly, for who would choose such a route? They are also a sign of neglect (cf. **24:30–31**). Thorns and briers are associated with evil in **Micah 7:4**: "*The best of them is like a brier, the most upright worse than a thorn hedge*."

Allen Ross: The way of the upright is like a well-made road, a "*highway*" (*selulâ*); they have no reason to detour or swerve.

Bruce Waltke: The simile denotes an impassible obstruction, and more specifically, an obstruction that pricks and pains. Sluggards want to achieve their goals, but their spiritual condition precludes them; to them, everything is too hard, painful, or dangerous to even try (**22:13; 26:13**). But the *path of upright people*, who have internalized the sages' teaching, is a *built-up highway* cleared of obstacles and good for travel. The metaphor signifies that those who embrace inspired wisdom find the path to achieving their goals free of obstacles.

B. (:20-21) Joy in Wise Behavior

1. (:20) Impact of Wise Behavior on Parents

"*A wise son makes a father glad,*
But a foolish man despises his mother."

Bruce Waltke: The proverb suggests the essential role of parents in teaching the son their wisdom (see **1:7–8**; cf. **23:22; 30:17**). "*Be glad*" and "*despise*" are not a precise match; a son who delights his parents does not despise but respects them, and one who hates them does not make them glad but grieves them.

George Mylne: Nothing can make a dutiful child happier, than to contribute to the happiness of his parents. This filial disposition must not be confined to childhood but dwell in us while either father or mother dwell upon the earth. If our parents should require us to do some great and hard thing for them both nature and gratitude would enforce our compliance. But all that they require, is that we should be wise and happy, for their felicity is bound up in our welfare. Surely he is an unnatural fool who will not gratify them in such kind desires.

2. (:21) Senseless Pursuit of Folly vs. Wise Staying on Course

"*Folly is joy to him who lacks sense,*
But a man of understanding walks straight."

Paul Koptak: Only a fool finds joy in the foolishness of putting self and pleasure first, not considering the consequences of actions or caring about the effects on self or others.

Bruce Waltke: The imprecise antithesis, "*folly brings joy*" and "*make* [their] *going straight*," implies that senseless people recklessly turn aside from the path of duty and life while understanding people stay the course for the joy set before them (cf. **Heb. 12:2**).

George Mylne: Sin is not only practiced by the wicked but it is loved by them. Folly is their joy, and therefore they sin even without a temptation. It is their food and drink to sin, and they roll iniquity under their tongue as if it were a sweet morsel. They do not hate those sins that are condemned by God's Word but the Word that condemns them. They dislike salvation itself because it is a deliverance from sin.

But the wise man's employment is to cleanse his way, and walk uprightly. He hates the sin that dwells in him, and loathes himself for his impurities. He takes pleasure in holiness, and loves the law of God, because it testifies against his iniquities.

C. (:22) Purposeful Living Via Plans and Counsel

"*Without consultation, plans are frustrated,*
But with many counselors they succeed."

Paul Koptak: Just as destinations are reached by walking straight ahead (**15:21**), so goals are met when plans are submitted to the wisdom of others. Others can often spot flaws or shortcomings that we cannot, and to fail to consult them is to court trouble.

Bruce Waltke: A plurality of counselors offsets the individual's limitations. The similar proverb in **11:14** pertains to a nation, but this generalization can refer to any situation where counsel is helpful.

George Mylne: The proud and stubborn man, who thinks himself above advice, meets with disappointment and shame. But by a multitude of counselors, (that is, of wise counselors, for none else deserve the name), plans are established, and their success is generally ensured. This is so important a truth, that Solomon takes care we should not forget it, and therefore repeats it in this place, from a former passage of this book.

B1. (:23) Joy in Wise Speech

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

George Mylne: To make words really good, it is necessary that they be spoken in due season; for as the showers of rain in their proper season fertilize the ground, but at a wrong time drown the hopes of the year so words have good or bad effects, as the time of speaking them is well or ill chosen.

A1. (:24) Path of Life

"*The path of life leads upward for the wise,*
That he may keep away from Sheol below."

Paul Koptak: At root, everyone wants "life," but too many pursue it in ways that lead to death. Surely this saying brings us back to the most basic contrast of the proverbs, the ends toward which our lives are directed, the way we will travel.

Allen Ross: The point here then is that the righteous expect to live long and healthy lives (**2:20–22; 3:18; 5:6; 10:17; 13:14**).

Bruce Waltke: This janus, a synthetic proverb, ramps up the reward of righteousness from present joy to **everlasting life** with I AM—in contrast to the destiny of the wicked, the theme of **vv. 25–29**. The *path of life* refers to the situation of having an everlasting relationship with the living God. *Leads upward*, as an antithesis to downward in connection with the grave, **implies eternal life** above and beyond the grave. *For* designates *the prudent* (or "*insightful*") as the path's beneficiaries. *And so* signifies the logical consequence of **v. 24b**: being on the upward path, one *turns aside from the grave* (lit. "from Sheol") *below*. Salvation from the grave is not merely avoiding an untimely death, for then the path of life would be swallowed up in death, negating this proverb and the book of Proverbs.

V. (:25-32) PATHWAY THAT PLEASES GOD

A. (:25) God Opposes the Proud But Supports the Vulnerable

"*The LORD will tear down the house of the proud,*
But He will establish the boundary of the widow."

Paul Koptak: The widow's boundary stone is the symbol of all that is humble and vulnerable about poverty. In Scripture, the moved boundary marker comes to stand for all injustice against weaker persons (cf. **Deut. 19:14; 27:17; Hos. 5:10**). Yahweh makes sure it continues to stand right where it is (cf. **Prov. 22:28; 23:10–11**). So in the songs of Hannah and Mary, Yahweh brings down the high and mighty and lifts up the lowly (**1 Sam. 2:1–10; Luke 1:46–55**).

George Mylne: Let us never be proud and vain of anything unless we wish to have it destroyed! God abhors pride even in those whom he dearly loves and shows his resentment of it by sending humbling providences.

B. (:26) God Detests Evil Motivations But Loves Righteous Intentions

"*Evil plans are an abomination to the LORD,*
But pleasant words are pure."

Paul Koptak: Read alongside **15:25**, the saying highlights Yahweh's look at intentions (cf. **15:3, 11**) that motivate right and wrong behaviors.

Tremper Longman: The proverb thus provides a strong condemnation of evil plans, which presumably refers to those who strategize concerning the downfall of others.

Allen Ross: The Lord is pleased with plans that have righteous intentions. The intentions or "*thoughts of the wicked*" are thoughts that will harm other people; these are an abomination to the Lord.

Bruce Waltke: *Pure* means free of any contaminations not consistent with something's essential nature, a notion that passes easily into its figurative use for that which is ethically pure (cf. **Eccl. 9:2**). Here, "pure" functions as a metonymy for favorable to I AM (cf. **Mal. 3:16**), the opposite of "abomination." Such words and plans shine before I AM like the gold in his sanctuary because they are free of all the ethical impurities that damage others, such as lies, distortions, and harshness.

George Mylne: The thoughts of the wicked are full of selfishness, impiety, pride, and impurity, and must be infinitely offensive unto the pure eyes of Jehovah. And whenever wicked men are, by the convincing operation of the Spirit, made to discern the secrets of their own hearts they become loathsome to themselves. Wicked men must forsake their thoughts, as well as their outward practices of wickedness; for what is the profit of making clean the outside of the cup while the inner part is full of impurity?

But the thoughts of the pure are well pleasing to the Lord, and their words are pleasant in his ears. God is of pure eyes, and delights in those who are made pure by the blood of his Son. Their heads are cleansed from iniquity, and produce those holy thoughts and words which are acceptable in the sight of the Lord their God and Redeemer. Their prayers and praises are a sweet fragrances in his nostrils. Their confessions are music to his ears. Their common discourse, when it is seasoned with salt, and ministers grace to the hearers is heard by him with delight.

C. (:27) The Profits of Bribery Are Destructive

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

Bruce Waltke: "*Greedy for gain*" leaves open whether the bribe is given or received; both are bad (**17:8; Exod. 23:8; Deut. 16:19; Ps. 15:5; Eccl. 7:7; Isa. 1:23; 5:23**). *Will live* is an imprecise antithesis to "*ruin their households*," implying that "*live*" entails the continuation of the good person's house and "*ruin their households*" entails a Judas-like death (cf. **Matt. 26:15; 27:5**).

George Mylne: He who is greedy for gain shall not live so the wise man insinuates in the last part of the verse. He either shortens his days by his anxieties about the world, and those sinful methods which he takes to obtain the things on which he has placed his heart or he embitters his life by his distracting cares. He designs to secure his family against poverty and contempt, and to raise it to eminence and honor but his covetousness brings evil and shame to his house, while he sins against his own soul. He kindles a fire in his dwelling, which shall consume the tabernacles of bribery.

D. (:28-29) Righteous / Wicked Contrasts

1. (:28) Thoughtful vs. Impulsive Speech

"*The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer,*
But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things."

Bruce Waltke: The proverb assumes that the righteous have the self-control not to react emotionally but to think before they answer, unlike the wicked, who only want to vent their malice (cf. **10:31–32; 15:1–2**). What they "*ponder*" is how to plunder (**24:2**).

George Mylne: A wicked man has little sense of the importance of the government of the tongue, and lacks the bridle of the fear of God to manage this unruly member, and therefore he pours forth evil things. But for all his vain and wicked words, he must one day account.

2. (:29) Separated vs. United to the Lord

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

Tremper Longman: It is not that Yahweh is unaware of the prayers of the wicked. The verse does not mean that God listens only to the prayers of the righteous and does not even hear those of the wicked. The verb "*hear*" in Hebrew often implies the response. God does something about the prayers of the righteous. To say that God is far from the wicked does not imply that he is merely local in his presence, but rather that he does not act on their behalf. In the light of the second colon, the first may be paraphrased: *Yahweh does not respond to the prayers of the wicked.*

Bruce Waltke: Assertions about I AM's presence or distance are not theological statements that restrict his omnipresence but religious statements about the availability of his favor.

George Mylne: The Lord is not far from any man, for in him we all live, and move, and have our being. But as wicked men are far from God, through the alienation of their hearts, and the wickedness of their works so the Lord is far from them, that is, he will have no fellowship with them. The righteous cry, and the Lord hears them but he does not hear the cry of the wicked, and beholds them afar off. Wicked men think they may safely go on in sin, and if trouble comes upon them, then they will cry to the Lord, and all shall be well. Many have been ruined by such presumptuous expectations, and sad experience has at last convinced them that the Almighty was under no obligation to attend to their voice in adversity, when they would not hear his voice in the day of his forbearance.

E. (:30-32) Importance of Heeding Wise Counsel

Paul Koptak: **Verses 30–32** are linked by catchword *šmʿ* ("*hear*") in "*news*" (i.e., what is heard, **15:30**), "*listens*" (**15:31**), and "*heeds*" (**15:32**).

1. (:30) Wise Counsel Nourishes Health

"*Bright eyes gladden the heart;*
Good news puts fat on the bones."

Paul Koptak: Set in the context of this chapter, the proverb is about messages that come from the good heart and bring health and life to those who receive them. If we look to the context that follows, we must include life-giving rebuke (**15:31**).

Allen Ross: The idea of "*health to the bones*" comes from a Hebrew expression that is literally "*makes the bones fat*," a symbol of health and prosperity (see also **17:22; 25:25; Ge 45:27–28; Isa 52:7–8**).

Bruce Waltke: the eyes reveal the inner vitality and joy of the bringer of "*good news*," its parallel in **v. 30b**. Scripture associates light with righteousness (**Prov. 13:9; Matt. 6:22–23**) and with life and good fortune (**Job 3:16; 33:28; Prov. 4:18; 6:23; 13:9; 16:15**). The New Testament connects light with Christ and his disciples (cf. **Matt. 4:16; 5:14–16; John 1:4–5; 12:35–36; Eph. 5:8**). Proverbs associates light and life exclusively with the wise, implying that illuminated eyes belong to the wise (**15:13a**).

Tremper Longman: This proverb imparts a psychological insight. Both move from external to internal. The first observes that one can tell from others' **bright eyes** (though it is difficult to be certain about the exact force of "*light of the eyes*") the positive state of the core of their being. The "*eyes*" in question are probably the eyes of persons whose good demeanor encourages those with whom they come into contact. Here "*heart*," which in general refers to the core of one's personality, clearly is connected with emotions and gives pause to those who suggest that the heart emphasizes internal cognitive processes.

The second colon also begins with something external, a good report or good news, in this case a matter of hearing rather than seeing. The effects of this news are also felt internally. A good report makes people feel good to their very bones.

2. (:31) Wise Counsel Must Be Heeded

"*He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof*
Will dwell among the wise."

George Mylne: If we have a just sense of the value of reproofs, we will count that faithful friend who reproves, rather than flatters a treasure, and frequent his company on that account. We will not angrily leave that Christian society with which we are connected, because the word of God is faithfully applied in it to the correction of vice, and discipline impartially administered, although we ourselves should become the objects of it.

The servant who loves a faithful reprover, and truly regards his own soul, will chose to live in a house where God is feared, and family religion enforced. And every man possessed of this humble disposition, will chose that company in which he is most likely to be told of his faults.

Those who reprove others, ought to dispense their beneficial admonitions with meekness and prudence, that they may not render this ordinance of God offensive by

their manner of dispensing it, and render themselves accountable for the harm done by this means to precious souls.

3. (:32) Wise Counsel Must Not Be Ignored

"*He who neglects discipline despises himself,*
But he who listens to reproof acquires understanding."

Paul Koptak: Those who ignore discipline not only disrespect others such as the wise, they hate themselves. Conversely, to "*gain understanding*" is to respect and love oneself. The thought echoes **9:12** (lit.): "*If you are wise, you are wise for yourself.*" The proverb also connects with **15:30**, in that the one who heeds (lit. "*hears*") correction "*gains understanding*" (lit., "*heart*"; cf. "*lack judgment* [heart]" in **9:4**).

Allen Ross: **Accepting discipline** is important to personal development. The person who despises discipline slights or "*despises himself*" (*mô ʾēs napšô* means that he rejects himself as though he were of little value and so fails to grow). One must acquire understanding, especially about oneself, to grow spiritually, intellectually, and emotionally.

Tremper Longman: Those who reject discipline disdain their lives because they run the risk of getting into trouble over and over again since they don't allow themselves to be aware of their mistakes. On the other hand, those who do listen "acquire heart," where heart points to one's core personality (see **3:1**). In other words, they become people of substance. There is something to their internal makeup.

George Mylne: But that man is happy who welcomes the word of exhortation and reproof, for though he is at present chargeable with many faults and follies yet he is in the way of reformation, and takes the sure method of getting understanding. He is meek and teachable, and God will bless to his soul that word which he receives with meekness.

(:33) SUMMARY – THEMATIC REFRAIN

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 33** closes off this section by pointing out that the fear of the Lord (i.e. respecting God as God) is the basis and perhaps even the content of this discipline, and will lead to the practical skills of a wisdom-shaped character. In parallel with this is the virtue of humility (also paired in **22:4**), which implies that a right view of oneself before God is essential for our prospering, here described as honour or glory.

A. Fear of the Lord

"*The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom,*"

George Mylne: The fear of the Lord will be a preservative to us from sin and folly, and an incentive to all holy living and godliness. A good understanding have all those who keep the commandments of God.

B. Humility

"*And before honor comes humility.*"

Bruce Waltke: "*Humility*" signifies a disposition that **renounces self-sufficiency** to pursue commitment to I AM, who alone is trustworthy to provide life-giving instruction (**3:5–7**). Commitment to I AM always [comes] before honor (see **3:16; 18:12; 22:4**). Paradoxically, those who strip off their glory before the glorious I AM are in the end crowned with the glory and the wealth that give them social esteem (see **3:16; 8:18; 11:16**).

TEXT: Proverbs 16:1-15

TITLE: YAHWEH SAYINGS AND ROYAL SAYINGS

I. (:1-9) YAHWEH SAYINGS – EMPHASIZING DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

Paul Koptak: This outline points up an example of **dove-tailing**: **Verses 1–9** include one non-Yahweh proverb about riches and "*injustice*" (*loʾ mišpaṭ*, **v. 8**), while **verses 10–15** have one nonroyal proverb about Yahweh's justice *(mišpaṭ*, v. 11 [NIV "*honest*"]).2 The key image of the "*way*" appears in all but one of the clusters (*derek*, **vv. 9, 17, 25, 31**).

Lindsay Wilson: Within **chapter 16**, **verses 1** and **9** operate as a bracket, with both outlining that **people plan but God determines the outcome**. . .

Signs of thematic unity in **verses 1–9** include the mention of the **human heart** in **verses 1, 5** and **9.**

A. (:1-3) God's Sovereign Control Takes Precedence over Human Plans

1. (:1) God's Sovereignty Trumps Human Initiative

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

Paul Koptak: Humans act according to their intentions, but God is somehow at work in those acts of word and deed.

Lindsay Wilson: Human plans or arrangements (*maʿărāk*, **v. 1**) seek to bring about a person's inner goals (*lēb*, the heart; *'mind'*, nrsv), but the one who says/decides what will happen (*the answer of the tongue*) is the Lord. This theme will be prominent in the second half of the Solomonic sayings (**19:21; 20:24; 21:30–31**).

Tremper Longman: Proverbs here, as often, parallels "*heart*" and a part of the body (tongue, lips, or the like) to signify internal processes and speech (see also **10:20; 16:23**). This proverb makes it clear that, though humans can legitimately make plans, God's will is definitive as to what will actually happen. One can strategize about the future, to be sure, but this wise observation would lead one to acknowledge that the future can only be determined by God. Such recognition would engender a proper humility and open one up to changes. As commentators frequently point out, this proverb is often understood to mean: "**Man proposes, but God disposes**." Whether or not "*the response of the tongue*" is referring to God's ultimate disposal of a thing or to the need for God's help to articulate the "*plans of the heart*" (so Whybray), the purpose of this proverb is not to discourage human planning, but rather to keep people aware that **their plans will come to nothing without God's concurrence**.

Charles Bridges: [**KJV**: *The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord*.] The great question is decided here: **Who is the first mover in the work of conversion?** Can man prepare his own heart for the grace of God? This proverb teaches that the Lord takes the stone out of the heart so that it may feel; the Lord draws the heart, that it may follow; the Lord gives life to the heart, that it may live. The Lord opens the heart, that he may stamp it with his own law and mold it in his own image. This work begins with God. It is not that we come first and then are taught. We first of all learn, and then we come. God's grace both goes ahead of us and cooperates in our salvation.

Should we then idly wait until God works? Far from it! **We must work, but in dependence on God**. God does not work without us but with us, through us, in us, and by us. And we work in him. Ours is to obey; his is the strength. He gives life to our actions. His commands do not imply our power to obey, but our dependence on him for the grace of obedience. "The work, as it is a duty, is ours; but as a performance, it is God's. He gives what he requires, and his promises are the foundation of our performances" (Bishop Reynolds). Our works are not the cause but the effect of his grace. They could never come from us until God had first put them in us.

This habit of **dependence** must continue to the end of our lives. We can no more prepare ourselves after we have received grace than we could before we received it. . . Dependence is not the excuse for indolence but the spring of active energy.

Matthew Henry: *The preparation of the heart is in man* (he may contrive and design this and the other) but *the answer of the tongue*, not only the delivering of what he designed to speak, but the issue and success of what he designed to do, *is of the Lord*.

Richard Clifford: Interpretations of this enigmatic saying range from "Man proposes but God disposes" (Toy) to Delitzsch's view that God's answer comes in the moment of verbal expression. Neither is adequate. An important clue is the customary antithesis of heart and tongue (or mouth or lips) to express the totality of human activity. **One dreams of projects, but their realization is not within one's capacity.**

2. (:2) God's Omniscience Extends to Human Motives

"*All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight,*
But the LORD weighs the motives."

Richard Clifford: God is the ultimate examiner and arbiter of human action.

Paul Koptak: Human assessments are limited and often distorted. The capacity for self-deception comes through in the image of one's ways being "*innocent*" (*zak*, "*pure*"; cf. **21:8; 20:11**) in one's own eyes. "*Motives*" (*ruḥot*, "*spirits*") are "*weighed*," presumably by Yahweh (**21:2; 24:12**; cf. **1 Sam. 2:3**). . . The interaction of the two lines in this proverb suggests that Yahweh is better able to discern our motivations than we are, hence the need for wisdom and instruction in standards outside of ourselves.

Tremper Longman: The proverb speaks to our ability to deceive ourselves concerning our righteousness. Proverbs often denigrates those who are wise (or clean) "*in their own eyes*" (**3:7; 12:15; 26:5, 12; 30:12**). The observation invites profound reflection on our motives, since God is the final arbiter of whether a path is right or wrong.

Charles Bridges: Man judges by acts; God judges by principles. God's eye, therefore, sees a mass of corruption in us, while a man's ways seem innocent to him. In fact, man will never believe his real character until some subtle temptation exposes his own evil. O God, place the blood of your beloved Son in the scale of your justice, and we will give to you the glory of your wonderful work of grace.

Allen Ross: **Divine Omniscience –**
The Lord alone can evaluate our behavior because he knows our motives. The proverb is arranged in antithetical parallelism to express the only true evaluation of moral behavior. People may seem "*innocent*" (*zak*) in their own estimation, but self-deception and rationalization make this estimation unreliable. The word *zak* (GK 2341) is used for pure oils, undiluted liquids; here it signifies unmixed actions. The proverb suggests that such a premature opinion of oneself is naive at best and smug at the worst.

The person may be far from pure when the Lord weighs the motives (tōkēn rûḥôt). The figure of "*weighing*" signifies evaluation (see **Ex 5:8** ["*require*"]; **1Sa 2:3; Pr 21:2; 24:12**; cf. **1Sa 16:7**). There may be a faint allusion to the Egyptian belief of weighing the heart after death to determine righteousness. The word *rûḥôt* is a metonymy for the motives, as in **Proverbs 21:2** and **24:12** (where it is parallel to "*heart*"). The conclusion of the matter is that we deceive ourselves so easily and therefore cannot fully evaluate ourselves. God, by his Spirit and through his Word, provides the penetrating evaluation.

Matthew Henry: The judgment of God concerning us, we are sure, is **according to truth**: He weighs the spirits in a just and unerring balance, knows what is in us, and passes a judgment upon us accordingly, writing Tekel upon that which passed our scale with approbation—weighed in the balance and found wanting; and by his judgment we must stand or fall. He not only sees men's ways but tries their spirits, and we are as our spirits are.

3. (:3) God's Sovereignty Ratifies Human Plans

"*Commit your works to the LORD,*
And your plans will be established."

Richard Clifford: The saying completes **v. 1**, which said the beginning of a project ("*plans*") comes from a human being but its completion is from God. Here one may finish a task but must entrust it to Yahweh in order for it to endure.

Paul Koptak: Again intention and deed are juxtaposed (as in **v. 1**). Here deeds are (lit.) "*rolled over*" toward Yahweh in trust (cf. **Ps. 22:8; 37:5**). As a result, plans and intentions are "*made solid*" (**Prov. 4:26; 12:3**); so also Yahweh makes steps "*firm*"

(**16:9**). Recognizing his presence in everyday affairs, we might paraphrase: "Plan, pray, then act."

Tremper Longman: This proverb fits in with the teaching of the previous two verses. It reminds the sage that, as important as human planning is, **the ultimate outcome** (as in this verse) and the morality of it (as in **16:2**) depend on Yahweh. All planning thus should be done in recognition that God can indeed overturn it. The thought is not that we simply pray for God to honor our plans and to establish them. Rather, it is the idea that **we submit our entire life's action to God**, so that even if our human plans are subverted, we can recognize an even deeper plan at work in our lives. If the "acts" are already accomplished, then the idea is that even when a plan has reached fruition, we must still trust God for its success.

Schwab: Human beings plan their actions because they want to be successful. However, success is rooted in the Lord's decision and not in human preparation. The Lord knows what the true intentions of people are and he acts according to this knowledge. So, instead of striving for success, people should leave that to the Lord and refrain from using whatever (even unethical) means in order to achieve their aims. Paradoxically, when someone is willing to let success go, then God will provide success.

Allen Ross: For our plans to succeed, we must depend on the Lord. This proverb of instruction includes the result for compliance. The verb "*commit*" is literally "*roll*" (*gōl,* from *gālal*, though the LXX and Targum assume *gal*, "*reveal*"). The figure of rolling, as in rolling one's burdens onto the Lord, is found also in **Psalms 22:8[9]; 37:5; 55:22**. It portrays **complete dependence on God**. This is accomplished with a spirit of humility and by means of a diligent season of prayer, but the plan also must have God's approval.

The syntax of the second clause shows that there is subordination: the waw on *yikkōnû*, coming after the imperative of the first clause, expresses that **this clause states the purpose or result of the first**. People should commit their plans to the Lord so that he may establish them. Not every plan we have is pleasing to him; but for those that are, this verse is a great comfort. Greenstone, 172, says, "True faith relieves much anxiety and smoothens many perplexities."

Matthew Henry: The great concerns of our souls must be committed to the grace of God, with a dependence upon and submission to the conduct of that grace (**2 Tim. 1:12**); all our outward concerns must be committed to the providence of God, and to the sovereign, wise, and gracious disposal of that providence. *Roll thy works upon the Lord* (so the word is); roll the burden of thy care from thyself upon God. Lay the matter before him by prayer. *Make known thy works unto the Lord* (so some read it), not only the works of thy hand, but the workings of thy heart; and then leave it with him, by faith and dependence upon him, submission and resignation to him. The will of the Lord be done. We may then be easy when we resolve that whatever pleases God shall please us.

B. (:4-6) God's Sovereignty Encompasses Even the Wicked

1. (:4) God Uses Even the Wicked to Accomplish His Purposes

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

Paul Koptak: Ultimately, Yahweh does what he purposes (or "*answers*"), even while there are those who seek to work out their purposes, purposes that are contrary to Yahweh's.

Allen Ross: Whybray, 93–94, suggests this saying could have sprung up in answer to the question, "**Why did God create the wicked**?"

The line of poetry is arranged with synthetic parallelism; it affirms the truth and then expands it with the specific application about the wicked. The verb *pāʿal* means "*to work out, bring about, accomplish*"; it is naturally used of **God's sovereign control of life** (see **Nu 23:23; Isa 26:12**; et al.). The interpretive difficulty concerns *lammaʿanēhû*; it has been taken to mean "*for his purpose*" or "*for its answer*." The word is *maʿaneh* ("*answer, response*") and is not from *lemaʿan* ("*purpose*"). So the suffix likely refers to *kol* ("*everything*"). The point is that God ensures that everyone's actions and their consequences correspond—certainly the wicked for the day of calamity. In God's order there is **just retribution** for every act, for every act includes its answer or consequence.

Tremper Longman: God is in control of the wicked acts of human beings and uses their evil for good. . .

God uses all things for his good purposes, even evil people and their wicked acts. In the NT, Peter proclaims that, though Jesus was put to death by wicked people, this was done by "*God's set purpose and foreknowledge*" (**Acts 2:22–24**; quote is from **2:23** NIV). And the idea of this proverb also lies behind Paul's reassurance that "*in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*" (Rom. 8:28 NIV).

The verse is not a statement that God authors evil. The teaching of the verse fits well with the general biblical idea that humans author their own wickedness. It is a statement of **God's control**. God can use the very act of human rebellion and autonomy for his purposes.

Charles Bridges: Every workman has some purpose in his work. God has the highest purpose in his work. Everything was made by God and for God (**Colossians 1:16**). This includes all the work of creation, all the events that take place in the nations, and all the dispensations of his providence. They all reveal his glory to his intelligent creatures.

Even the wicked, whose existence might seem hardly reconcilable with divine perfection, the Lord includes in the great purpose of setting out his name. "It is the greatest praise of his wisdom that he can turn the evil of men to his own glory" (Bishop

Hall). And when men sin by their own free will, he ordains them to be punished, as monuments to his power, his justice, and his patience.

Clearly God is not the author of sin. He cannot impart what he has not and what is contrary to his nature. Infinite perfection cannot impart imperfection. Absolute holiness cannot be the cause of sin, although, like the law, it may be the innocent occasion of it. If he foreknows with "infinite knowledge," as Edwards profoundly observes, that "proves the necessity of the event foreknown; yet it may not be the thing that causes the necessity." The Lord can decree nothing but good. If he permits evil, so far as not to hinder it, he nevertheless hates it as evil and permits it only for the greater good, and for the greatest good of all – the fuller manifestation of his own glory in it and out of it. He will be glorified in, or on, all his creatures.

2. (:5) Certain Retribution Awaits the Proud

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

Richard Clifford: Lifting up one's heart in pride, forgetting one is a fallible human being, is so profound an error that one cannot escape exposure and punishment.

Paul Koptak: The wicked meet disaster because they are proud of heart (cf. **15:25**) and detestable (**11:20–21**). Once again, what has been hinted at earlier now comes to full light. The wicked do not undo God's intentions for the world by opposing his intentions; rather, God opposes them because they are an abomination to him.

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 5** does not specifically state that God will punish the arrogant, but the fact of their punishment (rather than the when and how) is stressed. The mention of the arrogant in heart draws attention to people being accountable before God for their thoughts and not only their actions (developed in **vv. 18–19**). Godless plans and thoughts are described in strong language as an *abomination to the Lord*, and will be punished. Since **verse 5** should lead to self-examination, **verse 6** provides the way forward.

Tremper Longman: Proverbs is consistent in its condemnation of pride. Pride, after all, promotes the self and also leads to a self-defensiveness that does not allow one to hear criticism, an indispensable part of the path to wisdom. The haughty will be punished, but how is not specified. Perhaps their punishment will be effected through their own foolish behavior, or perhaps God will intervene. In any case, they will not escape.

Matthew Henry:
1) The pride of sinners sets God against them. He that, being high in estate is proud in heart, whose spirit is elevated with his condition, so that he becomes insolent in his conduct towards God and man, let him know that though he admires himself, and others caress him, yet he is an abomination to the Lord. The great God despises him; the holy God detest him.
2) The power of sinners cannot secure them against God, though they strengthen

themselves with body hands. Though they may strengthen one another with their confederacies and combinations, joining forces against God, they shall not escape his righteous judgment. Woe unto him that strives with his Maker, **ch. 11:21; Isa. 45:9**.

3. (:6) Love, Faithfulness and the Fear of God Protect against Evil

"*By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for,*
And by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil."

Paul Koptak: "*Love and faithfulness*" are the classic pair that describe Yahweh's relation to us. Both terms refer to steadfast love that does not forget to do kindness. It weathers hard times. It is a quality of human character in **3:3** and a reward in **14:22**. Yet this quality always shows itself in **action**, in doing love and faithfulness to another (cf. **Gen. 47:29; Josh. 2:14**).

Lindsay Wilson: In terms familiar from **chapters 1-9** (also **15:33**), there is a commendation of the **fear of the Lord**, or the foundational and ongoing respecting God as God. This core idea of Proverbs surfaces in the theological kernel of the individual proverbs because it undergirds the observations made throughout the book. The references to steadfast love and faithfulness are representative of the changed character insisted on in **chapters 1-9**. Thus iniquity is atoned for (in parallel with turns away from evil), in the sense of helping to purge wrong thinking and doing from our lives.

C. (:7-9) God's Sovereignty Accomplishes His Agenda

1. (:7) God's Sovereignty Rules over Human Relationships

"*When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD,*
He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."

Paul Koptak: Friendship with Yahweh spills over into friendship with others. It is not stated whether this is an instance of cause and effect, as though peace with enemies is a reward, or whether the goodness of one's ways works like the words of the wise, which create calm instead of turmoil. "Peace with God, peace with others" might be a paraphrase of the proverb that stands in the very center of the book (cf. **16:2**).

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 7** describes the beneficial effect on relationships that flows from a life that seeks to please God, probably an alternative description of the reality set out in **verse 6**. Actions that are based on turning away from evil and pursuing committed love and faithfulness are ways that please the Lord. The picture of restored, wholesome relationships (the hifil of *šlm*, '*to be at peace*') is described hyperbolically as including even one's enemies. This is not a promise (it was not true of Jesus, for example), but a way of saying that a godly life will usually lead to **healthier relationships with others**.

Richard Clifford: God's pleasure at one's way of life blesses not only oneself but creates a surrounding peace that takes away the dangerous hostility of enemies. Interior peace is not enough. Examples of how enemies reconcile as a result of God's favor are **Gen. 26:26–31** (Abimelech and Isaac), **Genesis 44–45** (Joseph and his brothers), and Solomon's prayer in **1 Kings 8:50**: "*Forgive your people their sins and all the offenses*

they have committed against you, and grant them compassion in the sight of their captors, so that they may have compassion on them."

2. (:8) God's Sovereignty Determines Sufficiency

"*Better is a little with righteousness*
Than great income with injustice."

Paul Koptak: Because interests sometimes conflict, one should learn to choose righteousness and justice over profit—certainly because it is better but ultimately because it pleases Yahweh.

Charles Bridges: The love of gain is so blind that it looks only at its own selfish end and to the present moment. It looks to things that can never bring true enjoyment or lasting security. Retributive justice is at hand.

3. (:9) God's Sovereignty Trumps Human Initiative

"*The mind of man plans his way,*
But the LORD directs his steps."

Charles Bridges: This is a good description of God's sovereign rule. It is an inscrutable mystery how God accomplishes his fixed purpose by free-willed agents. Man without his free will is a machine. God without his unchangeable purpose ceases to be God. As rational agents we think, consult, act freely. We are dependent agents, and the Lord exercises his own power in permitting, overruling, or furthering our actions. Thus man proposes, and God disposes. A man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps. God orders our will without infringing our liberty or stopping us from being responsible creatures. For while we act as we please, we must be answerable.

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 9**, recalling **verses 1–3**, concludes with an observation that a person's direction and actions in life are finally determined by God. This is not to deny human responsibility for our choices, but rather to remind us that **God is still in charge of his world.** As such, it is a fitting conclusion to this theological kernel.

Tremper Longman: This proverb is closest to **16:1**. Van Leeuwen, representing the majority of commentators, states that **vv. 1** and **9** thus "form an envelope around the theological themes of **divine sovereignty** and **freedom** in this passage." The idea is that human beings can plan, but plans do not get put into operation and do not find success unless Yahweh so decrees it. Understanding this diminishes human pride. The path indicates the course of a person's life. Taking a "*step*" on the path refers to various life events.

Matthew Henry: **Man is here represented to us,**
1. As a reasonable creature, that has the faculty of contriving for himself: His heart devises his way, designs an end, and projects ways and means leading to that end, which the inferior creatures, who are governed by sense and natural instinct, cannot do.

The more shame for him if he do not devise the way how to please God and provide for his everlasting state.

2. But as a depending creature, that is subject to the direction and dominion of his Maker. If men devise their way, so as to make God's glory their end and his will their rule, they may expect that he will direct their steps by his Spirit and grace, so that they shall not miss their way nor come short of their end. But let men devise their worldly affairs ever so politely, and with ever so great a probability of success, yet God has the ordering of the event, and sometimes directs their steps to that which they least intended.

II. (:10-15) KING SAYINGS – EMPHASIZING DIVINE AUTHORITY

Charles Bridges: Here is a manual for kings. It does not show them what they are but what God requires them to be. They should be a blessing to their people and benefactors to the world. Such a king, and this is the glory of royalty, will have no interest of his own apart from the public good. He remembers that honest scales and balances are the Lord's, and so he hands down even-handed justice. He will not only refrain from wrongdoing but detests wickedness. He is not only careful to remove all evil from himself, but he will surround himself with faithful counselors.

Lindsay Wilson: **Verses 10–12** deal with justice and the king, while **verses 13–15** concentrate on words before the king.

Richard Clifford: **Verses 10–15** are a series of six sayings on **the king and his God-given authority**. In ancient Near Eastern thought the king was the representative and regent of the gods, ensuring the continuance of the order established at creation. Thus, it is not surprising that the section on the king follows immediately that on Yahweh (15:33–16:9). The sayings about the king are in three pairs: The first two sayings begin with identical noun patterns (qesem, "divination; inspired word," and peles, "scale"); the next two begin, respectively, with "abomination" and "acceptance" (normally a fixed pair); and the last two are concerned with the effect on others of royal wealth and favor.

A. (:10-11) Concern for Good Judgment and Justice

1. (:10) Yahweh's Concern for Good Judgment

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

Paul Koptak: The first of the royal proverbs is followed by a Yahweh saying. Just as one overlaps pieces of cloth before sewing a seam, so this section inserts one of the royal proverbs before concluding the series of Yahweh sayings in **verses 1–11**. Likewise, a Yahweh saying stands in this section of royal sayings. The **overlap** reflects the biblical view that kings discharged their duties as appointed representatives of God's rule on earth. **Lips and mouth** are frequently paired; here they point to the

king's responsibility to speak judgments that enact "justice" (a play on two meanings of *mišpaṭ*; cf. 16:8). In this context, the witness to God's rule may be taken as an ideal picture of divine guidance (cf. **2 Sam. 14:17, 20; 1 Kings 3:9**), and so the king's decisions can rightly be called "*inspired*" (lit., an "*oracle*").

Allen Ross: Here begins a series of proverbs about kings. This first one teaches that **kings must speak righteously in their official capacities**. The parallelism is loosely synonymous, perhaps forming a cause-effect arrangement. When the king speaks officially, it is as though it were "an oracle." The word *qesem* (Gk 7877) is used throughout the Bible in the negative sense of "*divination*"; here it seems merely to mean words from an oracular sentence, as though the king speaks for God (see **Nu 22:7; 23:23**; for a popular opinion of such, see **2Sa 14:20**). The effect of this is that his mouth "*should not betray justice*." For a portrayal of the ideal king, see **Psalm 72** and **Isaiah 11:1–5**.

Tremper Longman: Perhaps the issue of justice concerns a proper presentation of the oracular decision that would have come from God. It could further point to a legal context for such an oracular decision. The temptation might be for the king to hedge the decision in the interests of his own policies, and thus the statement of colon 2 could also be understood as a kind of warning or prohibition. The wise king will not pervert the legal verdict rendered by the divinely inspired lot.

2. (:11) Yahweh's Concern for Justice

"*A just balance and scales belong to the LORD;*
All the weights of the bag are His concern."

Allen Ross: **Honesty in Business** –
The Lord is the source of honesty and justice in all human enterprises. This proverb concerns weights and balances; the OT law prescribed that they be just (see **Lev 19:36; Dt 25:13; Am 8:5; Mic 6:11**). But shrewd people in OT times kept light and heavy weights to make dishonest transactions (as a modern individual might keep two sets of books). But the verse, using synonymous parallelism to stress the point, affirms that righteous and just measures are from the Lord.

Matthew Henry: The observance of justice in commerce between man and man is likewise a divine appointment. He taught men discretion to make scales and weights for the adjusting of right exactly between buyer and seller, that neither may be wronged; and all other useful inventions for the preserving of right are from him. He has also appointed by his law that they be just. It is therefore a great affront to him, and to his government, to falsify, and so to do wrong under colour and pretence of doing right, which is wickedness in the place of judgment.

B. (:12-13) Priority of Righteousness

1. (:12) Foundation for Secure Kingdom

"*It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness,*
For a throne is established on righteousness."

Richard Clifford: The saying implies that it is in the king's interest to get rid of malefactors, for the stability of his throne depends on justice.

Paul Koptak: Righteousness and justice are the only foundations for a stable government; a corrupt one will eventually fall.

Lindsay Wilson: **Righteousness** is a core biblical value that describes individuals fulfilling all the demands of their relationships. For rulers, it would imply building up the community, and a genuine concern for the well-being of those under them. This is godly leadership.

Matthew Henry: He that makes conscience of using his power aright shall find that to be the best security of his government, both as it will oblige people, make them easy, and keep them in the interest of it, and as it will obtain the blessing of God, which will be a firm basis to the throne and a strong guard about it.

2. (:13) Fountain of Delight

"*Righteous lips are the delight of kings,*
And he who speaks right is loved."

Paul Koptak: If the throne is established through righteousness, then kings will want to surround themselves with persons who speak that way. Just as kings detest the wrong, they love those who do right (**12:2**). Taken together, **verses 12** and **13** hold up the virtues of speaking honestly.

C. (:14-15) King's Power over Life and Death

1. (:14) Appease the King's Anger – Leads to Death

"*The wrath of a king is as messengers of death,*
But a wise man will appease it."

Charles Bridges: Life and death are in his hands. His will is law. The despot issues his order, and the executioner performs his warrant without delay or resistance. No ordinary wisdom could appease his wrath.

Tremper Longman: This proverb appears to be addressed to those who have contact with the king. Obviously, ancient monarchs were powerful individuals, often making life-or-death decisions. If people anger a king, they run the risk of ending their own lives. The wise know how to anticipate the reaction of the king and say the right word and do the right thing to avoid bringing his anger onto them.

Matthew Henry: These two verses show **the power of kings**, which is every where great, but was especially so in those eastern countries, where they were absolute and arbitrary. Whom they would they slew and whom they would they kept alive. Their will was a law. We have reason to bless God for the happy constitution of the government

we live under, which maintains the prerogative of the prince without any injury to the liberty of the subject. But here it is intimated,

1. How formidable **the wrath of a king** is: It is as messengers of death; the wrath of Ahasuerus was so to Haman. An angry word from an incensed prince has been to many a messenger of death, and has struck so great a terror upon some as if a sentence of death had been pronounced upon them. He must be a very wise man that knows how to pacify the wrath of a king with a word fitly spoken, as Jonathan once pacified his father's rage against David, **1 Sa. 19:6**. A prudent subject may sometimes suggest that to an angry prince which will cool his resentments.

2. How valuable and desirable **the king's favour** is to those that have incurred his displeasure; it is life from the dead if the king be reconciled to them. To others it is as a cloud of the latter rain, very refreshing to the ground. Solomon put his subjects in mind of this, that they might not do any thing to incur his wrath, but be careful to recommend themselves to his favour. We ought by it to be put in mind how much we are concerned to escape the wrath and obtain the favour of the King of kings. His frowns are worse than death, and his favour is better than life; and therefore those are fools who to escape the wrath, and obtain the favour, of an earthly prince, will throw themselves out of God's favour, and make themselves obnoxious to his wrath.

2. (:15) Cultivate the King's Favor – Leads to Life and Prosperity

"*In the light of a king's face is life,*
And his favor is like a cloud with the spring rain."

Tremper Longman: This proverb forms a contrasting pair with the previous. **Verse 14** dealt with the king's anger, and this one with his delight. The "*light of his face*" indicates a demeanor that reflects inner happiness. This royal disposition leads to life, which implies something more than existence: reward. The second colon provides a metaphor that illustrates the first statement. A cloud brings refreshing late rains. These rains are late in the agricultural cycle, coming in March and April and causing a growth spurt of the crops before harvest. Again, the metaphor not only indicates existence but also **prosperity**.

Allen Ross: **Favor** from a king is encouraging to his people. This proverb is the antithesis of **v.14**. By using two metaphors the saying describes the benefits of having a king who is pleased with his subjects. The king's brightened face signifies his **delight** and thus means life for those around him (as opposed to his wrath). The favor this symbolizes is like the "*rain cloud*"—the latter rain or harvest rain, which is necessary for a successful harvest. Some of these ideas are similar to **Psalm 72:15–17**, which portrays the prosperity of the land as a blessing on account of the ideal king, whose righteous reign seems to ensure prosperity.

TEXT: Proverbs 16:16-33

TITLE: PURSUE WISDOM AND SWEET SPEECH

I. (:16-19) MOTIVATIONS FOR ACQUIRING WISDOM – WISDOM BETTER THAN GOLD

Lindsay Wilson: The distinctive teaching of these proverbs is about the **folly of pride** (**vv. 18–19**), which seems connected to the pursuit of wealth (*šālāl*, spoil or plunder, **v. 19b**) but which is ultimately self-destructive (**v. 18**). Against this backdrop of pride, readers are urged to choose wisdom rather than wealth (**v. 16**), to avoid evil ways and preserve their life (**v. 17**), and to trust in the Lord (**v. 20**). The path of the proud is yet another example of folly when compared to all that wisdom has to offer.

A. (:16) Choose Wisdom over Wealth

"*How much better it is to get wisdom than gold!*
And to get understanding is to be chosen above silver."

Paul Koptak: Everything that has been said about Yahweh and the king is now taken as evidence for the supreme value of wisdom. Because it is a currency of life and death (**16:4–5, 14–15**), wisdom is to be desired above wealth.

Richard Clifford: Traditionally, wisdom is declared more precious than gold and silver (see **3:14** and **Job 28**). Gold and silver can buy much, to be sure, but wisdom paves the way for God to give life, wealth, and honor. Such gifts can only be given; they cannot be bought. Gold and silver thus have less value than wisdom.

Allen Ross: This didactic saying follows the pattern of the "better" sayings. Wisdom and wealth are not incompatible, but this comparison is between wealth without wisdom and wisdom without wealth. McKane, 489, says, "Wealth without wisdom may be vulgarity or greed or ruthless individualism." The point of the verse is to encourage people to acquire wisdom and understanding (cf. **3:14**).

Lindsay Wilson: The seduction of wealth is that it can give a sense of power and status, and so lead easily to pride. The focus is broadened out in **verse 17** with references to a wise person's fundamental path through life (*highway, way*). The language used here of turning aside (**13:14; 14:27; 15:24; 16:6**) from evil, guarding one's way and preserving one's life has earlier been used of character (*šmr* and *nṣr* in 2:11). The foundational choice of those who choose the straight path (*the upright*) leads to a godly character which offers true life.

Peter Wallace: If you have the choice between wisdom and money, **choose wisdom**. Wisdom is that good. Money can buy any earthly good, in some fashion, except happiness and true love. But wisdom can provide life, love, and happiness too.

This means that you shouldn't worship work. You shouldn't spend all your time working and none of it getting wisdom. You shouldn't worship stuff, such that you're so busy buying and enjoying that you fail to consider Jesus, the wisdom of God. You shouldn't worship experiences, good as they are, such that you fail to consider how much better wisdom is than any of the things He made.

Do you adore wisdom? Do you work for wisdom, walk in wisdom, follow wisdom, seek wisdom? Brothers and sisters, Christ is personified wisdom and we know that He's better than money. But internalized wisdom is better than money too. There's nothing wrong with thinking about money. But if you think about money, not wisdom, you're not wise and you're ultimately not rich either.

How do we actually imbibe the notion that wisdom is better than money? How can you get to the place in life where you're content to let goods and kindred go if keeping them would cost you Christ? You have to focus your attention on **the good of wisdom**. You have to taste and see that He is good. You have to have experience of how blessed it is to be with Jesus.

B. (:17) Watch Your Way

"*The highway of the upright is to depart from evil;*
He who watches his way preserves his life."

Richard Clifford: In the metaphorical system of the two ways, the way of the righteous is protected. Those who stay on the way save themselves from trouble. One must constantly choose to stay on the path. Colon A declares that the good way avoids trouble and colon B affirms the effort of staying on it. The saying is given unity by sibilants; in colon B, CōCēC CaCCô (C = consonant) occurs twice, giving an aphoristic tone. The verse is the **exact midpoint of the book**, according to the Masorah.

Allen Ross: **Righteous living is a safeguard against calamity**. The parallelism of these lines is probably synthetic: the first asserts that integrity avoids evil, and the second explains further that the person who guards his way protects his life. In the first colon the point of righteous living is made with the image of a "*highway*" (*mesillâ*), a raised and well-graded road. This well-cared-for life, this integrity, turns from or "*avoids evil*" (*sûr mērāʿ*, with *rāʿ* in the sense of "*sinful living*"). The metaphor of the "*way*" (*mesillâ* // *darkô*) is carried into the second colon: he "*guards*" his way and thereby safeguards his life.

C. (:18-19) Warning against the Folly of Pride

1. (:18) Pride Trips Up

"*Pride goes before destruction,*
And a haughty spirit before stumbling."

Paul Koptak: The synonymous lines repeat the picture of arrogant people raising themselves up, only to trip and fall low.

Allen Ross: Many similar sayings have warned against **pride** and **arrogance**. An Arabic proverb says, "The nose is in the heavens, the seat is in the mire." McKane, 490, sees another implication in the words of this proverb: "'Disintegration' suggests a contrast with the man who has achieved wholeness *[šālôm*] by submitting to *mûsār* and learning wisdom; and '*stumbling*' a contrast with the safe road along which the teacher directs his attentive and receptive pupils."

Tremper Longman: Pride does not allow one to listen to criticism and thereby correct misperceptions and harmful patterns of behavior, whereas humility does.

Matthew Henry:
1. Pride will have a fall. Those that are of a haughty spirit, that think of themselves above what is meet, and look with contempt upon others, that with their pride affront God and disquiet others, will be brought down, either by repentance or by ruin. It is the honour of God to humble the proud, **Job 40:11, 12**. It is the act of justice that those who have lifted up themselves should be laid low. Pharaoh, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, were instances of this. Men cannot punish pride, but either admire it or fear it, and therefore God will take the punishing of it into his own hands. Let him alone to deal with proud men.

2. Proud men are frequently most proud, and insolent, and haughty, just before their destruction, so that it is a certain presage that they are upon the brink of it. When proud men set God's judgments at defiance, and think themselves at the greatest distance from them, it is a sign that they are at the door.

2. (:19) Hang with the Humble

"*It is better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly,*
Than to divide the spoil with the proud."

Richard Clifford: The phrase "*humble of spirit*" links the saying to "*haughty spirit*" in the previous verse. Sharing booty is an act of victory in war, which of itself is not a bad thing. What makes the sharing of booty bad, however, is when the group that shares it attributes the victory entirely to their own prowess. Contrasted with them are the humble, perhaps those defeated and despoiled by the self-centered victors. The proud will eventually lose their gains, whereas those who are humble win God's favor.

Allen Ross: The "*proud*" and the "*lowly*" here are ethical and religious descriptions for the proud rebel, who is overbearing and oppressive, and for the humble person, who submits to God and is unassuming and inoffensive (cf. Toy, 328). One should cultivate a humble spirit regardless of economic status, but one should never share the loot of those antagonistic to God.

Tremper Longman: Humility is valued because it is not the road to pride. Further, read in conjunction with the previous proverb, if wealth comes to the wise, it is likely to be short-lived or a prelude to disaster anyway. The "needy" are contrasted with those who "divide plunder," a warfare term for the victorious dividing the spoils among

themselves. Perhaps having won the victory breeds pride, if the victory is thought to come because of human skill or strength.

Charles Bridges: Examine secret faults. Trace them to their source. Maybe we have a subtle confidence in gifts, attainments, and privileges. Then praise your God for his painful discipline, the preserving mercy from ruinous self-exaltation. Truly the way down the valley of humiliation is deep and rugged. Humility, therefore, is the great preserving grace. The contrite tax collector was safe, though the boasting Pharisee was confounded (**Luke 18:14**). Better – more happy, more honorable, more acceptable to God and man – are the lowly in spirit than the haughty who only end up by being destroyed. It is better to have a humble spirit than a lofty position in this world. But who believes this? Most men strive to rise; few desire to lie low. May your example, blessed Savior, keep me low! "When Majesty," said pious Bernard, "humbled himself, shall the worm swell with pride?"

Matthew Henry: Humility, though it should expose us to contempt in the world, yet while it recommends us to the favour of God, qualifies us for his gracious visits, prepares us for his glory, secures us from many temptations, and preserves the quiet and repose of our own souls, is much better than that high-spiritedness which, though it carry away the honour and wealth of the world, makes God a man's enemy and the devil his master.

II. (:20-24) PROCESS OF TRANSMITTING WISDOM – WISDOM SWEET ON THE LIPS

A. (:20) Trust in the Lord

"*He who gives attention to the word shall find good,*
And blessed is he who trusts in the LORD."

Paul Koptak: "*Trust*" (cf. **3:5**) is an **active confidence**; more than believing in God's protection and provision, trust believes that God's way is the best way and so gladly follows it.

Richard Clifford: The point seems to be that success and happiness depend on both God and our own efforts. Neither can be neglected.

Allen Ross: The person who trusts in the Lord and "*gives heed to instruction*" will be blessed by him; he will find earthly prosperity and heavenly bliss from living a life that is right with God.

B. (:21) Gain a Reputation for Discernment and Sweet Speech

"*The wise in heart will be called discerning,*
And sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness."

Paul Koptak: This proverb begins a series on wisdom and speaking. The connection between heart and lips is made once again, here to demonstrate how reputation can also

enhance teaching. If the first line stresses the fruits for the wise one, the second stresses the effect on others. Once again, the charge to gain wisdom carries with it a second charge to pass it on to others by means of persuasive teaching (lit., "*sweetness of lips*"; NIV "*pleasant words*").

Richard Clifford: To win a reputation for wisdom, one must be both discerning and eloquent.

Tremper Longman: It is a bit hard to see a precise connection between the two cola here. The first observes that those in whom wisdom has sunk deep roots will be recognized and acclaimed as those who possess "*understanding*" (a word associated with "*wisdom*" and hard to distinguish from "*wisdom*" and "*knowledge*"). The second line suggests that one's teaching is better received or enhanced in some other way by "*sweet lips*." This may refer to eloquence or to the kindly attitude by which the sage presents material.

Matthew Henry: Those that with their wisdom have a happy elocution, that deliver their sentiments easily and with a good grace, are communicative of their wisdom and have words at will, and good language as well as good sense, increase learning; they diffuse and propagate knowledge to others, and do good work with it, and by that means increase their own stock. They add doctrine, improve sciences, and do service to the commonwealth of learning. To him that has, and uses what he has, more shall be given.

C. (:22) Understanding Differentiates between Life and Folly

"*Understanding is a fountain of life to him who has it,*
But the discipline of fools is folly."

Paul Koptak: Is the sense of the proverb that the fool is chastised, or that folly is the only instruction they know, so don't bother to teach them (cf. **26:4–5**)? Both are possible, but the contrast with the fountain of life lends weight to the first interpretation.

Charles Bridges: When understanding is enlightened so it can appreciate spiritual things in their spiritual glory, notions become principles. Feelings then flow from light and are filled with life. The book of God shines out with new glory. Every verse is a sunbeam. Every promise is irradiated with divine love. What had previously been meaningless noise now becomes spirit and life. This spiritual understanding is indeed a fountain of life. Even if it is not always bubbling, there is a supply of water flowing all the time from the spring.

Richard Clifford: Intelligence benefits the one who has it (**13:14**). It is a *fountain of life*, a source of the blessings of long and healthy life, wealth, and repute. Other "*fountains of life*" in Proverbs are the words of the wise (**10:11; 13:14**) and the fear of the Lord (**14:27**). The second colon is difficult. Syntactically, it could mean "*to educate fools is folly*" (so McKane), but that translation seems too simple. Most commentators take *mûsār* not in its usual sense of "*discipline, training*" but of "*punishment*" (on the basis of **13:24** and **22:15**). JPSV, for example, renders, "*and folly is the punishment of fools.*"

The ordinary meaning of *mûsār* makes sense, however. As long as perverse folly is the discipline of fools, they will remain fools and eventually bring retribution on their heads. Such faulty training is the very antithesis of "*fountain of life*."

D. (:23) Persuasive Speech Flows from a Discerning Heart

"*The heart of the wise teaches his mouth,*
And adds persuasiveness to his lips."

Allen Ross: Those who are wise ensure that they say wise things. The parallelism is synthetic, the first asserting that the wise heart "*guides*" the mouth, and the second line adding that he increases the reception of what he says (see **v.21**).

Tremper Longman: This proverb is based on the sages' understanding that one's words are a reflection of one's heart. One who is wise at heart will say intelligent and helpful things to enhance another's learning. Notice the close parallel between **16:21b** and the second colon of this verse.

Charles Bridges: Man's religion begins with the head, but God's religion begins with the heart. . . Experiential application realizes the glow of evangelical light and warmth. Let me look mainly not to intellectual or theological attainments, but to heavenly teaching. Let me seek that my heart is taught first and foremost. Then let it teach my mouth, so that my lips promote instruction for the praise of my God and the edifying of his church.

E. (:24) Sweet Speech Brings Healing

"*Pleasant words are a honeycomb,*
Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones."

Allen Ross: Pleasant words are **comforting** and **encouraging**. The subject matter here is *ʾimrê-nōʿam* ("*pleasant words*"). They are first described as "*a honeycomb*" (see **Ps 19:10[11]**). Then the added predicates are "*sweet*" (*mātôq*) and "*healing*" (*marpēʾ*). One may recall, in line with the use of this imagery, how Jonathan's eyes brightened when he ate the honeycomb (**1Sa 14:27**); such is the uplifting effect of pleasant words.

Matthew Henry:
1. They are like the honey-comb, sweet to the soul, which tastes in them that the Lord is gracious; nothing more grateful and agreeable to the new man than the word of God, and those words which are borrowed from it, **Ps. 119:103**.

2. They are wholesome. Many things are pleasant that are not profitable, but these pleasant words are health to the bones, to the inward man, as well as sweet to the soul. They make the bones, which sin has broken and put out of joint, to rejoice. The bones are the strength of the body; and the good word of God is a means of spiritual strength, curing the diseases that weaken us.

III. (:25-30) DESTRUCTIVE IMAGES OF WICKED SPEECH

Paul Koptak: Negative images dominate this cluster, particularly the villainous person. Note that many key words from **16:20–24** recur but as a mirror image of evil ("*way*," "*mouth*," "*lips*"), especially the reversal of "*finds good*" (*ṭob*, "*prospers*") in **16:20** to "*not good*" (*loʾ ṭob*) in **16:29**.

Lindsay Wilson: In contrast to the previous and following sections, **verses 25–30** (with the possible exception of **v. 26**) focus on negative images, expressed in various forms of **evil behaviour**. They describe the way of the wicked (**v. 25**), the worthless person or scoundrel (**v. 27**), the perverse gossip (**v. 28**) and the violent person (**v. 29**) who acts as a deceiver (**v. 30**). There is concentration on both their **plans** and **actions**. Clifford (1999: 161) sees a progression in the second lines of **verses 27–29** from thought (**v. 27**) to speech (**v. 28**) to actions harming others (**v. 29**). Indeed, each of **verses 27–29** begin with the same word (*ʾîš, a person*), binding them together. Even the seemingly anomalous **verse 26** may refer to someone being driven by hunger to do something (unspecified) that he or she should not do.

Caleb Nelson: **The Folly of Badmouthing, vv. 25-30**
A. A Reminder: What Seems Good Isn't Always, **v. 25**
B. The Ambiguity of Working to fill your mouth, **v. 26**
C. The Man of Wickedness Speaks Ill, **v. 27**
D. The Man of Perversity Sows Discord, **v. 28**
E. A Man of Violence Seduces Others, **vv. 29-30**

A. (:25) Independent but Self-Deluded Living

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

Allen Ross: the contrast is with the "*way*" that seems right and the "*ways of death*" (*darkê-māwet*; "*leads to death*," NIV), which in the end provide the reality for the **shortsighted evaluation**.

Lindsay Wilson: This proverb is identical to **14:12**. The context of both proverbs is a **group of negative characters**. This is not a description of all people, for the focus is on the wicked, that is to say, those whose end point is the way of death. The wicked may think that they are in control of their life, but, like the guests of Dame Folly (**9:18**), it will end in an untimely death.

Charles Bridges: Again we have this solemn, searching warning. For the danger of self-delusion is so dreadful that we are only kept safe if we are constantly given warnings. This is not because we do not understand, but because we love to sin. Our judgment is perverted because our heart is blind. It is no proof that a way is right because it seems right. All the ways of a man are right in his own eyes; yet, in the end they lead to death.

It seems as if we must travel along the road of disobedience. It appears to be only a

slight deviation, but it is punished because in reality it is witchcraft and idolatry. The way of deceit often appears to be right, as if it is an easy way to escape from a difficulty.

It is madness to dream about heaven when every step is the way to hell. For the end . . . leads to death. It is the enemy's great purpose to stop us from seeing the end, so that our road seems to be right. The paths that lead to death are many. But there is only one way to life, and nobody can come to the Father except by Jesus Christ (**John 14:6**). Oh, the transcendent mercy of the eyes opened to see the awful danger of our own way, ad our ears opened to hear the voice behind us saying, "*This is the way; walk in it*" (see **Isaiah 30:21; Jeremiah 6:16**).

B. (:26) Motivated by Selfish Needs

"*A worker's appetite works for him,*
For his hunger urges him on."

Richard Clifford: Our proverb paradoxically asserts that a person does not toil to fill the gullet but that the gullet itself "*toils*" in the sense that appetite forces one to work.

Allen Ross: **Hunger drives people to work diligently**. Here is a classification of labor and its primary incentive—need. "*Labor*" (*ʿāmēl*) is boring drudgery; motivations are necessary to its continuance, and hunger is the most frequent motivation. The word "*appetite*" is literally "*soul*" (*nepeš*), that part of human nature that craves food; for the "*life*" (*nepeš*) is a bundle of appetites. The second clause adds an explanatory idea: his "*mouth*" (*pîhû*; "*his hunger*," NIV) presses him on.

Lindsay Wilson: On the one hand, it could simply mean that the hunger or appetite of workers (lit. life or soul, but sometimes it means hunger or appetite, as in **6:30; 10:3; 13:25**) makes them keep on working in order to get food to satisfy their stomach. If so, it is just a description of a normal human process that we are geared to work in order to meet our physical needs. However, given the **negative examples** that surround it, it is more likely to imply that their hunger causes them to act in a way that is not right, but becomes desirable because of the extent of their hunger. If so, **their needs are driving them to act wrongly.**

C. (:27-30) Examples of Destructive Speech

1. (:27) Pictured as a Scorching Fire

"*A worthless man digs up evil,*
While his words are as a scorching fire."

Ernest Lucas: **Verses 27-29** each begin with the phrase '*a man of X*' in Hebrew, and **v. 30** is linked to them by the catchwords '*dishonest*' (**v. 28a**), '*lips*' (**v. 27b**, Heb.) and '*evil*' (**v. 27a**).

Paul Koptak: Like the portrait of the scoundrel in **6:12–19**, this evil person's thoughts, words, and actions are intent on hurting others. If a laborer toils to feed self and family

(**16:26**), a scoundrel "*plots*" (lit., "*digs a pit*") to entrap the unsuspecting, working not to provide for himself but to take what others have. The second line likens evil speech to this action, adding that it also burns like fire. A "*scorching fire*" quickly spreads, destroying everything in its path as it burns out of control.

Richard Clifford: When anyone's intent is malicious, his words are a destructive fire. There is a play on *'îš bĕlîya'al*, "*scoundrel*," and *'ēš*, "*fire*."

2. (:28) Spreading Strife and Slander

"*A perverse man spreads strife,*
And a slanderer separates intimate friends."

Paul Koptak: The similarity between the two lines is the absence of goodwill and unity. The difference is that one can do it loudly as one stirs up dissension or quietly and secretly through gossip and tale-bearing. Both are equally devastating to community (cf. **26:20** and **22**; also **18:8**).

Richard Clifford: The second type of malicious person is the **backbiter.** Such people destroy human relationships, which are founded on affection and trust. A gossip's words are filled with insinuations that destroy trust and respect.

Allen Ross: **Slanderers and gossips cause divisions**. The wicked is described as "*a perverse man*" (*'îš tahpukôt*, lit., "*a man of falsehoods, a liar*") and a "*gossip*" (*nirgān*), viz., one who whispers and murmurs (**18:8; 26:20, 22**). This kind of person destroys close friendships (*'allûp*) by what he says.

3. (:29) Enticing Others to Violence

"*A man of violence entices his neighbor,*
And leads him in a way that is not good."

Paul Koptak: A strong contrast stands here between the teacher who spreads health and peace and the "*teacher*" who spreads division and finally violence by word and example (cf. **4:14–17**). The phrase "*not good*" may point to the antithesis of choosing wisdom; every other occurrence of the word "*good*" (*ṭob*) associates it with wisdom's way (**16:8, 16, 19, 20, 32**). Enticement is ultimately deception that pretends to be speaking good when in fact it is "*not good*."

Allen Ross: Violent people influence others toward violence (note the synthetic parallelism, the second part adding to the first). The man of violence (*ḥāmās*; GK 2805) will influence his acquaintances toward violence. *Ḥāmās* often refers to sins against society, social injustices, and crimes. The "*path that is not good*" must refer to habits of crime. The point is to warn people to keep away from such villains.

4. (:30) Compounding Wicked Speech with Perverse Body Language

"*He who winks his eyes does so to devise perverse things;*
He who compresses his lips brings evil to pass."

Richard Clifford: The saying probably rounds off the series that began in **v. 27**. Proverbs constantly stresses the intimate relationship between thought and expression, heart and tongue. External behavior gives a clue to intent. Such is the point of these physiological observations.

Allen Ross: Two expressions are depicted here: winking the eye and pursing the lips. Facial expressions often reveal whether someone is plotting something evil (see **6:13–14**). Mannerisms and character are closely linked.

VI. (:31-33) FOUNDATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL LIVING

Paul Koptak: The final three verses of this chapter hardly seem related to one another, yet there is a common thread of final victory.

- The virtues of a lifelong commitment to righteousness yield a long life (**16:31**),
- the one who commands control of self is the true conqueror (**16:32**),
- and lots of chance point to the final decision of Yahweh (**16:33**).

Human will can be directed toward faithfulness, longsuffering, and a determined openness to God's will.

A. (:31) Maintain Righteousness until Receiving the Reward of Respect in Old Age

"*A gray head is a crown of glory;*
It is found in the way of righteousness."

Richard Clifford: Nature, as it were, bestows a glorious crown—the gray hair of a senior or elderly person. "*Glorious crown*" (*'ăṭeret tip'eret*) rhymes in Hebrew. Gray hair is a synecdoche for old age (**Lev. 19:32**): "*You shall rise before gray hair and honor the visage of an elder.*" Colon B explains where the glory comes from—not from a long life as such but from a long righteous life. Cf. **24:5–6**.

Allen Ross: there is something commendable about old age that can remember a long walk with God through life and can anticipate unbroken fellowship with him in glory.

Tremper Longman: The idea of age as reward may also be seen in the light of the teaching that wisdom allows one to grow old, while fools will die prematurely. This is presupposed in the constantly offered enticement that wisdom leads to life, while folly leads to death. Again, this is not an absolute principle in Proverbs, but a generally true one.

B. (:32) Maintain Self Control over Your Emotions

"*He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,*
And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city."

Paul Koptak: Better to exhibit **self-control** than to control others. In an age when kings used stone reliefs to depict their prowess in war, this praise of the patience that maintains social order may have been shaped to surprise hearers with its common sense.

C. (:33) Maintain Confidence in God's Providence Ruling Every Decision

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

Paul Koptak: People cast lots in order to discern Yahweh's will and so hope to find success. Most likely, "*lot*" refers to the use of Urim and Thummim (**Ex. 28:30–31; Lev. 8:8; 16:8–10**); among other uses, lots were used to make decisions about going to war (cf. **Num. 27:21; 1 Sam. 23:9–12**). The "*decision*" (*mišpaṭ*) is a judgment, and Yahweh's judgments are for justice (*mišpaṭ,* **Prov. 16:8**) and honesty (**16:11**). A "*lap*" (*ḥeq*) is formed by the folds of one's garment. Thus, both lots cast into the folds and weight stones drawn out of the bag point to Yahweh's desire for decisions that reflect his will (cf. **16:11**). Like the opening proverbs, however, the role of human planning in the final outworking of God's plans is left in mysterious tension.

Richard Clifford: The issue is similar to **16:1**: We can plan something, but it is not in our power to bring it to consummation. Cf. **18:18** and **1 Sam. 14:41–42**.

Matthew Henry:
1. The divine Providence orders and directs those things which to us are perfectly casual and fortuitous. Nothing comes to pass by chance, nor is an event determined by a blind fortune, but everything by the will and counsel of God. What man has neither eye nor hand in God is intimately concerned in.

2. When solemn appeals are made to Providence by the casting of lots, for the deciding of that matter of moment which could not otherwise be at all, or not so well, decided, God must be eyed in it, by prayer, that it may be disposed aright (Give a perfect lot, **1 Sa. 14:41; Acts 1:24**), and by acquiescing in it when it is disposed, being satisfied that the hand of God is in it and that hand directed by infinite wisdom. All the disposals of Providence concerning our affairs we must look upon to be the directing of our lot, the determining of what we referred to God, and must be reconciled to them accordingly.

Charles Bridges: The instructive lesson to learn from this proverb is that there is no waste in the most minute circumstances. Who can fail to see the hand of God, most wonderful in the most apparently casual contingencies, overruling all second causes to fulfill his will while they work their own? "When kingdoms are tossed up and downlike a tennis ball, not one event can fly out of the bounds of God's providence. The smallest are not below it. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without it. Not a hair, but it is numbered by it" (Polhill).

TEXT: Proverbs 17:1-28

TITLE: FOOLS AND EVILDOERS

Paul Koptak: Running through a melange of sayings about families (households) and larger communities are the twin themes of strife and unity. Proverbs about speech habits like gossip and quarreling are intertwined with proverbs about handling money (bribes and pledges) to show their connection with wisdom's goals of justice and harmony.

Lindsay Wilson: **Chapter 17** has little observable structure (Murphy 1998: 127 calls it 'a hodgepodge of sayings'). Even Heim concedes that 'there is a greater variety of themes in **Proverbs 17** than in previous chapters, and obvious links are missing' (Heim 2001: 204). Yet **verses 4–16** are predominantly about various kinds of fools and evildoers, with the exception of **verse 6** and perhaps **verse 10**. The remainder of **chapter 17** still has a focus on fools and wrongdoers, but there are more pictures of positive characters.

I. (:1-15) EXAMINATION OF FOOLS AND EVILDOERS

A. (:1-6) Examples of Foolish Behavior

1. (:1) Strife Isn't Worth It

> "*Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it*
> *Than a house full of feasting with strife.*"

Richard Clifford: It is peace and fellowship that make a true feast, not the food. For a similar sentiment, see **15:16–17** and **16:8.**

Paul Koptak: The irony is plain: If the goal of harmony is not met, what good is a sumptuous table?

Allen Ross: Abundance often brings a deterioration of moral and ethical standards and an increase in envy and strife.

Charles Bridges: The allusion is to the Jewish ordinance of feasting at home on the remains of the sacrifices. A house full of feasting was therefore a house with ample provisions. Yet when the spirit of love does not rule, self predominates, and this becomes a source of much strife and confusion.

Ponder every thought that may disturb contentment. If you have fewer comforts than you used to have, or fewer comforts than other people have, or fewer comforts than you desire, do you not still have more than you deserve? If you had more of them, would you not be tempted to forget God and to live in a worldly way? Does not the memory of the earthly lot that your Savior chose turn every thought about being discontented into adoration and gratitude? Do not forget that there is great gain in contentment.

2. (:2) Shameful Behavior Nullifies Family Rights

"*A servant who acts wisely will rule over a son who acts shamefully,*
And will share in the inheritance among brothers."

Richard Clifford: Virtuous and shrewd behavior opens doors, even providing access to the privileges and wealth customarily reserved for family members. . . Wisdom can transcend natural boundaries and expectations.

Tremper Longman: The consequence of insight over disgrace (which implies a lack of insight) is that the servant will be treated like a son when it comes to inheritance. The purpose of this proverb may be to warn sons to pay close attention to their filial duties and to act in such a way that their reputations bring honor and not shame on the family.

Paul Koptak: This saying is also about life in a household, so it might be paraphrased, "*Better a wise servant than a shameful son*." Status, like material prosperity, means little if it is not matched by wise character. Servants and sons alike can be shameful (**10:5; 14:35**), and in this saying neither is privileged.

Derek Kidner: **Ability outruns privilege** –
Privilege, as an obstacle or a support, looms larger in most people's minds than in God's, in things both spiritual (**Amos 9:7; Matt. 8:11, 12**) and temporal. Solomon's proverb was to be strikingly borne out in the careers of his servant and his son (**1kg 11:28ff**.).

Charles Bridges: Folly leads to shame, while wisdom leads to honor. The son, the heir of the family, may bring shame on his family by his behavior, instead of bringing glory to his family. A wise servant, although he has only temporary interest in the home, may be promoted to rule over a disgraceful son.

George Mylne: This verse gives parents a proper hint about the distribution of their estates, and directs those who have the disposal of places of trust, to pay a greater regard to wisdom and integrity than to high birth, or great estates, or the connections of friendship and kindred.

How excellent is wisdom, which raises the slave from grinding at the mill, and the beggar from the dunghill to places of distinction, and to the truest honors, because they are the pure fruits of goodness! How miserable a thing is folly, which degrades the high, and brings misery upon the latter days of those who flourished like green bay-trees in the prime of their life!

3. (:3) Sin Revealed by Divine Testing

"*The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold,*
But the LORD tests hearts."

Richard Clifford: A crucible is a container used for refining metal by separating out impurities or for testing whether there is impurity in precious metal. The process

provides an analogy to God's testing human hearts as in **Pss. 26:2; 66:10; Jer. 9:6**.

Paul Koptak: If there are no precious metals, the crucible will show it; if there are no characteristics of wise character, the test will show that also.

Tremper Longman: The proverb sets up a comparison between God, who refines hearts, and the refining of two precious materials. Metalworkers separate silver and gold from impurities by a process of heating the metal until the dross can be poured off. In the same way, God puts his people into difficult situations that will reveal their sin (the impurity of their hearts). Since the crucible does not only expose but also gets rid of dross, the implication may be that he not only evaluates hearts in this way but also helps people get rid of their sin. For other texts that use the refining metaphor, see **Ps. 12:6; Isa. 1:24–26; Jer. 9:7 [6 MT]; Zech. 13:8–9**.

Allen Ross: **Divine Omniscience –**
The Lord examines every thought and every motive. The imagery is of silver and gold being purified, parallel to the Lord's "*testing*" (*bōḥēn*) human hearts. Such examinations are always constructive; they are designed to improve the value of what is purified.

4. (:4) Speech that Is Wicked Should Not Gain a Hearing

"*An evildoer listens to wicked lips,*
A liar pays attention to a destructive tongue."

Richard Clifford: A common theme in Proverbs is that fools' words are destructive. This saying shifts the perspective: those who take in evil words themselves become evil.

Paul Koptak: A good heart will discern, but evil persons will accept anything as long as it is in line with their own purposes. The pungent metaphors of evil lips and malicious tongue suggest that you can tell how someone will speak by noting what he or she chooses to listen to. In other words, if a person finds gossip delicious, it's a good bet that such an individual will spread it just as quickly. Kidner paraphrases, "Evil words die without a welcome."

Allen Ross: **Leviticus 19:17** warns people to rebuke those with malicious words and not to bear evil with them. Plaut, 186, explains that people who listen to gossip are just as guilty of it as those who spread it.

Charles Bridges: Here is a dark but true picture of human nature. A wicked man is not content with his own evil desires. He has such an appetite for sin that he seeks outside stimulants to increase his activities. "There would not be so many open mouths if there were not so many willing ears to entertain them" (Bishop Hall). Remember that the listening ear shares the responsibility of the malicious tongue. Both are involved in the treason and are directly or indirectly acquainted with the plot.

George Mylne: He is a wicked man who gives heed to evil lips. Wicked men have a great treasury of evil in their hearts and yet have not enough to satisfy their own corrupt dispositions. They are like covetous men, in whom their large possessions only increase their lust of having, and therefore they carry on a trade with other wicked men, who are able to add to their store of iniquity, by flattering and counseling them in sin. Their heart gathers iniquity to itself, not merely by its own corrupt imaginations and contrivances but by hearing the devilish lessons of those who have made a greater proficiency in that wisdom which comes from below. They are blessed who hunger and thirst after righteousness but cursed are those who add drunkenness to thirst in the service of sin, for they shall be filled with their own devices.

5. (:5) Scoffing at the Poor Leads to Certain Punishment

"*He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker;*
He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished."

Richard Clifford: The dignity of each human being comes from being created by God. Contempt toward anyone insults the person's maker. The example of a poor person, the type perhaps least likely to gain respect, is used to dramatize the point. Every human being, irrespective of wealth, is worthy of respect. Cf. **14:31.**

Paul Koptak: Evil lips are at work when the poor are ridiculed or someone's misfortune becomes an occasion to "*gloat*" (lit., "*rejoice*"). Is this one of the wicked messages that verse 4 has in mind? Attitude is an action waiting to happen, and so the way we view others determines the way we will treat them.

B. (:6) Special Honor in Family Relationships

"*Grandchildren are the crown of old men,*
And the glory of sons is their fathers."

Tremper Longman: This remarkable statement shows the **importance of family**. It is also an observation on how families are **interconnected.** The assumption is that all the family members are wise and not doing things that bring shame on themselves and the family (**10:1**). The actions of family members reflect either glory or shame on others who are connected to them. That the elderly have grandchildren at all is testimony to their long lives and their fertility and thus the rewards ("*crown*") of godliness. Parents may be the glory of their children since godly parents help their children by directing them in the right path.

Allen Ross: The synonymous parallelism here focuses on this point from two sides—grandchildren are a crown to the aged, and parents are an honor to children. This idea comes from a culture that places great importance on the family in society; the older folks have preeminence in the family and receive the appropriate respect.

C. (:7-9) 3 Types of Folly

1. (:7) Verbal Folly – Lying Lips

"*Excellent speech is not fitting for a fool;*

Much less are lying lips to a prince."

Richard Clifford: Noble words cannot have as their source a foolish heart, nor can foolish words issue from a noble heart. Cf. **Matt. 7:17**: "*Every good tree bears good fruit, and a bad tree bears bad fruit*" (see also **Matt. 12:33** and **Luke 6:43–44**).

Derek Kidner: **Be what you profess –**
Fool is *nābāl* (as in **17:21b; 30:22**): the overbearing, crudely godless man as in **Psalm 14:1** or **1 Samuel 25:25**. The contrast between him and the prince (*nādîb*) or, better, '*nobleman*', is clarified in **Isaiah 32:5–8**, where both words occur, and nobility is made a title to be lived up to.

Allen Ross: A dishonest leader is worse than an arrogant fool. . . The lesson is that if fools should not speak lofty things, then certainly honorable people should not lie.

Matthew Henry: Two things are here represented as very absurd:

1. That men of no repute should be dictators. What can be more unbecoming than for fools, who are known to have little sense and discretion, to pretend to that which is above them and which they were never cut out for? A fool, in Solomon's proverbs, signifies a wicked man, whom excellent speech does not become, because his conversation gives the lie to his excellent speech. What have those to do to declare God's statutes who hate instruction? **Ps. 50:16**. Christ would not suffer the unclean spirits to say that they knew him to be the Son of God. See **Acts 16:17, 18**.

2. That men of great repute should be deceivers. If it is unbecoming a despicable man to presume to speak as a philosopher or politician, and nobody heeds him, being prejudiced against his character, much more unbecoming is it for a prince, for a man of honour, to take advantage from his character and the confidence that is put in him to lie, and dissemble, and make no conscience of breaking his word. Lying ill becomes any man, but worst a prince.

2. (:8) Financial Folly -- Bribery

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

Paul Koptak: Just as the noble should not lie, neither should a judge or any other authority be vulnerable to a "*bribe*."

Derek Kidner: *Gift* (AV, RV) is here *bribe* (RSV; *šoḥad*, never used of a disinterested gift). *Precious stone* (AV, RV) is lit. '*stone of favour*'; hence RSV hazards magic stone, as procuring favour. The saying's general sense is clear: it describes the briber's confidence in the versatile usefulness of his tool. 'Money talks.' But God's view is given in **verses 15** and **23**.

3. (:9) Relational Folly -- Gossip

"*He who covers a transgression seeks love,*
But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends."

Paul Koptak: The observation leads to the general truth that it is better to forgive and forget.

Charles Bridges: A forbearing spirit is a fine manifestation of this heavenly grace. Our motives are often misconstrued. We meet in a world of selfishness and cold reserve instead of glowing confidence. Prejudice builds a wall against Christian fellowship. Wounded pride seeks to return an unkindness with contempt. Resentment stirs up recrimination. Disappointment kindles morbid suspicion. But a disciplined tongue is a gracious mercy to the church.

Tremper Longman: Don't keep bringing up the faults of others if you want to enjoy an intimate relationship with that person. The repeating of a transgression may also involve gossip if the story is told to third parties.

Allen Ross: **Love shown by discretion –**
How people respond to the faults of others reveals whether or not they have compassion. This proverb is an antithetical statement, showing the contrast between "*he who covers over an offense*" of a friend and the one who "*repeats*" the news about it; the former promotes love and the latter separates friends. There can be no friendship without such understanding and discretion. Plaut, 188, says such friendship requires the ability to forget; harping on the past has destroyed many friendships and marriages. The point is that for the sake of love, the true friend buries the wrong done; Mckane, 508–9, describes the antithesis this way:

> "On the one hand the person who believes that love is better served by a charitable silence than by a campaign of exposure and, on the other, the person who breaks up friendships—other men's friendships, not his own—by scandalous gossip. Even if this is done with a kind of zeal for the welfare of the community, the means are not justified by the end, for it is an activity which will destroy love and trust and so destroy what it sets out to preserve. And those who begin as crusaders will be degraded by what they supposed to be their mission in life and will become common informers and persecutors."

George Mylne: But he who follows the contrary method of behavior seeks hatred, and alienates the affections of the most cordial friends from one another. The censorious man, the tale-bearer, the person that revives old quarrels is a mortal enemy to love; a faithful servant of the accuser of the brethren; an enemy to him who is our peace with God and with one another. If such dreadful punishments are threatened to those who are destitute of love then what shall be the portion of those who scatter the seed of enmity and discord through a whole town, by the stories they tell, and by the lies and misrepresentations which they mingle with their idle tales!

D. (:10-13) 4 Consequences of Folly

1. (:10) Impervious to Rebuke

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

Richard Clifford: The wise learn from mere hints, whereas fools do not learn even from many blows.

Paul Koptak: One can confront a wise person and expect a change in behavior, but not from the fool, for whom a hundred blows are not persuasive enough.

George Mylne: It is good to have tender hearts susceptible of impressions from reproof, and from the providence of God. As a lively faith will enable the Christian to bear the greatest trials, so a tender conscience will enable him to derive spiritual improvement from the gentlest afflictions which are not to be despised, because they come to us with a message from God.

2. (:11) Destined for Calamity

"*A rebellious man seeks only evil,*
So a cruel messenger will be sent against him."

Paul Koptak: While a wise person will appease that wrath, here the evil person only provokes it. One can seek reconciliation or one can seek rebellion; the choice is clear.

Derek Kidner: **Playing with fire** –
Subject and object should be reversed here, as the Heb. suggests. So Moffatt, succinctly: 'Rebels are out for mischief.' That is to say, since rebellion scorns moderation, the rebel need expect none, for what we seek, we find. See also **verse 13**.

Allen Ross: The formal parallelism lines up a cause-and-effect relationship. The cause is that evil people seek rebellion, and its effect is that retribution will be sent in the form of a "*merciless official*" (*mal ʾāk ʾakzārî*). This expression could refer to a pitiless messenger the king would send; but it also could refer to storms, pestilence, or any misfortune that served as God's messenger of retribution.

3. (:12) Driven by Rage

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

Richard Clifford: Hyperbole is used here for humorous effect. Bears were regarded as exceedingly dangerous and as instruments of Yahweh's wrath (e.g., **2 Kings 2:23–24**, where bears attack and kill the children ridiculing Elisha). A dangerous animal in a state of rage poses less danger than a fool.

George Mylne: The most furious of beasts are men whose passions rule their reason, and make use of the understandings they have, to enable them to behave more brutishly

than natural brute beasts can do. Alas! that rational creatures, made after the image of God, should debase themselves to such a degree, that the savage animals should not furnish sufficient emblems to represent their folly!

4. (:13) Legacy of Evil

"*He who returns evil for good,*
Evil will not depart from his house."

Richard Clifford: Returning evil for good ensures that the evil will remain within one's own house. The paradox is that inflicting evil upon another does not get rid of it but ensures it will stay with the perpetrator.

E. (:14-15) 2 Foolish Dangers to Avoid

1. (:14) Avoid Escalating Strife

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

Paul Koptak: Just as water cannot be brought back under control once it is released, so a quarrel has a life of its own that can escalate beyond anyone's expectation. The solution is to leave things as they are, to let a matter go (cf. **17:9**). If the image is that of a sluice gate for irrigation (**11:25**; cf. **Isa. 58:11**), the life-giving effects of getting one's responses under control is underscored.

Matthew Henry: **The danger that there is in the beginning of strife.**
One hot word, one peevish reflection, one angry demand, one spiteful contradiction, begets another, and that a third, and so on, till it proves like the cutting of a dam; when the water has got a little passage it does itself widen the breach, bears down all before it, and there is then no stopping it, no reducing it.

George Mylne: But it is still better to leave off contention before it is started. The banks of rivers are more easily preserved, than repaired after a breach is made. To keep ourselves out of this snare of the devil, it is our duty to mortify every selfish disposition, to keep every passion under the government of sanctified reason, to avoid everything that may give offence, to be hesitant in conceiving offences against others; and in our dispositions, words, and actions, to observe that great rule of doing to others as we wish that others should do to us.

2. (:15) Avoid Bad Judgments

"*He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous,*
Both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD."

Tremper Longman: It is so wrong to misjudge people at the fundamental level of righteousness and wickedness. God hates seeing the righteous considered or treated as if they are wicked and vice versa. Judging correctly would be especially important in a legal context, and perhaps that background is specifically in mind. **Deuteronomy 25:1** directs judges to judge the righteous as righteous and the wicked as wicked.

Charles Bridges: Judicial iniquity is a dreadful abuse of God's authority. The judge or magistrate is God's minister (**Romans 13:4**). We appeal to him for justice, for hie represents God (**Deuteronomy 25:1**).

II. (:16-28) EXAMPLES OF FOOLS AND EVILDOERS

Caleb Nelson: Proposition: The wise son responds to folly and the sorrow and injustice it causes with friendship, joy, and self-restraint.

I. Friendship, the Antidote to Ignorant Folly, vv. 16-20
A. The Fool
    1. No Mind to Learn, **v. 16**
    2. No Love for Peace, **v. 19**
    3. Corrupt Heart, **v. 20a**
    4. Perverse Tongue, **v. 20b**
B. The Friend
    1. Loves peace all the time, **v. 17**
    2. Uses his tongue to help when he can, **v. 18**

II. Joy, the Antidote to Sorrow and Injustice, vv. 21-26
A. The Sorrow of Fathering a Fool, **vv. 21, 25**
B. The Injustice Done by the Wicked
    1. Taking bribes, **v. 23**
    2. Fining the righteous, **v. 26a**
    3. Flogging upright nobles, **v. 26b**
C. The Good Medicine of a Joyful Heart, **v. 22**

III. Self-Restraint, the Antidote to Ignorant Folly, vv. 27-28
A. The wise keep their tongue in check, **vv. 27a, 28**
B. The wise keep their cool, **v. 27b**

Paul Koptak: **Wisdom, Always Close at Hand (17:16–28)**
1. Fools and money, brothers and friends (**17:16–20**)
2. Suffering fools in secret (**17:21–24**)
3. Fools thought wise when silent (**17:25–28**)

A. (:16-20) Friends vs. Fools

1. (:16) Fools Squander Their Resources

> "*Why is there a price in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom,*
> *When he has no sense?*"

Paul Koptak: The point of this satiric proverb is two-sided: It is folly to think one can buy wisdom since it is a gift of God and must be acquired through study (**2:1–6**), and

even if wisdom could be bought, the fool lacks the sense (lit., "*heart*") to know what to do with it. The sharp juxtaposition of having money and lacking sense makes it clear that heart, both as "desire" and "mind" (NRSV), is the prerequisite for learning wisdom. Some see a dunce showing up at the door of a teacher with fee in hand, but evidence for this in Israel is lacking. Rather, we see a fool who does not know what to do with good things like money, responsibility, or even a proverb (**26:6–9**)!

Charles Bridges: Of what use is money in the hand of a fool, since he has no desire to get wisdom?

George Mylne: Does he not know that wisdom is infinitely more precious than land or gold? No, this is the reason of his carelessness. He has no heart or desire for wisdom he knows not its value, and has no relish of its pleasures. That which is more precious than rubies is to him more worthless than a pebble. That which is more sweet than honey is as tasteless as the white of an egg to him.

2. (:17) Friends Should Remain Faithful in Adversity

"*A friend loves at all times,*
And a brother is born for adversity."

Richard Clifford: The saying does not identify true love with family relationships as such but, more generally, with constancy in difficult times. Cf. **18:24** and Sir. 37:5.

George Mylne: Adversity is commonly reputed the touchstone of friendship. That is the season when our hollow friends forsake us but a real friend then acts the part of a brother, and reveals his friendship more than ever.

Paul Koptak: Here concerns of household and community are drawn together (cf. **17:13**). The saying implicitly rebukes those who claim friendship but are nowhere to be found when they are needed.

Charles Bridges: We must look to our Lord for the best example in this matter. We see the Son of God taking on our nature so that he might be our friend and brother (**Hebrews 2:14**). The mystery of this friendship is beyond our imagination. His love is constant, even in death. "Here is a brother born for adversity. Trust him, oh, you trembling believers at all times and in all places. You will then possess the happy art of living beyond the reach of all disappointment" (Howell). "Though solitary and unsupported and oppressed by sorrows unknown and undivided, I am not without joyful expectations. There is one Friend who loves at all times: a Brother born for adversity; the help of the helpless; the hope of the hopeless; the strength of the weak; the riches of the poor; the peace of the disquieted; the companion of the desolate; the friend of the friendless. To him alone will I call, and he will raise me above my fears" (Hawkes).

3. (:18) Financial Decisions Must Be Prudent

"*A man lacking in sense pledges,*
And becomes surety in the presence of his neighbor."

Tremper Longman: Proverbs is consistent in its advice not to put up security, whether for friend or stranger (cf. **6:1–5; 11:15; 20:16; 22:26; 27:13**). It is indeed good to help another, but when a situation of need arises, then be generous (**11:24; 28:27; 29:7, 14**). However, people must avoid giving something that they need to get back. The expression "*lacks heart*" is used elsewhere in Proverbs and indicates a **lack of character**. It may emphasize faulty judgment, an absence of intelligence, or perhaps a lack of courage.

Charles Bridges: We may become popular through a thoughtless kindness. But the principle, closely examined, will be found to be another form of selfishness. There is no true benevolence in rash engagements that may involve our name and family in disgrace or ruin.

4. (:19) Fomenting Trouble

"*He who loves transgression loves strife;*
He who raises his door seeks destruction."

Richard Clifford: To paraphrase, whoever dwells on an offense is asking for the quarrel that inevitably follows an unforgiven slight.

What does the metaphor of building found in colon B contribute to the saying? **Isaiah 30:13** gives a hint (roots identical to those in our saying are italicized): "This iniquity shall be in you like a spreading breach in a *high* wall; all of a sudden its *collapse* will come." The point of the saying is that harping on a fault risks an eruption like that from a poorly constructed wall.

3 Different Views of the significance of the phrase -- "*raises his door*":
Tremper Longman: Some people understand the word translated as "*high*" (*gābah*) to mean "arrogant" and to fit in with the idea that arrogance leads to a fall. That seems unlikely. More likely it refers to an **architectural problem**. Just as people who love to pick away at an offense or to offend others will naturally lead to the chaos of a fight, so those who build a doorway that is too high will certainly have that **doorway collapse**.

Allen Ross: Arrogant and contentious speech ends in destruction. The double focus is on the one who "*loves a quarrel* [*maṣṣâ*]" in **v.19a** and the one who "*builds a high gate*" in **v.19b**. Some have taken the latter expression literally and interpreted it to mean pretentious house building, but that would be an unusual expression in the OT. Probably it is figurative; the gate is the mouth, and so to make it high is to say lofty things—**he brags too much** (see **1Sa 2:3; Pr 18:12; 29:23**).

Lindsay Wilson: The image of making your door, threshold or gate high is a way of saying that you are making it difficult for people to enter your home. This is a **rejection of friendship or relationship** and, like loving strife, leads to destructive consequences.

5. (:20) Finding Evil

"*He who has a crooked mind finds no good,*
And he who is perverted in his language falls into evil.

Tremper Longman: This proverb parallels "*hearts*" with "*tongues*," not untypical of the book, which recognizes that people's speech reflects their core personality (**16:23** and especially 3:1). The proverb simply observes that the wicked will experience dire consequences.

Allen Ross: Wicked ways and words lead to trouble. The synonymous parallelism makes this verse fairly easy to understand. The wicked person has a "*perverse*" heart (i.e., he is morally crooked) and a "*deceitful tongue*" (i.e., he has turned away from the truth). All who are wicked in their plans and speech can expect only trouble ahead. The idea of "*trouble*" (*rāʿâ*) refers to calamity or adversity in this life; such people face a life without good (meaning prosperity in this life).

George Mylne: How foolish are the men whose wisdom lies in a skill to do evil! Their own feet cast them into a snare, and their own tongues, by which they hope to execute their wicked contrivances, fall upon themselves, and grind them to powder. Honesty and integrity is our best wisdom. Upright men walk on firm ground when the men who boast of their crooked arts fall into their own snares.

B. (:21-26) Joy vs. Sorrow

1. (:21) Fools Cause Parents Sorrow

"*He who begets a fool does so to his sorrow,*
And the father of a fool has no joy."

Paul Koptak: If **verse 20** depicts the effects of folly on the person who practices it, this proverb reminds us that the effects spread throughout the family (**17:2**; cf. **10:5**) and to others as well.

2. (:22) Link between Emotions and Health

"*A joyful heart is good medicine,*
But a broken spirit dries up the bones."

Paul Koptak: Can we say that the rejoicing heart knows contentment and gratitude while the perverse heart schemes to gain more no matter how?

Tremper Longman: The proverb states that one's emotional well-being has physical effects.

3. (:23) Bribes Pervert Justice

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

Richard Clifford: Gift-giving itself is not condemned, for in many societies it is a form

of politeness. It is only evil when it perverts justice. Cf. **21:14**.

Paul Koptak: Like the hidden heart that reveals its conditions in word, deed, and even the condition of the body, so a bribe given in secret does its damaging work; a perverse heart (**17:20**) works to pervert justice.

4. (:24) Focus Fosters Wisdom

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

Paul Koptac: This saying contrasts the person who keeps wisdom nearby and the fool who looks everywhere else for answers.

Tremper Longman: This proverb may speak of **concentration on a goal**. Wisdom is the focus of people with understanding, and that is why they have understanding. On the other hand, **fools are distracted**. Their focus is too broad and scattered. Qoheleth, the Teacher in Ecclesiastes, may be responding to the idea behind this proverb when he states: "'*I will be wise!' But it was far from me. Far away is that which is, and deep, deep, who can find it*?" (7:23–24)

Richard Clifford: In this contrast of two parts of the body (face and eyes) and of two types (a wise and a foolish person), wisdom is visible in the countenance, that is, the mouth, lips, and tongue (= word) of the wise person. Wise words come from a wise heart. Fools have no such source of wisdom close at hand. Their distance from the source of wisdom is nicely captured by their eye gazing on the distant horizon. This may be a reference to wisdom that is thought to be distant and inaccessible but is actually close at hand, as in **Deut. 30:11–15**.

Charles Bridges: "He who has understanding fixes his eyes on wisdom and is content with that object, whereas a fool's eyes are constantly wandering everywhere, and his thought settle on nothing that may avail to his good" (Bishop Hall). His eyes are on the ends of the earth, rolling and wandering from one object to another. His thoughts are scattered. He has no definite objective, no certain way of life. Talent, cultivation of mind, and improvement of opportunity are all frittered away. He cares about those things that are furthest form him and with which he has the least concern.

Allen Ross: **Discipline, concentration on plans** --
The wise persist in following a course of wisdom. They comprehend the true issues of life and concentrate on the path of wisdom. The "*fool*" (*kesîl*), however, lacks any serious concentration and is unable to fix his attention on anything, so he drifts in the limitless sea of uncertainty (Toy, 351). McKane, 504, vividly depicts these distinctions when he says:

> "The eyes of the *mēbîn* ['*discerning man'*] are riveted on the teacher, for he is fascinated by her instruction and is a picture of unbroken concentration. The *kesîl* ['*fool*'] has the wandering eye and the vacant distracted mind, and his

condition is expressed by a hyperbole. As a student who is hearing nothing of what his teacher says might let his eyes rove to every corner of the classroom, so the fool who is inattentive to the instruction of Wisdom is said to have his eyes on the ends of the earth."

5. (:25) Fools Cause Parents Sorrow

"*A foolish son is a grief to his father,*
And bitterness to her who bore him."

Tremper Longman: The object of these proverbs may be in part to motivate parents to work hard at inculcating wisdom into their children. But such a proverb could also be addressed to children, to motivate them not to live in a way that would anger their parents.

6. (:26) Punishment Not Appropriate for the Righteous

"*It is also not good to fine the righteous,*
Nor to strike the noble for their uprightness."

Richard Clifford: It is best to assume the saying is about the legal system, and it has the same sense as **17:15**: It is wrong to inflict any punishment on an innocent person, and even more wrong to flog such a one.

Matthew Henry: In differences that happen between magistrates and subjects, and such differences often arise,

1. Let magistrates see to it that they never punish the just, that they be in no case a terror to good works, for that is to abuse their power and betray that great trust which is reposed in them. It is not good, that is, it is a very evil thing, and will end ill, whatever end they may aim at in it. When princes become tyrants and persecutors their thrones will be neither easy nor firm.

2. Let subjects see to it that they do not find fault with the government for doing its duty, for it is a wicked thing to strike princes for equity, by defaming their administration or by any secret attempts against them to strike at them, as the ten tribes that revolted reflected upon Solomon for imposing necessary taxes.

C. (:27-28) Restraint of Words and Emotions

1. (:27) Confirms the Character of the Wise

"*He who restrains his words has knowledge,*
And he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding."

Paul Koptak: This saying presents two signs of a person who has gathered "*knowledge*"—that one **moderates both words and temper**. These conjure up the image of a person who knows when it is best to hold back words and control one's response to anger. "*Restraint*" is to consider or give thought to one's words. The even-tempered person is "*cool of spirit*" (NRSV).

2. (:28) Conceals the Perversion of Fools

"*Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise;*
When he closes his lips, he is counted prudent."

Richard Clifford: If few words betoken a wise person (**v. 27**), total silence can make even a fool appear wise. Words reveal the heart. By their silence, fools can at least temporarily delay the discovery of their perverted heart. In **15:2** fools are said to pour out words.

TEXT: Proverbs 18:1-24

TITLE: SPEECH AS RELATING TO CONSEQUENCES, DISPUTES AND REWARDS

I. (:1-8) SPEECH AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Paul Koptak: The majority of these proverbs are about **speech** and its **effects**; all are concerned with the attitudes and actions that destroy relationships and community. . . The proverbs of **chapter 18** make it clear that the isolation, self-centeredness, and poor judgment of **verse 1** make themselves known through acts of speaking, as shown in **verse 2.** Fools have no desire to listen, only to **spout their own views**. The words of the mouth, like deep waters, can hide and deceive, and words like these are far removed from the life giving words of wisdom (**18:4**). Words can be partial to the wicked (**18:5**), bring strife and calamity to the fool (**18:6–7**), and damage both the reputation of others as well as the lives of those who have an ear for it (**18:8**).

A. (:1-3) Speech Can Bring Dishonor

1. (:1) Folly of Isolationism

> "*He who separates himself seeks his own desire,*
> *He quarrels against all sound wisdom.*"

Paul Koptak: Individualists like this one isolate themselves from other people with no thought for their concerns and needs.

Richard Clifford: The point is that excessive devotion to one's own ideas is an obstacle to prudent decision making. The parallelism is synonymous.

- Colon A: Extreme devotion to one's own ideas characterizes an antisocial person;
- Colon B: such people contemn the clear thinking that leads to wise action. One cannot become wise by isolating oneself.

Tremper Longman: The term "*antisocial*" (*niprād*) comes from the verb *prd*, which suggests "someone who is divided, either internally or externally." Our translation opts for the former since the verse describes those who are internally focused on their own desires, but such a focus would naturally separate them from the community. In the second colon, they are defined by their stance against wisdom, since "resourcefulness" is related to wisdom.

Lindsay Wilson: The subject is described as '*one being separated*' (*niprād*), probably someone who goes off alone. Such a person pursues or seeks *desire*, which can have a positive meaning as in **13:12** (a desire fulfilled is a tree of life), or something craved for or coveted. Most English versions translate it with a negative connotation here (e.g. '*self-indulgent*', nrsv; *'selfish ends'*, niv; '*goes his own way'*, Murphy 1998), and that makes good sense as the second half of the verse is clearly critical of the person. Against all wisdom or sound judgment, such a person '*bursts out'* – a verb found only

in this section of Proverbs, being used of a quarrel breaking out, and parallel to strife or dispute in **17:14** and **20:3**. So it has the sense here of '*starts quarrels'* (niv).

2. (:2) Folly of the Self-Centered Blowhard

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

Paul Koptak: Such people never engage in conversation, only **monologue.** Interested only in showing what he knows, the person in this verse accomplishes just the opposite. Ironically, he does "*reveal his heart*," for speech always reveals character (cf. **12:16, 23; 13:16**).

Charles Bridges: An unfriendly man pursues selfish ends; he defies all sound judgment. A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions.

Richard Clifford: Fools take no pleasure in the wisdom of others but only in telling others their own "*wisdom*." As in **v. 1**, fools are smug and **self-centered**, not open to others.

Tremper Longman: The verse suggests that fools are again (see previous verse) only interested in their own desires and ideas. They do not have the patience to achieve the goals associated with wisdom (for competence, see **2:2**), nor do they want to listen to people with competence. They only want to blurt out what is on their minds, thus "*disclosing their hearts*."

3. (:3) Resulting Dishonor

"*When a wicked man comes, contempt also comes,*
And with dishonor comes reproach."

Richard Clifford: Evil conduct leads to **loss of reputation**. Such a loss would be especially painful in ancient Mediterranean culture, which placed a high value on honor.

Derek Kidner: The three terms for shame give triple emphasis to this corollary of sin (the antithesis of the glory which is the corollary of holiness: **Isa. 6:3; Rom. 8:30**).

Lindsay Wilson: They have 'a closed mind and an open mouth' (Waltke 2005: 69). Most of us need to speak less and listen more. **Verse 3** outlines a **snowballing of folly** from wickedness to a contemptuous dishonouring of others, to disgrace or shame. This is why our foundational choice of wisdom or folly (**chs. 1 – 9**) is so vital, as each leads to **different consequences**.

B. (:4) Speech Can Be a Fountain of Wisdom

"*The words of a man's mouth are deep waters;*
The fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook."

Richard Clifford: With Toy, McKane, and JPSV, we take the two phrases of colon B to be in apposition to "*deep waters*" in colon A, that is, words express a person's thoughts, bringing them to the surface. Those words in turn become a source of wisdom to others.

Charles Bridges: "This sentence expresses the depth, the abundance, the clearness, and the force of the counsels of the wise man" (Calmet). When a person has immersed himself in wisdom, his words are in themselves deep waters, and as they are spoken they become as fruitful as a bubbling brook. His wisdom is a fountain that "sends up full brooks that are ready to overflow their banks. So plentiful is he in good discourse and wholesome counsel" (Bishop Hall).

Matthew Henry:
1. The well-spring of wisdom is as deep waters. An intelligent knowing man has in him a good treasure of useful things, which furnishes him with something to say upon all occasions that is pertinent and profitable. This is as deep waters, which make no noise, but never run dry.

2. The words of such a man's mouth are as a flowing brook. What he sees cause to speak flows naturally from him and with a great deal of ease, and freedom, and natural fluency; it is clean and fresh, it is cleansing and refreshing; from his deep waters there flows what there is occasion for, to water those about him, as the brooks do the low grounds.

C. (:5) Speech Can Promote Injustice

"*To show partiality to the wicked is not good,*
Nor to thrust aside the righteous in judgment."

Paul Koptak: This proverb echoes the statement that one should not clear the guilty and condemn the innocent (**Prov. 17:15**).

Charles Bridges: For justice to happen, the cause must be heard, not the person. Let the person be punished for his wickedness, not the wickedness be covered for the person's sake. When one is partial to the wicked, the rights of God are despised, and the claims of his justice are thrown away.

Tremper Longman: Proverbs is interested in proper outcomes for wicked and righteous actions. The law forbids subverting justice in **Lev. 19:15** and Deut. 10:17.

D. (:6-7) Speech Can Hurt the Speaker

1. (:6) Bring Strife and Physical Confrontation

"*A fool's lips bring strife,*
And his mouth calls for blows."

Richard Clifford: Words, especially provocative words, are so powerful that they can lead a person into trouble, almost as if one's lips had a life of their own. Similarly

concrete is the modern maxim, “Don’t let your lips get you into a place where your feet can’t get you out.”

2. (:7) Cause Ruin

“*A fool's mouth is his ruin,*
And his lips are the snare of his soul.”

Richard Clifford: **Verse 7** is linked to **v. 6** by its use (in reversed order) of the fixed pair “*mouth*” and “*lips*.” Normally, Proverbs is concerned with the damage that foolish words do to others, but in **vv. 6–7** the accent is on the damage done to the speaker.

Tremper Longman: The moral of this observation is clear: The speech (represented by the concrete body parts “*mouth*” and “*lips*”) of fools brings them great harm. They say things that get them into trouble or into fights. Wise speech helps people get out of trouble; **foolish speech plunges them into harm**. This proverb is similar to the previous one, though more general. Connected to the previous verse, there is a **chiasmus**: lips, mouth, mouth, lips.

Charles Bridges: The mouths of wild beasts devour each other. A fool’s mouth is his own destruction. And he is not only the cause but the agent of his own destruction.

E. (:8) Seductive Danger of Destructive Gossip

“*The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels,*
And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.”

Richard Clifford: Slanderous gossip is likened to delicious food, which is anticipated with pleasure and devoured with gusto, and goes down to the innermost stomach. Slander is eagerly heard and printed indelibly in the memory.

Tremper Longman: Even though so harmful, people often find the words of gossips irresistible, and this proverb likens gossip to fine food that is hard not to eat, but once eaten, it penetrates deeply into a person.

II. (:9-12) PROVERBS RELATED TO WORK, SECURITY AND PRIDE

[This section does not fit well with the other sections and seems to be just miscellaneous proverbs.]

Paul Koptak: This small cluster gathers around the themes strength and safety, symbolized by the high fortress and the assaults that come against it—negligence, trust in riches, and pride.

A. (:9) Condemnation of Poor Work Ethic

“*He also who is slack in his work*
Is brother to him who destroys.”

Richard Clifford: Failure to work with care and commitment is judged equivalent to destroying. In one sense, it matters little whether a task or product is destroyed by enemies from without or ruined by the carelessness of its maker.

Tremper Longman: Those who are lazy harm themselves and others. The observation is an implicit admonition to work hard. The lazy are ultimately detrimental to society.

B. (:10-11) Contrasting Images of Strength and Security

Paul Koptak: **Verses 10–11** are linked by the images of **fortress-like security**—one real, one false. Someone in danger, even the slacker of **18:9**, would want a place safe from destruction.

1. (:10) True Security in the Lord

"*The name of the LORD is a strong tower;*
The righteous runs into it and is safe."

Tremper Longman: This verse sounds like it comes from the Psalms, with its assertion of the protective power of Yahweh's name, and thus of Yahweh himself. The second colon may describe the behavior of the righteous person as a way of determining whether one is righteous. The use of military imagery in the next proverb invites us to read them together.

Matthew Henry: The strength of this tower is enough to protect them; the name of the Lord is all that whereby he has made himself known as God, and our God, not only his titles and attributes, but his covenant and all the promises of it; these make up a tower, a strong tower, impenetrable, impregnable, for all God's people.

2. (:11) False Security in Wealth

"*A rich man's wealth is his strong city,*
And like a high wall in his own imagination."

Paul Koptak: Linked with the saying before by the word "*high*" (*niśgab*; here, "*unscalable*"), the contrast between trust in wealth and faith in the name of Yahweh stands out clearly. The difference, of course, is that wealth is only a strong city and high wall as "*they imagine it*," adding a new twist to the imagery of **10:15a**. Readers are reminded of the "*high gate*" of **17:19.**

Charles Bridges: Every man as secure as his trust. A trust in God communicates a divine and lofty spirit. We feel that we are surrounded by God and living on high with him. Oh, the sweet security of the weakest believer, shut up in an impregnable fortress. But a vain trust brings a vain and proud heart, the immediate forerunner of ruin.

Matthew Henry: He makes his *wealth his city*, where he dwells, where he rules, with a great deal of self-complacency, as if he had a whole city under his command. It *is his*

strong city, in which he intrenches himself, and then sets danger at defiance, as if nothing could hurt him. *His scales are his pride*; his wealth is his wall in which he encloses himself, and he thinks it a *high wall*, which cannot be scaled or got over, **Job 31:24; Rev. 18:7**. How herein he cheats himself. It is a *strong city*, and a *high wall*, but it is so only *in his own conceit*; it will not prove to be really so, but like the house built on the sand, which will fail the builder when he most needs it.

C. (:12) Contrasting Effects of Pride and Humility

"*Before destruction the heart of man is haughty,*
But humility goes before honor."

Tremper Longman: Pride resists correction, and therefore the proud do not change destructive behaviors and attitudes. Though people with pride think themselves great, they will be cast down by life. On the other hand, the humble are open to correction and are more likely to achieve the kind of success that leads to honor. For similar teaching in Proverbs, see **16:18** and **15:33b** for repetitions of cola 1 and 2 respectively. For the teaching that humility is the proper course, see also **11:2** and **29:23**.

Charles Bridges: Before his downfall a man's heart is proud, but humility comes before honor. We have had both of these proverbs separately (**16:18; 15:33**). Surely this repetition was intended to deepen our sense of their importance. It is hard to persuade a man that he is proud. Everyone protests against this sin. Yet who does not cherish the viper in his own heart? Man so little understands that dependence upon his God constitutes the creature's happiness, and that the principle of independence is madness, and its end destruction. The proud walk on the edge of a fearful precipice. Only a miracle preserves them from instant ruin. The security of the child of God is when he lies prostrate in the dust. If he soars high, danger is imminent, even if he is on the edge of heaven (**2 Corinthians 12:1-7**).

III. (:13-19) SPEECH AND DISPUTES

Paul Koptak: The sayings of this cluster gather around the two themes of speaking and resolving conflicts in a legal setting. Also scattered throughout are images of strength and weakness, continuing the sequence that began in **18:10**.

A. (:13) Listen before Speaking

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

Paul Koptac: Fools choose not to hear, only to be heard. Put another way, they only like to hear themselves talk. One way to exhibit humility is to listen carefully.

Tremper Longman: Fools speak impulsively, without really listening and reflecting on what they hear (see also **15:28; 19:2; 20:18, 25; 21:5; 29:20**). They say whatever comes to mind, and what comes to their empty minds is particularly vacuous. Fools

babble all sorts of things that get them into trouble and earn them the reputation of being stupid, and in this way they are humiliated.

George Mylne: How many do we find who will not change their sentiments about religion, or about people and things, upon the clearest evidence and give way to anger upon the least contradiction to their favorite notions, as if their dearest interests were attacked!

B. (:14) Crushing Weight of a Broken Spirit

"*The spirit of a man can endure his sickness,*
But a broken spirit who can bear?"

Paul Koptak: The contrast between a spirit that holds up and one that weighs down suggests that the typical role of the spirit, working as a supportive friend in sickness (and other difficulties?), is reversed when that spirit itself is crushed down. It cannot hold one up; instead, it becomes a crushing weight itself.

Charles Bridges: A man's spirit sustains him in sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear? Man is born is a world of trouble, and he has considerable powers of endurance. Natural courage and vivacity of spirit will bear us up even under the pressure of ponderous evils, poverty, pain, sickness, and need. Christian principle strengthens natural strength. Outward troubles are bearable, yes, more than bearable, if there is peace within.

A man's spirit sustains him is sickness. But what if his spirit is crushed? "If the strength that is in me is weakness, how great is that weakness" (Bishop Sanderson). The wound to the spirit pierces more deeply than a flesh wound, as the spirit is more vital than the body. Grief gains the victory and becomes intolerable.

C. (:15) Priority of Seeking Knowledge

"*The mind of the prudent acquires knowledge,*
And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge."

Paul Koptak: Here the ear seeks knowledge so that it can be received and internalized to good effect. What a contrast to the intake of gossip in **18:8**!

Richard Clifford: The wise store knowledge in their hearts without lessening their desire to acquire more. Proverbs views the heart as the storehouse of observations (from ear and eyes) and the organ of decision.

Matthew Henry:
1. Those that are prudent will seek knowledge, and apply their ear and heart to the pursuit of it, their ear to attend to the means of knowledge and their heart to mix faith with what they hear and make a good improvement of it. Those that are prudent do not think they have prudence enough, but still see they have need of more; and the more

prudent a man is the more inquisitive will he be after knowledge, the knowledge of God and his duty, and the way to heaven, for that is the best knowledge.

2. Those that prudently seek knowledge shall certainly get knowledge, for God never said to such, Seek in vain, but, *Seek and you shall find*. If the ear seeks it, the heart gets it, and keeps it, and is enriched by it. We must get knowledge, not only into our heads, but into our hearts, get the savour and relish of it, apply what we know to ourselves and experience the power and influence of it.

D. (:16) Impact of Gifts (Bribes)

"*A man's gift makes room for him,*
And brings him before great men."

Matthew Henry: Of what great force gifts (that is, bribes) are he had intimated before, **ch. 17:8, 23**. Here he shows the **power of gifts**, that is, presents made even by inferiors to those that are above them and have much more than they have. A good present will go far,

1. Towards a man's liberty: A man's gift, if he be in prison, may procure his enlargement; there are courtiers, who, if they use their interest even for oppressed innocency, expect to receive a gratuity for it. Or, if a mean man know not how to get access to a great man, he may do it by a fee to his servants or a present to himself; those will make room for him.

2. Towards his preferment. It will bring him to sit among great men, in honour and power. See how corrupt the world is when men's gifts will not do, though ever so great; nay, will gain that for them which they are unworthy of and unfit for; and no wonder that those take bribes in their offices who gave bribes for them. *Vendere jura potest, emerat ille prius*—He that bought law can sell it.

E. (:17) Listen to Both Sides of a Dispute

"*The first to plead his case seems just,*
Until another comes and examines him."

Richard Clifford: Truth appears gradually; **one must listen to all sides**. The old Latin axiom is relevant: *audiatur et altera pars*, "Let the other side be heard too." Protagoras in the fifth century B.C.E. said, "There are two sides to every question."

Matthew Henry: The plaintiff having done his evidence, it is fit that the defendant should be heard, should have leave to confront the witnesses and cross-examine them, and show the falsehood and fallacy of what has been alleged, which perhaps may make the matter appear quite otherwise than it did. We must therefore remember that we have two ears, to hear both sides before we give judgment.

F. (:18) Settling Disputes Via Lots

"*The lot puts an end to contentions,*

And decides between the mighty."

Tremper Longman: According to the wisdom of the sages, conflicts and fights create disorder and are to be avoided. Perhaps surprisingly, the lot is mentioned as a way of suppressing conflict. However, it must be remembered that in **16:33**, the lot expresses a divine decision and is not simply the result of chance. It would be particularly important to resolve conflicts between powerful people because their disagreements could lead to the most widespread damage, not only to themselves as individuals but also to society at large. In narrative, the only example of God's people using the lot is in a context, typically with the Urim and Thummim (**Exod. 28:30**), where God is explicitly said to be involved. However, most commentators believe that the preceding context of this saying implies that the lot is thought to resolve tough court cases, though there is no evidence of this happening outside of this context.

G. (:19) Barriers to Family Reconciliation

"*A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city,*
And contentions are like the bars of a castle."

Paul Koptak: Disputes occur between neighbors (**18:17**), but also between brothers. This saying observes that such conflicts are especially strong and intractable. It may be because the sense of betrayal is so great; one expects the brother to stand with, not against, so sibling conflict is the worst example of good relations perverted.

Richard Clifford: Fraternal and familial love and loyalty is a precious thing, but such love, once offended, can be the cause of bitter and undying enmity. An offended relative is compared to the fortified upper city, which was its most impregnable part. Family feuds are the bitterest conflicts and civil wars are the bloodiest wars.

IV. (:20-24) SPEECH AND REWARDS

A. (:20) Satisfaction from Speech

"*With the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach will be satisfied;*
He will be satisfied with the product of his lips."

Richard Clifford: Here the fruit is metaphorical—one's words. Speaking is the most expressive human activity. Fruit from the ground provides sustenance to the body, but the "*fruit of one's lips*" (words) also affects one's well-being. If one's words are right, then one is blessed, one's belly is filled. If one's words are wicked, one will eat the fruit of those and suffer the evil consequences.

Derek Kidner: Your words will catch up with you.

B. (:21) Power of Speech

"*Death and life are in the power of the tongue,*
And those who love it will eat its fruit."

Richard Clifford: The meaning is that death and life are in the power of the tongue in the sense that people will experience one or the other depending on the quality of their words. Words are the most expressive human product (cf. **12:14; 13:2; 18:20**). Colon B is in synthetic parallelism to colon A: **You will eat the fruit of your choice**.

C. (:22) Value of a Wife

"*He who finds a wife finds a good thing,*
And obtains favor from the LORD."

Tremper Longman: This verse underlines the importance of a good wife by claiming that she is a divine gift. In the introduction, we observed that Proverbs' teaching on the difference between a good wife and the strange woman reflects the difference between a relationship with personified Wisdom and Folly, figurative language that ultimately points to the conflict between true and false religion.

D. (:23) Economic Status Motivates Different Approaches to Life's Problems

"*The poor man utters supplications,*
But the rich man answers roughly."

Paul Koptak: More often than not, the poor must plead with someone who holds power over them, while the rich can answer harshly to those of lower status. Read together, the hierarchy in any such conversation between rich and poor shows itself (cf. **22:7**). Is this another false use of the power of wealth as in **18:11**, an example of pride as in **18:12**? It is difficult to discern the economic status of the speaker of the proverb, but one can detect a note of censure against the rich. One might expect the rich man to answer kindly or gently or in some other gracious manner.

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 23** also describes two different kinds of speech, one from the powerless (the poor) and one from the powerful (the rich). The poor ask and seek to persuade, for they are in need, but it is easy for the self-sufficient to be careless about their speech, since little rests on it as far as they can see. This is not an endorsement of these practices (especially the responses of the rich who answer roughly), but is an attempt to outline how society often works. The way forward for both the rich and poor is to use the tongue to bring life not death.

George Mylne: The rich answer roughly, for their riches produce self-confidence, and that makes them insolent towards God himself.

E. (:24) Value of Friendship

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

Paul Koptak: Here is the reverse image of the "unfriendly" person who separates himself in his selfishness (**18:1**; cf. **17:19**). The word "*loves*" is repeated from **18:21**; one who loves the power of the tongue will also love friends and neighbors.

Matthew Henry: Solomon here recommends friendship to us, and shows,

1. What we must do that we may contract and cultivate friendship; we must show ourselves friendly. Would we have friends and keep them, we must not only not affront them, or quarrel with them, but we must love them, and make it appear that we do so by all expressions that are endearing, by being free with them, pleasing to them, visiting them and bidding them welcome, and especially by doing all the good offices we can and serving them in every thing that lies in our power; that is showing ourselves friendly.

2. That it is worth while to do so, for we may promise ourselves a great deal of comfort in a true friend. A brother indeed is born for adversity, as he had said, **ch. 17:17**. In our troubles we expect comfort and relief from our relations, but sometimes there is a friend, that is nothing akin to us, the bonds of whose esteem and love prove stronger than those of nature, and, when it comes to the trial, will do more for us than a brother will. Christ is a friend to all believers that sticks closer than a brother; to him therefore let them show themselves friendly.

TEXT: Proverbs 19:1-29

TITLE: INTEGRITY, WISDOM, WEALTH AND WORK

(:1-3) INTRODUCTION – INTEGRITY AND KNOWLEDGE GUARD AGAINST FOOLISHNESS

Lindsay Wilson: These verses explore the fundamental stance of the fool compared with that of a person of integrity.

A. (:1) Value of Integrity vs. Perverse Speech

"*Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity*
Than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool."

Paul Koptak: The "better than" sayings typically speak to matters of poverty and wealth (cf. **15:16–17; 16:8; 17:1**) or satirize the fool (**17:12**); this is the first to combine the themes. The contrast is surprising, for one expects "*rich*" to parallel "*poor*" (cf. **28:6**). However, a blameless walk and a crooked tongue mix metaphors in typical proverbial style, the path of the feet and words of the mouth serving as expressions of either wisdom or folly. Most striking is the juxtaposition of folly and perversity, an association that has only been implied before. **Verses 1–3** are linked together by the vocabulary of feet walking on the path and the theme of the destructive results of folly.

Richard Clifford: The familiar biblical metaphors of life as a path and straight and crooked as moral terms are employed to state that a poor person of integrity is better than a wealthy reprobate. Wealth is not a criterion for judging moral worth.

Lindsay Wilson: The distinguishing characteristic of fools in verse 1b is that their speech is crooked or perversely twisted from what it should be.

Tremper Longman: Fools are not only dull of mind and do stupid things; they also are evil people. In particular, according to this proverb, they speak in a way that does not faithfully reflect reality ("*crooked lips*"). The "walking" metaphor in colon 1 is an allusion to the metaphor of life as a path, which is strongly developed in the first nine chapters of the book.

Charles Bridges: Poverty is never a disgrace, except when it is the result of wrong behavior. But when it is adorned with blameless character, it is most honorable. Better a poor man than a person who is elevated in his own sight because of his riches and is given over to being perverse. Often men put under their feet those whom God carries in his heart. Man honors the perverse for their riches and despises the poor because of their poverty. But what does the rich man have if he does not have God? And what is a poor man lacking if he has God? It is better to be in a wilderness with God than in Canaan without him. Judge wisdom according to God's standard. God judges by character, not by status. Estimate the value of everything in the light of eternity. Death

will strip the poor of his rags and the rich of his purple and bring them both naked to the earth, from which they came.

George Mylne: In short, the upright man, however poor and lowly, is not only a man of better dispositions and behavior than the rich worldling but he is also incomparably happier and richer, and shall be rich as long as God himself is rich!

Be satisfied and thankful, you who are taught by the Spirit of God, to walk in integrity. You are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom and in this world you have and shall have everything that infinite wisdom and divine love sees fit for you!

Here the poor may see a certain method of being rich, or of obtaining what is far better than riches. Do not labor to be rich in gold and silver but seek after that which Christ calls the true riches, and which he will dispense unto those who seek them in his appointed way.

Let not the rich man glory in his wealth if he is perverse in his lips, he is poor and miserable, and blind, and naked; and the esteem of men will not counterbalance the abhorrence of God. Go to Christ under deep impressions of your poverty, and buy from him gold tried in the fire, and you shall be truly rich!

B. (:2) Value of Knowledge vs. Presumption

"*Also it is not good for a person to be without knowledge,*
And he who makes haste with his feet errs."

Paul Koptak: By implication, the proverb holds out patience and caution as knowledgeable companions of desire.

Tremper Longman: This proverb may be close to the well-known English aphorism "Haste makes waste." If one is impulsive, not thinking before acting, then one is going to commit errors. Desire propels one toward acting in a way that fulfills those desires, but this proverb warns the hearer to think before doing anything.

Allen Ross: **Zeal, without knowledge** –
Ill-advised and thoughtless zeal leads to failure. The lines are loosely synonymous. In the first the word *nepeš* means "*vitality, drive*," so it describes the eager "*zeal*" of a person. Without knowledge this will be unsuccessful ("*not good*"). Neither is there success for those who are "*hasty*" (*ʾāṣ beraglayim*, lit., "*hasty with the feet*") and "*miss the way*" (*ḥôṭēʾ*; see **Jdg 20:16; Job 5:24**). Kidner, 132, underscores "how negative is the achievement of the man who wants tangible and quick rewards"—he will miss the way. The passage reminds us that we must know the time and the direction for action, or zealous effort will be a futile activity.

Matthew Henry: Two things are here declared to be of bad consequence:

1. Ignorance: To be without the knowledge of the soul is not good, so some read it.

Know we not our own selves, our own hearts? A soul without knowledge is not good; it is a great privilege that we have souls, but, if these souls have not knowledge, what the better are we? If man has not understanding, he is as the beasts, **Ps. 49:20**. An ignorant soul cannot be a good soul. That the soul be without knowledge is not safe, nor pleasant; what good can the soul do, of what is it good for, if it be without knowledge?

2. Rashness: He that hastes with his feet (that does things inconsiderately and with precipitation, and will not take time to ponder the path of his feet) sins; he cannot but often miss the mark and take many a false step, which those prevent that consider their ways. As good not know as not consider.

C. (:3) Negative Outcomes from Foolishness

"*The foolishness of man subverts his way,*
And his heart rages against the LORD."

Paul Koptak: The second line may intentionally move in two directions. The heart that rages against Yahweh is certainly the source of all folly, but it may also be a result. The fool, having ruined his life all by himself, now wants to blame God for his misfortune!

Lindsay Wilson: The **destructive nature** of folly is seen in **verse 3**, where the consequence of people's folly is that their pathway is twisted or ruined (as in **21:12**). The essence of their folly is that at the core of their being (their heart), they are angry or enraged against God. They have missed the foundation of the fear of the Lord (**1:7; 9:10**).

Tremper Longman: This proverb first observes that it is people's stupidity that keeps them from getting ahead in life. The metaphor of the path is well known throughout Proverbs, particularly in the first nine chapters, as a metaphor of the course of one's life. **Stupidity keeps people from making progress**.

Even so, such people do not blame themselves and then try to correct their errors by learning right strategies for living. Rather, they **rage against God**, whom they blame for all their troubles. Since they do not put the blame for their problems in the right place, they cannot possibly improve their lives. As Whybray rightly comments, "Folly and blasphemy are closely linked here."

Charles Bridges: The fool rushes into the sin and most unreasonably rages against the Lord. He blames his crosses not on his own perverseness, but on God's injustice. But God is free from all blame. He showed the better way, but man chose the worse way. God has issued warnings through his Word and through the conscience. But man, deaf to these warnings, plunges into misery and, while eating the fruit of his own ways, rages against the Lor. Such is the pride and blasphemy of a proud spirit. The criminal blames the judge for his righteous sentence.

George Mylne: When our way is sinful, we soon feel the miserable consequences of our folly. For wretchedness, in one form or other, follows sin, as the shadow follows the

body. But we are so reluctant to blame ourselves for the consequences of our own folly, that our hearts will rather fret against the Lord, as if he were the cause of our ruin! Adam laid the blame of his sin upon the woman, whom God gave to be with him, indirectly transferring his own folly to his Maker and it is natural and common for men to follow the example of their common parent.

I. (:4-9) INTEGRITY AND WISDOM IN LEGAL DISPUTES

Lindsay Wilson: These verses are a likely section. The virtual duplication found in **verses 5** and **9**, dealing with a false witness, draws the unit together and gives a setting of a **legal dispute**. **Verse 4**, developed in **verses 6** and **7**, could also have in view a legal or court setting in which the rich, or those offering a bribe, hold sway, while the poor are left friendless. **Verse 8** is less connected to the rest of the group, but it may imply that the one who guards understanding (i.e. holds on to the path of wisdom) will succeed in legal matters.

A. (:4-7) Wealth and Friendship

1. (:4) Attractiveness of Wealth

"*Wealth adds many friends,*
But a poor man is separated from his friend."

Lindsay Wilson: The wealthy do not gain friends because they are nicer people (see **18:23**), but because they can offer some form of **inducement** – money now or a favour in the future. **Verse 4a** is developed in **verse 6**, where many seek the favour of a high-status or generous person (the Hebrew word can mean a willing or generous person [esv] or a noble [niv]; see **17:7, 26**). The parallel in **verse 6b** makes the motivation clear – such a person gives gifts (lit. '*a person of gifts'*). This explains **verse 4b**, since a poor person, by way of contrast, cannot afford to give lavish gifts or promise favours. These are observations about how society often works, with justice giving way to self-interest. The proverbs are not endorsing these practices.

Allen Ross: People will run after the rich in the hope of gaining something, but they will avoid the poor out of fear that the poor might be trying to gain something from them.

2. (:5) Punishment for the Liar

"*A false witness will not go unpunished,*
And he who tells lies will not escape."

Paul Koptak: False words and lies are often paired to denote the betrayal of the neighbor/friend relationship.

Lindsay Wilson: **vv. 5, 9** -- These virtually identical proverbs have a clear judicial setting, with witness clearly being legal terminology. There is no concern with the process (how the false witness is punished, who orders it, etc.), but the verses simply

focus on the fact that **one who seeks to pervert justice will also justly receive punishment**, and will not be cleared of guilt or exempt from punishment (see **6:29; 11:21; 17:5; 28:20**). The passive sense might suggest that God will do this, but no special attention is drawn to his work. The second half of each verse describes this false witness as one who breathes out or testifies (the verb could mean either) lies (see similar language in **6:19; 14:5, 25**). The sole variation in the two verses would be of little comfort for those who seek to twist justice. They will not escape/go free (**v. 5b**); they will perish or be destroyed (**v. 9b**).

Matthew Henry: This intimates that that which emboldens them in the sin is the hope of impunity, it being a sin which commonly escapes punishment from men, though the law is strict, **Deu. 19:18, 19**. But it shall not escape the righteous judgment of God, who is jealous, and will not suffer his name to be profaned; we know where all liars will have their everlasting portion.

3. (:6) Solicitation of Influential People

"*Many will entreat the favor of a generous man,*
And every man is a friend to him who gives gifts."

Tremper Longman: People present themselves positively to those from whom they expect to gain favors. Rulers are usually wealthy and have positions of influence, and thus people are nice to them, at least to their faces, hoping to gain advantages. The same is true with anyone else known to bring gifts.

The purpose of the proverb, if there is one, is harder to ferret out. Is this advice on how to gain favor with the rich and influential? Is it making fun of people who act positively toward others out of self-interest? Is it critical? At least it informs those who read it of the reality of the situation so that they can act accordingly. This verse makes a point similar to **19:4**.

Allen Ross: People seek the friendship of influential people. . . As with **Proverbs 18:23–24**, this proverb acknowledges the value of gifts in life, especially in business and politics.

4. (:7) Avoidance of the Poor

"*All the brothers of a poor man hate him;*
How much more do his friends go far from him!
He pursues them with words, but they are gone."

Paul Koptak: It is a portrait of **superficial friendship**, practiced even by one's family.

Lindsay Wilson: The general sense is that the poor person unsuccessfully pleads for support from those supposedly 'close' to him. They are either not found, or unwilling to speak in his favour.

Allen Ross: The basic meaning of the passage is clear, however; the idea of "*hate*," in the sense of "*reject*," tells how **superficial** friends and relatives will abandon the poor man. The plight of Job captures such abandonment.

George Mylne: The best of men have often complained in the time of their afflictions, that they were forsaken and abhorred by those whom they most loved, and those from whom they had reason to expect the greatest kindness. But how do they reveal their hatred? By behaving like strangers, and turning a deaf ear to their entreaties for help. This is a sufficient evidence of hatred in the wise man's view, and therefore we may justly conclude, that there is more of this abominable sin in the world than those who are chargeable with it will be willing to acknowledge.

B. (:8) Value of Wisdom

"*He who gets wisdom loves his own soul;*
He who keeps understanding will find good."

Richard Clifford: Wisdom is the great means to happiness and prosperity. One should acquire it in preference to silver and gold (**2:2–4**). The acquisition of wisdom is the greatest benefit one can obtain for oneself. It is true self-interest, for with wisdom come all other gifts (**3:13–20**). To preserve and guard that wisdom is prosperity, literally "*to find good*," as in **16:20; 17:20; 18:22**.

Lindsay Wilson: In **verse 8** it is the person who wants to be shaped by wisdom who is described as loving his [own] life. The parallel in **verse 8b** is that such a person guards understanding with the aim of finding what is good. **Verse 8** thus describes the person of integrity mentioned in **verse 1**, and outlined in more detail in **chapters 1 – 9**.

Tremper Longman: I understand the first colon as saying that those who want to improve their character want the best for themselves, and the second colon as more specifically talking about one aspect of character: competence, practical knowledge.

In this last line, self-interest is used as a motivation. Why should people work at character development? Because it is in their best interest.

Charles Bridges: To get wisdom, therefore, whatever the cost, is to love our own soul. One should be ashamed even to ask the question, will Christ or the world have our love, trust, time, and talents? It is like comparing pebbles with pearls, dust with diamonds, dross with gold. To follow our way is to destroy ourselves and not to love our souls.

Matthew Henry: Those are here encouraged,

1. That take pains to get wisdom, to get knowledge, and grace, and acquaintance with God; those that do so show that they love their own souls, and will be found to have done themselves the greatest kindness imaginable. No man ever hated his own flesh, but loves that, yet many are wanting in love to their own souls, for only those love their souls, and consequently love themselves, aright, that get wisdom, true wisdom.

2. That take care to keep it when they have got it; it is health, and wealth, and honour, and all, to the soul, and therefore he that keeps understanding, as he shows that he loves his own soul, so he shall certainly find good, all good. He that retains the good lessons he has learnt, and orders his conversation according to them, shall find the benefit and comfort of it in his own soul and shall be happy here and for ever.

C. (:9) Lying Will Turn Around and Bite You

"*A false witness will not go unpunished,*
And he who tells lies will perish."

Richard Clifford: Perjurers who try to convict others will themselves be convicted, and those who seek to destroy others by legal means will be destroyed by the same means. The justice system will recoil upon those who abuse it.

II. (:10-14) MISCELLANEOUS PROVERBS

A. (:10) Inappropriate Scenarios

"*Luxury is not fitting for a fool;*
Much less for a slave to rule over princes."

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 10** outlines two scenarios that are not fitting: a fool living in luxury and a slave ruling princes. The first is the obvious outworking of the wisdom principle that **wisdom, not folly, will lead to success** (e.g. **3:13–18**), as **26:1** comments, it is not fitting for a fool to gain honour. However, the Hebrew intensifying expression beginning the second part of **verse 10** (often in evv, 'much less/worse') indicates that the real thrust of the proverb is in a **court setting**. This will also be picked up in **verse 12**, and may well be implied in **verse 11**. In light of **verse 10a**, the target of **verse 10b** is a foolish slave (**30:22**), not a former slave like the wise Joseph (**Gen. 41:37–57**). While **verse 10b** may involve a wider endorsement of an established social order, its primary focus is on the value of wisdom in ruling.

B. (:11-12) Avoiding Anger

1. (:11) Forbearance

"*A man's discretion makes him slow to anger,*
And it is his glory to overlook a transgression."

Paul Koptak: **Verses 11–12** are linked by the theme of anger and forbearance. The virtue of "*patience*" is here associated with wisdom (cf. the root *śkl* for the "*prudent wife*" in **19:14**). The patient person is (lit.) "*long of nose*," meaning that it takes a long time for the nose to get hot in anger (cf. **16:32**). It is one's glory to overlook an offense (cf. **17:9**) instead of seeking strife (cf. **17:19; 29:22**). Ironically, it is when we seek to protect our honor or status by quarreling that we stand to lose it the most.

Tremper Longman: Those with wisdom ("*insight*" is associated with *ḥokmâ*) avoid conflict. Here they do so by controlling their emotions. Sometimes when responding to

an annoying offense, people make more trouble and annoyance for themselves. Thus, the wise are not quick to respond angrily to someone. God himself is slow to take offense (**Exod. 34:6; Mic. 7:18**).

McKane: The virtue which is indicated here is more than a forgiving temper; it includes also the ability to shrug off insults and the absence of a brooding hypersensitivity. It is the ability to deny to an adversary the pleasure of hearing a yelp of pain even when his words have inflicted a wound, of making large allowances for human frailties and keeping the lines of communication open. It contains elements of toughness and self-discipline; it is the capacity to stifle a hot, emotional rejoinder and to sleep on an insult.

Derek Kidner: *Good sense* (RSV) and *glory* point to the practical and the moral worth of this quality; both of them amply demonstrated by the early history of David. The word for glory is sometimes translated '*beauty*' (e.g. **Exod. 28:2**): it suggests adornment, and so brings out here the glowing colours of a virtue which in practice may look drably unassertive. God himself declares his 'almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity'.

2. (:12) Powerful Impact of the King's Disposition

"*The king's wrath is like the roaring of a lion,*
But his favor is like dew on the grass."

Paul Koptak: If it is wise to practice patience and restrain one's anger, it is also wise to do everything possible to keep from provoking anger in one more powerful.

Allen Ross: A king has the power **to terrify** or **to refresh**. Through the use of two similes, the verse contrasts the king's "*rage*" (*zaʿap*) with his "*pleasure*" or "*favor*" (*reṣônô*). The first simile, the roar of a lion, presents him at his most dangerous attitude (see **20:2; Am 3:4**). But the second portrays him as benevolent. For similar teachings see **Proverbs 16:14–15; 20:2; 28:15**. For a picture of the ideal king, see **2 Samuel 23:3–4**. This proverb advises the king's subjects to use tact and the king to cultivate kindness.

Matthew Henry: To make subjects faithful and dutiful to their princes. Let them be restrained from all disloyalty by the consideration of the dreadful consequence of having the government against them; and let them be encouraged in all good services to the public by the hopes of the favour of their prince.

C. (:13-14) Quarrelsome Wife vs. Prudent Wife

1. (:13) Quarrelsome Wife

"*A foolish son is destruction to his father,*
And the contentions of a wife are a constant dripping."

Paul Koptak: The continual dripping of the quarrelsome wife is not like the annoyance of a leaky faucet; the dripping roof is destructive and dangerous, a fitting parallel for the ruin of the foolish son.

Lindsay Wilson: In a family-based society members of a family can do either great good or great harm to their relatives. A foolish child (not just a son) can destroy a parent's reputation, circumstances or even life. In Israelite society there was clear teaching about the importance of disciplining as well as discipling their offspring (see **13:24**).

Tremper Longman: The perspective is that of the senior male of the household and deals with two important relationships. On the one hand, a son who makes foolish life decisions is a disaster to a father (see **10:1**; etc.). After all, a foolish son ends up in all kinds of trouble that the father feels intently because of his love for the child. The second intimate relationship that can be a source of annoyance is his wife (**21:9, 19; 25:24**). Nagging is here likened to the torture of dripping water. It is not an overwhelming force, but it wears one down.

2. (:14) Prudent Wife

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

Paul Koptak: The contrast between the quarrelsome wife (**19:13**) and the one who is prudent (root *śkl* = "**wisdom**" in **19:11**) extends the picture of the happy and prosperous home.

Allen Ross: The verse contrasts wealth that can be inherited from a father with a "*prudent*" (*maśkālet*) wife who is from the Lord. The verse does not answer questions about unhappy marriages or bad wives; rather, it simply affirms that when a marriage turns out well, one should credit God (cf. **18:22; 31:10–31**).

III. (:15-24) SLUGGARDS AND DISCIPLINE

A. (:15) Laziness and Its Consequences

"*Laziness casts into a deep sleep,*
And an idle man will suffer hunger."

Allen Ross: Those who are lazy waste time and lose money. These loosely synonymous clauses stress one basic point. "*Laziness*" (*ʿaṣlâ*) brings on a "*deep sleep*." *Tardēmâ* is used to describe complete inactivity (see **Ge 2:21; Jn 1:5**); here it probably signifies **lethargy** (Whybray, 110). This individual wastes time that is needed to provide for himself and his family. Parallel is the "*shiftless man*" (*remîyâ*) who goes hungry. Once again the first line presents the cause ("*deep sleep*") and the second the effect ("*goes hungry*").

B. (:16) Obedience to Instruction

"*He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul,*
But he who is careless of his ways will die."

Paul Koptak: "*Instructions*" is (lit.) "*command*" (*miṣwah*; cf. **6:23; 13:13**), a word often used of parental teaching (**2:1; 4:4; 7:2**). In the context of Proverbs it points to the directions for living that one ignores at one's peril. To refuse their guidance is to despise one's way, to be careless about where one walks.

Richard Clifford: Respect for legitimate authority benefits oneself.

C. (:17) Generosity to Those in Need Will Be Rewarded

"*He who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD,*
And He will repay him for his good deed."

Matthew Henry: The **duty of charity described**. It includes <u>two things</u>:

<u>1. Compassion</u>, which is the inward principle of charity in the heart; it is to have pity on the poor. Those that have not a penny for the poor, yet may have pity for them, a charitable concern and sympathy; and, if a man *give all his goods to feed the poor* and have not this charity in his heart, *it is nothing*, **1 Co. 13:3**. We must *draw out our souls to the hungry*, **Isa. 58:10**.

<u>2. Bounty and liberality</u>. We must not only pity the poor, but give, according to their necessity and our ability, **Jam. 2:15, 16.** That which he has given.

D. (:18) Benefit of Discipline

"*Discipline your son while there is hope,*
And do not desire his death."

Allen Ross: It is necessary to *discipline* (*ysr*) children to prevent their premature death. Proverbs here and elsewhere teaches that to refrain from discipline allows a child to grow up stupid or wicked and thereby possibly incur death as a result of bad behavior (Whybray, 110). The motivation for such discipline is that "*there is hope*" (*tiqwâ*), an excellent reason to keep at it. The clause in the second half literally reads, "*Do not lift up your life to kill him*"; that is, do not make the kind of decisions that will lead to his death (i.e., to allow him to go astray through neglect). The idea in *ysr* includes both <u>chastisement</u> and <u>instruction</u>.

Charles Bridges: It is a false idea to say, "Children will be children." It only makes us pass over their faults and think that their tempers and waywardness are too trifling to require prompt correction. In this way, sin winked at in its beginning hardens and becomes deep-rooted corruption. For who would neglect their most trifling bodily ailment that might grow into a serious disease? Oh, what grace and wisdom are needed to discipline our minds, judgment, and affections so that we can train up our children to serve God, which will be their greatest happiness.

E. (:19) No Rescue for the Habitually Hot-Tempered

"*A man of great anger shall bear the penalty,*
For if you rescue him, you will only have to do it again."

Tremper Longman: This proverb makes an observation about people who are characteristically angry. They contain the seeds of their own punishment. They grow angry and bring people's resentment on them. The observation is actually addressed not to people who cannot control their anger, but to those who help them get out of scrapes. It is a reminder that the problem is **habitual**. Perhaps the implicit message is not to try to rescue such people; like the fool who does not deserve a response (**26:4**), the angry person should not be helped.

F. (:20) Acceptance of Counsel

"*Listen to counsel and accept discipline,*
That you may be wise the rest of your days."

Allen Ross: By accepting advice and discipline, one becomes wise. This proverb is one continuous thought, the second half providing the purpose of the advice. The vocabulary reminds the reader of **chs. 1–9**: "*Listen to advice* [*ʿēṣâ*] *and accept instruction* [*mûsār*; lit., '*discipline*']." This advice is in all probability the teachings of the sages that will make one wise. "*In the end*" there will be maturity from all the discipline, and there will be steadfast perseverance in the path of life.

G. (:21) Human Plans Only Established by Divine Sovereignty

"*Many are the plans in a man's heart,*
But the counsel of the LORD, it will stand."

Allen Ross: The success of our plans depends on God's will. In the form of a contrast, the proverb teaches that only those plans that God approves will succeed (see **16:1, 9**). People have many "*plans*," but the Lord's counsel or "*purpose*" will stand. Humans are diverse and uncertain; God is absolutely wise and sure, as Toy, 378, reminds us. Midrash Mishlê applies this passage to the accounts of Pharaoh, Absalom, and Haman.

H. (:22) Importance of Loyal Kindness

"*What is desirable in a man is his kindness,*
And it is better to be a poor man than a liar."

Richard Clifford: "*Liars*" in colon B means perjurers, as often in Proverbs (**6:19; 14:5, 25; 19:9; 21:28**), that is, those who violate an oath sworn before God, presumably for a bribe. There is a play on the word "*desire*." One's desire should not be money but fidelity in fulfilling one's responsibility. Better to forego money than to perjure oneself in court.

Tremper Longman: Those in a covenant relationship must stay true to their word. Lying is a **fundamental breach of trust**, often spoken against in Proverbs (6**:16–19; 13:5; 14:5; 25:18**).

I. (:23) Foundational Refrain of Fearing the Lord

"*The fear of the LORD leads to life,*

So that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil."

Tremper Longman: In **Gen. 19** and in **Judg. 19**, we have stories of travelers who lodge for the evening in a strange town and face incredible evil, even though they have sought refuge in someone's home. These stories inform us that travel in the ancient world was not a secure matter, and the only sure recourse was Yahweh.

Allen Ross: Piety brings a life of contentment and safety. The saying uses synthetic parallelism, the second part carrying the idea of life further. "*Life*" is probably a metonymy for all the blessings and prosperity in life. Its essential feature is "*contentment*" (*śābēaʿ*; "*content*," NIV) that lodges without being visited by calamity or "*trouble*" (*rāʿ*). The vocabulary is vivid: "*rests*" is metaphorical for abide, and "*untouched*" means without any intervention to alter one's destiny. When one lives a life of piety, the Lord provides a quality of life that cannot be disrupted by such evil.

J. (:24) Folly of Laziness

"*The sluggard buries his hand in the dish,*
And will not even bring it back to his mouth."

Paul Koptak: In contrast with the verse before, this proverb lampoons one who goes unsatisfied (cf. the identical proverb in **26:15**). Like the picture of laziness and hunger in **19:15**, this satiric saying imagines one who even finds the effort of eating to be too much. The contradiction may hold the key: Most sluggards do want something for nothing; here, the irony of sloth comes out in a humorous sight that hides the stinger. Although no one is really that lazy, the exaggeration shows that sloth will leave one hungry.

IV. (:25-29) MOCKERS AND KNOWLEDGE

A. (:25) Different Responses to Discipline

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

Richard Clifford: The contrasts are striking—to beat and to rebuke; the inability of the scoffer to learn even from a beating and the ability of the intelligent person to learn from the slightest gesture. The latter point is wittily and subtly made in colon A: even a naive onlooker learns the lesson a scoffer being beaten does not.

Tremper Longman: "*Mockers*" (*lēṣ*) cannot learn because they become defensive concerning their mistakes. They will make fun of those who try to instruct them. However, this proverb points out that the effort to educate them through the kind of physical punishment often associated with learning in Proverbs may not help them (because they can be beaten silly with no effect; cf. **17:10**); yet such punishment will teach a lesson to an immature person, whose defenses are not so high.

Allen Ross: **Discipline affects people differently**. The antithetical proverb shows the different ways discipline works. Three types of people are noted here: the "*mocker*" (*lēṣ*) with a closed mind, the "*simple*" or simpleton (*petî*) with an empty mind, and the "*discerning*" (*nābôn*) with an open mind (Kidner, 135). The simpleton learns by observing punishment given to the scoffer. Although the punishment will have no effect on the scoffer, it should still be given, for the *petî* will learn what the *lēṣ* does not (McKane, 525–26). The discerning person, however, will learn from verbal rebuke, even if it is painful truth.

B. (:26) Mistreatment of Parents Is Shameful and Disgraceful

"*He who assaults his father and drives his mother away*
Is a shameful and disgraceful son."

Paul Koptak: The symbolism of this proverb makes sense when read in reverse: The shameful son (cf. **19:13**) brings ruin on the house, which is tantamount to robbing father and evicting mother. The proverb may be hyperbolic, like the saying on the sluggard (**19:24**) and the parable of the son who threw away half his father's estate (**Luke 15:11–24**). Yet Jesus also had harsh words for the Pharisee's practice of Corban (**Mark 7:9–13**), so the danger of failing to honor and care for parents is real (**Deut. 5:16**), especially when the son's foolishness has left the parents destitute.

Richard Clifford: Children's shameful conduct ruins the house, personified in the parents.

C. (:27) Consequences of Rejecting Discipline

"*Cease listening, my son, to discipline,*
And you will stray from the words of knowledge."

Lindsay Wilson: Once people stop being shaped by wisdom (lit. *'hearing/obeying discipline/instruction'*), they will go astray from words of knowledge. The lazy person, the foolish scoffer, the violent child and the wicked false witness are all examples of people who do not want to be moulded by wisdom and her life-giving words.

Tremper Longman: The sage warns the son not to think that he will reach a point where no more instruction is necessary. **Gathering wisdom is a lifelong process**.

D. (:28) Corrupt Witnesses Subvert Justice

"*A rascally witness makes a mockery of justice,*
And the mouth of the wicked spreads iniquity."

Paul Koptak: This enigmatic proverb incorporates images scattered throughout the chapter; the corrupt witness breathes lies (**19:1, 5, 9, 22**) and in so doing mocks the very idea of justice (**19:25, 29**). "*Gulps down evil*" is ambiguous, pointing to the greedy appetite of the wicked but also hinting at final rewards (cf. **18:20–21**). Desire without knowledge is not good (**19:2**), for you may swallow poison!

Richard Clifford: The sounds of *bĕlîya'al*, "*malicious*," repeat in *yālîṣ*, "*mocks*," and in *yĕballa'*, "*swallows*." The sounds relate malice and mocking the judicial system, implying that the motive of a lying witness is the witness's ingesting of evil, that is, active collusion with evil (see **4:17**).

E. (:29) Certainty of Retribution for Fools

"*Judgments are prepared for scoffers,*
And blows for the back of fools."

Richard Clifford: Completing the thought of **v. 28** on the scoffers who contemn the judicial process, **v. 29** asserts that their punishment is as inevitable as that of fools. Just as their mouths took in injustice (**v. 28**) so will their backs take blows. Scoffers deny that God acts purposefully or with justice. Punishment awaits them (divine passive).

TEXT: Proverbs 20:1-11

TITLE: CONTRAST BETWEEN FOOLS AND FAITHFUL MEN

I. (:1-4) 4 TYPES OF FOOLS

Lindsay Wilson: Context: **Verses 1–4** give examples of the **consequences of negative behaviour**: becoming unwise, forfeiting one's life, losing honour and finding no harvest. **Verse 1** makes a link with the previous chapter by using the word *mocker* (*lēṣ*, placed first in the Hebrew text for emphasis), picking up on various forms of the word used in **19:25, 28, 29**. **Verse 2** repeats much of **19:12**; **verse 4** recalls **19:12, 24**; while strife and quarrelling in **verse 3** pick up on similar pictures in **19:13, 26**.

A. (:1) The Drunkard

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

Paul Koptak: The use of šgh suggests that to stagger from drink is to err both in one's steps and one's judgment (**Isa. 28:7**). The "*brawler*" (*homeh*) is loud and noisy, like the foolish women of **Proverbs 7:11** and **9:13**. This proverb recognizes that alcohol can impair one's judgment (cf. **21:17; 23:29–35; 31:4–5**) and therefore compares it to two figures known to be a negative influence.

Allen Ross: The excessive use of intoxicants excites the drinker to boisterous behavior and aggressive and belligerent attitudes; it confuses the senses so that he is out of control. Whoever overimbibes is unwise; it just is not sensible to drink to excess (Toy, 382).

Tremper Longman: Wisdom requires clear thinking, an ability to make decisions. Wine clouds judgment and thus may end up causing a person a lot of trouble. This proverb is not necessarily advocating abstinence from alcoholic drinks. If it did, it would be out of kilter with the rest of the OT. In any case, the description that is associated with personified wine and strong drink (as a mocker and carouser, respectively) suggests overindulgence. However, wine must be consumed in moderation and only at certain times. Later in Proverbs (**31:4–7**) as well as Ecclesiastes (**10:16–17**), it is especially leaders who are warned against the use of alcohol since it clouds their judgment. After all, leaders' judgments affect more than their own well-being. Often, if one drinks too much wine, it leads them to harass or mock others, but the reference here is ambiguous and may well refer to wine mocking the person who drinks too much.

Richard Clifford: Wine and strong drink are personified according to their effects on human beings. So powerful is alcohol in inducing disrespect toward others that it can be called a scoffer. In Proverbs wine is not only a sign of prosperity and symbol of feasting (**3:10; 9:2, 5**) but also a threat to wisdom (**21:17; 23:29–35; 31:4**). The saying plays on straying from the path in a literal sense (**Ezek. 34:6**) and in a figurative sense (**1 Sam.**

26:21 and **Job 19:4**). Drink causes one to stagger and to stray from the right path (**Isa. 28:7**).

Charles Bridges: The history of the world from the days of Noah (**Genesis 9:21**) proves that the love of wine . . . and beer is a most insidious vice. The wretched victims are convinced too late that they have been mocked and led astray. Not only does it overcome them before they are aware, but it promises pleasures that it can never give. And yet so mighty is the spell that the overcome slave consents to be mocked again and again.

Its power turns humans into a level below the beasts as it turns each of its victims into a brawler. Reason surrenders to lust, appetite, or passion. Surely, then, whoever is led astray by them is not wise.

George Mylne: Wine deceives and mocks those who use it to excess, and punishes those who abuse it as an instrument of dishonor to him who gave it to men to cheer their hearts. It promises refreshment but it steals away men's senses, until it makes them the objects of scorn to the sober. It made the venerable patriarch Noah a laughing-stock to his own son. It deprives men of their reason, and gives the government of the mind to the passions; and then those who were men of good behavior in their sober moments become insolent and brawling. When the king of Israel was made drunk with bottles of wine, he forgot his dignity, and stretched out his hand with scorners.

Wine has been the beginning of many quarrels which have ended in wounds and blood. For it rouses the passions, it turns suspicions into certainties in the eye of the drunkard, and thus inflames resentments into irreconcilable animosities. It gives full range to all the hidden vices of the soul, and produces new vices of a dangerous kind. It destroys the power of reason, and infuses into the soul all the fury of a wild beast!

B. (:2) The Provoker

"*The terror of a king is like the growling of a lion;*
He who provokes him to anger forfeits his own life."

Paul Koptak: Continuing the association of noise and danger from the previous verse, the king's wrath is here likened to a lion's roar. The wise take warning, but fools provoke it and pay with their lives (lit., "*sins against his soul*," *ḥoṭeh napšo*; cf. **19:2**). The first line is nearly identical to **19:12**, except for the word "*wrath*" in place of "*rage*." The earlier verse added a word about the king's favor as life-giving dew, whereas here the threat of death is made explicit.

Richard Clifford: A king may be awe-inspiring but he can also be dangerous. A lion was a common royal symbol in the ancient Near East. The symbol shows all too clearly a king's majesty and danger to ordinary mortals.

Tremper Longman: The first colon is very similar to **19:12**. The king is a powerful person in an ancient Near Eastern society. His dread can be destructive since he holds

the power of life and death, as explicated in the second colon. The image of a lion makes the danger particularly clear.

Allen Ross: The simple idea is that one would do well to stay away from any angry person, especially a king who cannot be treated like other men (Whybray, 113; see also **16:14; 19:12**).

George Mylne: If the fear occasioned by the displeasure of a king is so intolerable then what must it be to encounter the wrath of him whose voice is not only like the roaring of a lion but like the sound of many thunders. His voice shakes the Heaven and the earth, and neither men nor devils shall be able to endure the terrors of it. To sin against Christ is to sin not only against our lives but against our immortal souls!

C. (:3) The Quarreler

"*Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man,*
But any fool will quarrel."

Paul Koptak: The bite of the saying may be that those who quarrel will not gain the respect they fight for but will actually lose standing in the community.

Richard Clifford: Nowhere is the difference between the foolish and the wise as clear as in disputes. The wise keep away from them, whereas fools get embroiled (e.g., **13:10; 15:18; 18:6; 22:10**). Paradoxically, the honor one might gain from winning a fight comes without fighting to the person who does not get involved. Honor will never be given to the fool who plunges intemperately into quarrels.

Tremper Longman: Proverbs is a book that frequently advocates conflict avoidance. Often fights, even if based on a real offense, create more trouble than they are worth. The wise person lets things lie, while the stupid person doesn't hesitate to enter the fray. It is the pride of the stupid person and the humility of the wise person that motivate their respective behaviors.

Allen Ross: One cannot avoid strife entirely but should avoid every unnecessary confrontation. As McKane, 537, says, the honorable person stops short of undignified and unedifying wrangling; it is this person who has the capacity of preserving a working relationship with even the most difficult people (see also **17:14, 28; 18:2**).

Charles Bridges: To drop the matter in a dispute (**17:14**) is an honorable act (**16:32; Romans 12:21**); it is a triumph over the flesh. For how often is strife fed by the folly of man's pride rather than extinguished by a peaceful and loving spirit. But to put on meekness and patience and to let God's peace rule in our hearts are the characteristics of God's elect as we follow the example of our divine Master (**Colossians 3:12-15**).

George Mylne: Every fool is quick to quarrel. For a fool is so self-conceited, that he can bear no contradiction. He is so insolent, that he will have a hand in every other man's

business. He is so proud, that he cannot bear to be found in the wrong. He is so stubborn, that he will have the last word, although his lips should prove his destruction.

D. (:4) The Sluggard

"*The sluggard does not plow after the autumn,*
So he begs during the harvest and has nothing."

Paul Koptak: The comic example of the sluggard who makes no preparation but still looks for a result recommends both foresight and industry (cf. 6:8). Coming after 20:3, it may also recommend shifting one's energies away from conflict and toward something more productive.

Tremper Longman: Winter (October to March) was the time for plowing in Palestine. The lazy cannot get themselves to do such an onerous task. However, actions—or in this case a lack of actions—have consequences. If one does not do the work at the beginning of the agricultural season, then how can one expect to reap (literally) the benefits? In colon 2 the context indicates that what they ask after is the crop, and the answer is "nothing"; there is nothing in the field. Lazy persons do not do the work necessary to have adequate food when they need it.

II. (:5-11) PORTRAIT OF A FAITHFUL MAN

Lindsay Wilson: Context: In **verses 5–7** there is a focus on more positive characteristics (understanding, steadfast love, faithful, righteous, blessed). This cluster of virtues (and the corresponding opposites) extends like an umbrella over the sayings that follow and offers a way forward. The question of **verse 6b** ('*a faithful person who can find*?') operates as a challenge to the reader to be that kind of person.

A. (:5) A Faithful Man Exercises Perception Based on His Discernment

"*A plan in the heart of a man is like deep water,*
But a man of understanding draws it out."

Paul Koptak: Like water from the bottom of the well, human "*purposes*" (*ʿeṣab*, "*counsel*"; cf. **8:14; 19:20; 21:30**) can be drawn out if one has the proper equipment—in this case, "*understanding*." Similar to the proverb in **18:4**, this comparison is between the hidden recesses of the human heart (*ʿeṣab*, cf. **Isa. 29:15**) and wisdom's access to them. The saying is probably a paradigmatic teaser, introducing those that follow on the intention of the heart (esp. **Prov. 20:9**).

John MacArthur: The wise man has keen discernment reaching to the deepest intentions of the heart to grasp wise counsel (**18:4; Heb. 4:12**).

Allen Ross: Those who are wise can **discern the motives of the heart**. This saying is one continuous sentence, though it exhibits a bit of an antithesis. The counsel or purpose (*ʿēṣâ*) in the heart is first compared to "*deep waters*." This figure probably

means that one's motives are difficult to "*fathom*"—it takes a counselor with "*understanding*" (*tebûnâ*) to "draw them out." The line shows how important good counseling is. Plaut, 209, notes that if we are not aware of our motivations, others who are wise may enable us to discover them. Of course, there is always the **need for discernment** as to how much should be dredged from within the heart. McKane, 536, takes a slightly different approach, interpreting the "*deep waters*" to mean profound ideas (as in **18:4**). Accordingly, it would take the wise to use their skills of clarification and interpretation.

Lindsay Wilson: The key aspect of deep water (in the light of drawing it out in **v. 5b**) is that it makes an object harder to identify or find. The object in this case is the plan or purpose (*'ēṣâ*, as in **19:20, 21**) in a person's heart – **one's core commitment or goal in life** – but even such an elusive reality is able to be revealed by one who is following the path of wisdom, the person of understanding (**28:11**). Lucas (2015: 140) puts it well: "**The wise person has the discernment to understand what is beneath the surface and express it in appropriate words**."

George Mylne: A man of sagacity has a **knowledge of human nature**, which assists him in finding out the plans and designs of particular men. He can avail himself of their gestures, their general course of behavior, their behavior in particular instances; and on sudden emergencies, their silence, their words, even when they are disguising their thoughts; their connections and company, their interests and humors, to form our judgment of their thoughts and designs. And by this means, he is often enabled to guard himself and his good name from the snares of the wicked. Wisdom is profitable, you see, not only for the life to come but likewise for the present life but hypocrisy and deceit profits little. It is often detected by men it is always known to God; and the day is coming in which he will make manifest the secrets of all hearts.

B. (:6) A Faithful Man (Loyal Friend) Is Hard to Find

"*Many a man proclaims his own loyalty,*
But who can find a trustworthy man?"

Richard Clifford: The adjectives in colon A and colon B, "*loyal*" and "*of trust*" have virtually the same meaning, for they often occur as a fixed pair. The antithesis is not, therefore, between being loyal and being trustworthy but between having a reputation for a virtue and actually practicing it, between untested and tested friendship. Friendship is proved when trouble comes.

Tremper Longman: The proverb may be roughly understood as saying "talk is cheap." People are willing to claim they are loyal, but when the chips are down, will these same people actually come through? The word translated "*tell*" (*qārā'*) is more literally "*call out*," pointing to a kind of public assertion. The term "*loyal*" (*ḥesed*) denotes the kind of love that flows between **covenant partners**. In other words, these people will say that they are bound by love, with the implication that they will assist when threats emerge, but the question of the second colon implies that these are often false claims. The

proverb will put the wise on warning **not to accept all claims of friendship at face value**.

C. (:7-11) A Faithful Man Is Characterized by Integrity

1. (:7) Legacy of Integrity

"*A righteous man who walks in his integrity—*
How blessed are his sons after him."

Paul Koptak: The saying assures readers that whoever walks in integrity (**19:1; 28:6**) is called a *ṣaddiq* ("*righteous one*"); blessed are the descendants who share in the honor. Here is a legacy or inheritance one cannot sell, buy, or lose (cf. **10:7; 13:22; 17:2**). "*Children*" can also be the beneficiaries of a parent's faith (**14:26**).

Tremper Longman: The point of the proverb seems to be found in the second colon, which expresses the influence of the righteous on those who observe them closely, particularly the children (which may imply not just one but many generations—descendants). And this is the most natural way of understanding their influence; the righteous are good role models to those who watch their lifestyle.

Caleb Nelson: So a good man who walks in his integrity — his children are blessed. They have the best legacy one could receive. That's not a monetary inheritance, but a moral and spiritual one. We all know that what you see in childhood forms your baseline, your default. If your baseline is that parents argue with each other, dislike each other, divorce each other, then guess what you're naturally going to replicate in your own home and life? But if your baseline is that parents love each other, pray together, shepherd the family together, delight in Jesus individually and with the rest of the family, then guess what you're naturally going to replicate in your own life? Brothers and sisters, a good man leaves a blessing to his children merely by being good to them.

George Mylne: The integrity of the just man, is not like the pretended integrity of the moralist, for it includes piety, justice, sobriety, and a conscientious regard to every precept of God, without excluding those who appear to vain men to be of small importance, or those who most directly oppose the prevailing disposition of the mind. The just man walks in his integrity, for his righteousness is not like the morning cloud but like the light of the sun, which shines more and more unto the perfect day. God tries him the devil and the world, and the flesh, solicit him to sin but he will not turn aside into the ways of iniquity. Or if he should, he will not continue to walk in them but returns with bitter regret to that good and straight way, which leads unto life, and continues in that path until the end of his life, for his heart is set upon it, and upon that heavenly city to which it leads.

2. (:8) Integrity in Dispensing Justice and Restraining Evil

"*A king who sits on the throne of justice*
Disperses all evil with his eyes."

Caleb Nelson: The eyes of the king, set as judge, disperse all evil. They scatter it away. How? Through the fear they inspire. A judge I know tells me from time to time that he sees the worst people at their best. Why are they at their best? Because the eyes of the judge are upon them! They see him, and they know he's watching them, and they know that judges and kings don't take kindly to evildoers actually doing evil right in front of their noses! Indeed, it's been a theory of mine for a long time that if you're speeding when you come over the hill and see the police cruiser, the cop will give you a break as long as you immediately slam on the brakes. Doing so shows that you have proper respect for him, while cruising on by doing 10 over shows that you really don't care.

George Mylne: Kings have majesty in their countenances, and when they preserve their dignity of character, their eyes are dreadful to the breakers of the law. This awe of royalty is impressed by God upon the minds of men, for the peace and benefit of human society. Kings are obliged to use that authority with which the Most High God has dignified them as his ministers for the encouragement of virtue, and the suppression of vice.

Richard Clifford: A king's throne is established in justice (**16:12; 20:28; 25:5; 29:14**), and the king is the agent of that justice. A king effects God's intent by putting down the wicked and upholding the righteous. Justice is not merely a personal virtue of a particular king but belongs to the office. The king sits to give judgment. The Hebrew verb "*to scatter*" can mean "*to winnow*" and may refer to winnowing in a metaphorical sense—separating the good from the bad.

Tremper Longman: This is the picture of the just and wise king, who dissipates evil through his deliberate application of law in his kingdom. Because of his just determination of law, criminal elements are fragmented and unable to coalesce into a substantial threat to order. The reference to the king's eyes may reflect the idea that nothing escapes his notice. Wisdom is a quality especially required for the exercise of proper legal judgment.

Allen Ross: This proverb names justice (*dîn*; "*to judge*," NIV) as the basis of his administration and then uses the image of winnowing to show that he removes evil from his realm (see **Ps 101**). The verse could apply to any person in authority, but certainly the principle stands that a just government roots out the evils of society (Plaut, 210). Unfortunately, no government has ever lived up to this ideal.

Sid S. Buzzell: Kings often served as chief judges (e.g., Solomon, **1 Kings 3:16-28**). By carefully examining (*with his eyes*) a case, a just king could detect (*winnow* or *sift out*; cf. **Prov. 20:26**) evil motives and actions. He could not easily be fooled.

Matthew Henry: **The happy effect of a good government.**
The presence of the prince goes far towards the putting of wickedness out of countenance; if he inspect his affairs himself, those that are employed under him will be kept in awe and restrained from doing wrong. If great men be good men, and will use

their power as they may and ought, what good may they do and what evil may they prevent!

3. (:9) Integrity and Humility in Confessing Sin

"*Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart,*
I am pure from my sin '?"

Tremper Longman: This proverb seeks to bring **self-awareness** to the wise, who are also the righteous and may sometimes be tempted to self-righteousness. Even the wise must be aware that they are not perfect. They too need to grapple with sin. Even the "*innocent*" Job recognized that he too had faults (**Job 9:2**). Not to know this would lead to a wrong self-assessment and then to errors in behavior and speech. Even so, a number of Proverbs implicitly recognize that some people are "*righteous*" and others are "*wicked*." This proverb relativizes this otherwise fairly strict dichotomy.

Allen Ross: Many passages affirm the **inevitability of our sinfulness** (**Ge 6:5; 1Ki 8:46; Ps 143:2**), and **Psalm 51:7** teaches that one can claim to be pure only if made pure by divine forgiveness. The sages here reflect the **weakness of humanity**. McKane, 548, says that one "can never be certain that his mind is pure and that he is without alloy of sin. Even when he has no good reason to believe otherwise and might draw such a conclusion in good faith, he cannot be certain that he is not self-deceived and has failed to plumb unsuspected depths of duplicity and perversion which Yahweh will take into account." So this proverb should bring us to **personal humility** and engender in us an understanding of the failures of others.

Charles Bridges: A sinner in his **self-delusion** may conceive himself to be a saint. But it is impossible for a saint ever to consider himself in this way. Who can say, . . . "I am clean and without sin"? What? No vain thoughts, no sinful imagination dwelling within? No ignorance, no pride, no coldness, no worldliness, no unbelief indulged in? The more we search the heart, the more its impurity will confront us. Only vain people can boast that they have pure hearts. But the boast, far from showing their goodness, demonstrates their blindness. Man is so depraved that he cannot understand his own depravity.

4. (:10) Integrity in Business

"*Differing weights and differing measures,*
Both of them are abominable to the LORD."

Richard Clifford: Different weights are signs of a dishonest trader. **Deuteronomy 25:13** makes the same condemnation: "*You shall not have in your sack a stone and a stone,* [one] *large and* [the other] *small.*" The "*stone*" is a weight of indeterminate heaviness. An ephah is a dry measure equal to one-tenth of a homer or kor, estimated to be 1.5 or 2.5 pecks, three-eighths or two-thirds of a U.S. bushel. It was the most common dry measure. Altering weights is an abomination to Yahweh, who is the guarantor of the just order of the world.

5. (:11) Integrity in Deeds

"*It is by his deeds that a lad distinguishes himself*
If his conduct is pure and right."

Tremper Longman: The debate in this proverb surrounds the first verb, which can mean either "*to disguise*" or "*to make known*" in the hitpael. The versions go both ways, as do modern commentators, though most contemporary translations opt for the second meaning, as illustrated by the **NRSV**:

Even children make themselves known by their acts,
by whether what they do is pure and right.

If the **NRSV** interpretation is the right one, then the idea is that children, like adults (the force of "*even*"), **demonstrate their integrity by their actions**. This may well be right, but it seems tautologous even for a proverb.

The alternate interpretation at least has interest going for it. If it is correct, then the intention is to warn people that appearances can be deceiving and to encourage them to keep their eyes open in dealing with children as well as with adults.

Ernest Lucas: The verb in **v. 11a** can mean either '*to make oneself known'* (ESV) or '*to dissemble'* (NJPSV, ESV footnote). Taken in the first sense the proverb is a version of 'by their fruits you shall know them' and may be advice to parents to discern the character of a child so that any remedial training can be begun early. If taken in the second sense it is a warning that appearances can be deceptive, and so discernment is needed to determine the true character of the child.

Matthew Henry: The tree is known by its fruits, a man *by his doings*, even a young tree by its first fruits, *a child* by his childish things, *whether his work be clean* only, appearing good (the word is used **ch. 16:2**), or *whether it be right*, that is, really good. This intimates,

1. That children will discover themselves. One may soon see what their temper is, and which way their inclination leads them, according as their constitution is. Children have not learned the art of dissembling and concealing their bent as grown people have.

2. That parents should observe their children, that they may discover their disposition and genius, and both manage and dispose of them accordingly, drive the nail that will go and draw out that which goes amiss. Wisdom is herein profitable to direct.

TEXT: Proverbs 20:12-30

TITLE: WISE SPEECH, INTEGRITY, JUSTICE AND DILIGENCE

Paul Koptak: The many **doubled proverbs and images** of this chapter suggest that a clue for reading can be found by attending to the repetition. So we observe that two pairs of royal proverbs (**20:2** and **8; 20:26** and **28**) frame two clusters of Yahweh proverbs (**20:10** and **12**; **20:22–24** and **27**), with a list of speech sins running throughout and gathering at the center: quarrels (**20:3**), self-deception (**20:9**), sharp bargaining (**20:14**), unwise pledges (**20:16**), falsehood (**20:17**), tale-bearing (**20:19**), cursing (**20:20**), threat (**20:22**), and rash vows (**20:25**). We also notice that there are two proverbs about the king's winnowing (**20:8, 26**), two on Yahweh's hatred for false weights and measures (**20:10, 23**), and two on the sluggard who goes without food (**20:4, 13**). Therefore we will look at Yahweh's work of watching and searching, the king's work of winnowing, and the failure to work by sluggards of all kinds, especially those who do not discipline their speech.

I. (:12-15) PERCEPTION, DILIGENCE, INTEGRITY AND WISE SPEECH

A. (:12) Perception Is a Gift from God

"*The hearing ear and the seeing eye,*
The LORD has made both of them."

Charles Bridges: Sight and hearing are the two senses by which instruction is conveyed to the mind. They are component parts of that divine structure that God so wonderfully made (**Psalm 139:14**).

Richard Clifford: In the psychology of Proverbs, the ear and the eye take in data for the heart to store, ponder, and decide. What the heart decides, the mouth, the hands, and the feet will effect. The saying can mean either that God intends people to use their senses to become wise (God created them), or, what is far more likely, that if human beings can see and hear, how much more can God. **Psalm 94:9** is relevant: "*The one who planted the ear, does he not hear? The one who formed the eye, does he not see*?" The argument is *a fortiori*, "how much more."

Paul Koptak: The figure of "*ears that hear, eyes that see*" is used throughout the Old and New Testaments to signify careful attention and discernment, just as Jesus said, "*If any have ears to hear, let them hear*." The form of this proverb is similar to **20:10**.

Tremper Longman: So much of the wisdom of proverbs is based on experience that arises out of observation. This is what makes wisdom seem so practical and, to some, even secular. This latter view ignores the explicitly theological teaching of the book that connects the acquisition of wisdom to the "*fear of Yahweh*" (**1:7**) or the metaphor that rules the first nine chapters of the book, describing a relationship with Woman Wisdom. But this simple proverb brings additional insight: even observation only happens because of Yahweh. There is no seeing or hearing apart from his good gift.

Ernest Lucas: The import of the statement that the ear and eye, the two organs used in discernment, are made by the LORD is probably that humans should therefore use them properly for the purpose for which they were given. This will mean beginning with the 'fear of the LORD' who made them (**1:7**).

George Mylne: It is said that the famous physician Galen learned the absurdity of atheism from the consideration of the human eye. The structure of it clearly displays the amazing wisdom of God, and his goodness shines with no less brightness in the pleasures and advantages derived from the ministry of this admirable organ.

B. (:13) Diligence Rewarded

"*Do not love sleep, lest you become poor;*
Open your eyes, and you will be satisfied with food."

Robert Clifford: Sleep, laziness, and poverty are closely linked as in **19:15**.

Tremper Longman: The implication seems to be that whoever prefers sleep to work may anger the father enough to be cut out of the family inheritance. The converse expressed in the second colon is that an alert person will not lack for sustenance.

Allen Ross: The verse is set in antithetical parallelism, the ideas of loving sleep and staying awake being contrasted, as well as their results of growing poor and being satisfied. Just as sleep can be used for slothfulness, so opening the eyes and staying awake can represent vigorous, active conduct.

George Mylne: Sleep, as well as food, is necessary for refreshing our frail bodies but neither food nor sleep must be used for their own sakes, nor must we be intemperate in either of them. Sleep taken in a moderate degree, is the nurse of nature, it recruits our physical and mental powers, and prepares us for the labors of life. But excess of sleep enervates the body, and stupefies our souls, and is loved only by sluggards.

We have received time and talents from God, to be used according to his direction and to waste the one, and bury the other, is a very great sin. And yet by immoderate sleep, we do both in some degree, for all the time that we sleep beyond what is needful for us, our talents are unemployed, and our time is running out in vain.

C. (:14) Bartering Tactics Can Be Deceitful

"*'Bad, bad,' says the buyer;*
But when he goes his way, then he boasts."

Tremper Longman: Here we have the case of "seller beware." Ancient Near Eastern commercial transactions, as in some quarters even today, were done by barter and negotiation. Here the shrewd buyer makes it seem as if there is something wrong with the merchandise; when the seller parts with it at a low price, the buyer goes to his friends and brags about his good fortune. The function of this proverb seems again to be

a warning against the deception of appearances. Proverbs is often concerned that commercial transactions are fair. Typically (**11:1; 16:11; 20:10**), the warning is directed at the shrewd seller, but here it is the shrewd buyer.

Allen Ross: Shrewdness is one thing, but deceitful misrepresentation in the deal in order to buy under value becomes unethical.

Charles Bridges: We are all engaged in pecuniary transactions. With many it is the main business of life. Yet such are the temptations from our own interest and the selfishness of others and the general example of the world to deviate from a straight line that we should be most grateful for this probing analysis of deceit. The man of God knows that he must do everything to the glory of God.

George Mylne: The spirit of this proverb includes in it, a condemnation of the like methods that sellers use to get bad commodities disposed of. When a man commends his wares above their value, or gives a false account of the price which they cost him, or of the price that he was offered for them, or when he uses deceitful means to conceal their bad properties then he is dealing unrighteously, and seeking the gain by fraud by which he is not so likely to fill his purse as to wound his character, and bring the curse of God upon his substance.

D. (:15) Surpassing Value of Wise Speech

"*There is gold, and an abundance of jewels;*
But the lips of knowledge are a more precious thing."

Robert Clifford: Wise lips are a more precious adornment than the finest jewelry, for they display the wisdom of the heart. Wisdom is more beautiful than gold or silver.

Tremper Longman: This verse is a variant of the teaching that wisdom is better than precious jewels and expensive metals. If a choice must be made, then wisdom is better than these desired objects. The proverb is intended to teach a proper perspective. After all, wealth often comes through wisdom, so better to get that, so, like Solomon, one can be wise and rich!

Charles Bridges: It is divine knowledge that is preeminent here. Human wisdom may captivate the imagination and furnish it with useful information. But the words for the most part die away on the ear. They do not feed the heart. They do not comfort the afflicted, bring hope to the despondent, or teach the ignorant. So while they may be pearls, they are not the pearl of great price, that rare jewel that dims the luster of earth's most splendid vanities (**Matthew 13:45-46**).

But lips that speak knowledge are a rare jewel. How precious is the sound of the messenger of the Gospel when he brings good tidings of great joy to a burdened conscience. Truly the sound of his coming is welcome on account of his message.

George Mylne: wisest and richest of kings, inspired by the Author of wisdom and riches, frequently reminds us, that the lips directed by true knowledge, are a more precious jewel than any that can be found in the mines of the east! A deep impression of this truth, would be of very great advantage to our souls. When a man values gold and rubies above wisdom, he lies exposed to a thousand temptations of a very dangerous kind. For he is like a blind man who knows not where he goes, and will leap into a pit, if he imagines that money is at the bottom of it, because he sees not how deep it is, and how impossible it will be to get out. But he who prefers the lips of knowledge to riches, has his eyes in his head, and steadily observes the ways of religion and happiness.

II. (:16-22) INTEGRITY AND JUSTICE WITH REGARD TO FINANCIAL DEALINGS AND SPEECH

A. (:16) Protect Yourself against Unwise Loans

"*Take his garment when he becomes surety for a stranger;*
And for foreigners, hold him in pledge."

Paul Koptak: The saying may be a parody on the teaching of **Deuteronomy 24:10–13, 17**, that one should not take another's garment in security or at the least should give it back on a cold night. Ironically, one who makes an unwise pledge may well have given his shirt, for he will surely lose it (cf. **Prov. 22:27**).

Tremper Longman: This proverb is another warning against providing loans or supporting loans for another person, particularly for a stranger (see **also 6:1–5; 11:15; 17:18; 22:26; 27:13**). This proverb is addressed to those who have made the loan, and it says that no mercy should be shown to foolish people who stick their necks out in such a way. Better to be generous to someone in need (**11:24; 28:27; 29:7, 14**) than to expect to get paid back for such a loan.

Ernest Lucas: The proverb is probably ironical: anyone who stands pledge for a loan to a stranger is acting stupidly, and their pledge is as good as forfeit from the outset.

George Mylne: Nothing will so soon ruin a man's estate and credit, as **rash suretyship**. If you see a man who engages in putting up security for one who is a stranger to him, and especially for a immoral woman, trust him not if he should swear, and offer you the surest bonds for payment. He will in a very short time become a bankrupt, and therefore lend him nothing. And if you sell him anything without ready money, be sure to have a sufficient pledge. You may even take his garment without any breach of charity, for the law about restoring the garment taken by way of pledge, was made for the benefit of the poor and unfortunate, and not for those who are running to ruin by their own willful folly.

B. (:17) Dishonest Gain Will Not Satisfy

"*Bread obtained by falsehood is sweet to a man,*
But afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel."

Robert Clifford: Food obtained through deceptive behavior provides deceptive nourishment.

Tremper Longman: The principle of the proverb is that material gained by false pretenses or in an illegitimate way may at first seem enjoyable and beneficial, but in the end shows itself harmful. What appears to be bread in the mouth is actually gravel to be spit out. . . The proverb is thus a warning against pursuing gain through false means.

Sid S. Buzzell: Sin, usually attractive in its immediate payoff, ultimately turns on its host (cf. **7:14-23**).

C. (:18) Careful Planning and Wise Counsel

"*Prepare plans by consultation,*
And make war by wise guidance."

Paul Koptak: Here the emphasis is on not knowing all the details or possible outcomes of a situation; for that reason one should seek out advice, practical and ethical, from one who speaks words of knowledge **(20:15**).

Tremper Longman: The wise person does not act on impulse but only after careful reflection (**15:28; 19:2; 20:18, 25; 21:5; 29:20**). This proverb encourages thoughtful preparation for action and then applies this principle particularly to battle. Bad things will happen if one enters battle rashly. The thought is similar to **24:6.** This proverb is an excellent example of the sharpening effect of parallelism. The general principle is given first, but then it is applied to one particular area, warfare. The general principle, though, allows the reader to apply the idea to other aspects of life.

Charles Bridges: To deliberate before we act by seeking advice is the path of wisdom. Even the wisest of men valued this (**1 Kings 12:6**). God has placed us in society, so that we are more or less dependent on each other. So while it is most important to have clear judgment oneself, we must guard against an obstinate and exclusive adherence to our own opinions.

Matthew Henry: Consider, and take advice, whether the war should be begun or no, whether it be just, whether it be prudent, whether we be a match for the enemy, and able to carry it on when it is too late to retreat (**Lu. 14:31**); and, when it is begun, consider how and by what arts it may be prosecuted, for management is as necessary as courage.

George Mylne: Wisdom lies, in the first place, in <u>forming right purposes</u>; and secondly, in devising, and <u>executing proper plans</u> for bringing these good purposes to pass. However good our designs are yet rashness and inconsideration will be sure to render them abortive. And, besides our own wisdom, it is necessary for us, in all matters of importance, to take the advice of the wise and upright. If we have such a high opinion of our own wisdom, that we think we have no need of counsel from other men then we prove ourselves fools of the worst kind, for there is more hope of any other kind of fools, than for those who are wise in their own conceit.

D. (:19) Gossips Cannot Be Trusted

"*He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets,*
Therefore do not associate with a gossip."

Matthew Henry: Those are unprincipled people that go about carrying stories, that make mischief among neighbours and relations, that sow in the minds of people jealousies of their governors, of their ministers, and of one another, that reveal secrets which they are entrusted with or which by unfair means they come to the knowledge of, under pretence of guessing at men's thoughts and intentions, tell that of them which is really false

Robert Clifford: To protect your private thoughts and judgments, stay away from gossips.

George Mylne: Flatterers are generally gossips. They sooth and caress a man to fish his secrets out of him, and they tell the secrets which they have got by these base means, to the next companion they meet, and perhaps make very considerable additions to them, for they take the liberty to add conjectures of their own to what they have heard. By spreading their stories, they sow the seeds of contention among neighbors, and their words are as dainties which go down into the innermost parts of the belly. Beware, then, of those flatterers, who cajole you with good words and fair speeches!

Self love makes us flatterers of ourselves, and disposes us to be well pleased with those who comply with all our humours, assent to all our opinions, and approve of all our actions.

But those who flatter us are not our friends but for the most part the most dangerous enemies we have. If we give them our company we are very likely to hear stories that will vex us. If we tell them any of our secrets we may be sure of having them divulged, and represented to our disadvantage. When they tell us stories about other people, we may judge how they will behave to us for when they were in the company of these people, they flattered them as much as they now flatter us and by their pretenses of friendship, they made a shift to pick up these tales with which we are now entertained.

It is an excess of self love, which makes the company of a flatterer tolerable. It is the lack of love to our neighbors, that makes us bear with tale bearers. But if we will not discountenance them for the sake of our neighbors, let us do it for our own for they will mete out the same measure to us, that they have already meted out to other men.

E. (:20) Cursing Parents Is a Capital Offense

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

Robert Clifford: The extinguishing of a lamp is a metaphor for death (**Job 18:5, 6; 21:17; Prov. 13:9; 24:20; Isa. 43:17**). Commandment and instruction are called a light

and a lamp in **Prov. 6:23**. One who despises parents quenches a great source of instruction and discipline.

F. (:21) Quick Wealth Can Be Fleeting

"*An inheritance gained hurriedly at the beginning,*
Will not be blessed in the end."

Richard Clifford: An inheritance in an agricultural society such as Israel typically was not money but farmland, which was believed to require God's blessing to be productive. . . One ought not to take one's inheritance hastily, perhaps in the sense of taking it with undue haste from elderly parents.

Paul Koptak: Whether the inheritance is gained quickly or greedily, the point of the proverb is that inappropriate behavior at the start cannot lead to blessing, divine or human, at the end (cf. **20:17**). **Choices have predictable outcomes.**

Tremper Longman: This proverb may well fit in with the extensive teaching on the dangers of "*quick wealth*" (**11:18; 13:11**). It may envision a young, immature person coming into an inheritance because of the untimely early death of parents. Without the wisdom needed to manage well, the material goods are not a blessing but rather quickly evaporate.

Allen Ross: The verb describes a hurried or hastened activity; perhaps a wayward son seizes the inheritance quickly (cf. **Lk 15:12**) or even drives out his parents (cf. **Pr 19:26**). In either case divine justice is at work—this enterprise "*will not be blessed*" (*lōʾ tebōrāk*); rather than prosper, it will probably be wasted.

G. (:22) Vengeance Belongs to the Lord

"*Do not say, 'I will repay evil';*
Wait for the LORD, and He will save you."

Tremper Longman: The wise do not look for revenge. They rather can expect their God to act on their behalf. Christian readers will recognize the same idea behind Paul's teaching in **Rom. 12:17–20**: "*Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord*" (TNIV).

Allen Ross: The response of the righteous must be to "*wait*" (*qawwēh*) on the Lord; this waiting involves belief in and reliance on God. The work of the Lord here focuses on the positive side—he is a deliverer (*yōšaʿ*) rather than an avenger, although to deliver the righteous involves judgment on the wicked.

Matthew Henry: We must refer ourselves to God, and leave it to him to plead our cause, to maintain our right, and reckon with those that do us wrong in such a way and manner as he thinks fit and in his own due time: "Wait on the Lord, and attend his pleasure, acquiesce in his will, and he does not say that he will punish him that has injured thee

(instead of desiring that thou must forgive him and pray for him), but he will save thee, and that is enough. He will protect thee, so that thy passing by one injury shall not (as is commonly feared) expose thee to another; nay, he will recompense good to thee, to balance thy trouble and encourage thy patience," as David hoped, when Shimei cursed him, **2 Sa. 16:12**.

III. (:23-26) INTEGRITY, PERPLEXITY, RASH VOWS AND PURGING OF EVIL

A. (:23) Dishonest Business Practices

"*Differing weights are an abomination to the LORD,*
And a false scale is not good."

Charles Bridges: Three times [God] drives this point home (**verses 10, 14, 23**). Yet this is hardly vain repetition. There must be an important reason for this to be repeated.

The truth of this proverb should be especially taken note of in our evil commercial system. Differing weights are continually condemned as an abomination – yes, they are detested by God; yet how often are they ignored as if they were a necessity.

George Mylne: Injustice is a poisonous weed which springs up very plenteously in the heart of men. It needs great pains to pluck it up, and the inspired writer does not grudge his pains for this purpose. When he might have been dazzling us with new discoveries of surprising truths in every sentence he repeats the same warnings over and over, to reclaim men from every instance of dishonesty. How inexcusable will the unjust trader be, if he continues unreformed, after all that the Spirit of God has inculcated so frequently for his conviction and amendment.

B. (:24) Perplexity of Divine Providence

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

Paul Koptak: The juxtaposition of human plans and intentions with God's sovereign action in human affairs is not meant to discourage planning or activity but rather to guide it. The wise do well to seek counsel about this plan (20:18), listening instead of making rash or hurtful statements (**20:19–20**).

Tremper Longman: The teaching of this proverb is similar to that found in **16:1, 9**. The path of a person, representing one's life journey, is enigmatic. Indeed, to claim to know where one is heading is presumptuous and dangerous. The book of Proverbs certainly does not denigrate planning; just the opposite is true (**16:1, 3**). Yet planning must be done with the awareness that God can intervene and change one's future. This proverb is a call to recognize God's sovereignty over one's life.

Ernest Lucas: The main point of **v. 24** is Yahweh's sovereignty, belief in which is essential if one is to trust him to uphold the moral order. Proverbs, like the rest of the

OT, holds in tension belief in God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Here, as in **16:1, 9**, recognition of God's sovereignty acts as a counter to human hubris. It means that there is an element of uncertainty and mystery in life, but that is no excuse for not thinking and planning ahead (**15:22; 16:3; 20:18**).

Allen Ross: How can anyone delude himself into thinking that he does not need the Lord when even a strong man's activities are divinely prepared (see, e.g., **Ge 50:20**; see also **Pr 3:6** for the proper advice in view of this truth). McKane, 546–47, says: "No man can walk with enlightened assurance along the path of life by reason of a well-cultivated nicety of judgment and power of intellectual penetration. He is dependent at every step of the way on Yahweh, and without his light on his path his journey is deprived of safe guidance and enlightened purposiveness."

Charles Bridges: Here are <u>two basic principles</u>: God's controllable power and sovereignty, and man's absolute dependence and helplessness. Here is no infringement of freedom on the one hand and no excuse for laziness on the other hand. Man often acts as if he is the master of his own situation, as if his steps are his own. Or else, having the warped idea of every event being predetermined, he sits still instead of working diligently,so the Lord's purposes may be fulfilled. But the humble Chrisitan **exercises his freedom in the spirit of dependence on God**. His steps are directed by the Lord, who both inspires the effort and brings success.

C. (:25) Rash Vows

"*It is a snare for a man to say rashly, 'It is holy!'*
And after the vows to make inquiry."

Richard Clifford: Proverbs is against **precipitous vows**. One is bound by one's words (**Lev. 27:28**). One should reflect on the cost and consequences before vowing rather than after. The great biblical example of a reckless vow is **Judg. 11:29–40**: Jephthah vowed to offer up as a holocaust "*whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites*" and ended up sacrificing his only daughter. See also the oath of Saul (**1 Samuel 14**) and of Herod (Matt. 14:1–12). What is said of vows applies also to human promises generally.

Paul Koptak: The metaphor of the trap should register with anyone who has made a promise, only later to wish he or she had been more careful.

Tremper Longman: This proverb, whose syntax seems a bit awkward, fits in with others that warn concerning the **danger of speaking before thinking**. Here the stakes are particularly high since impetuous commitments are being made in terms of one's relationship to God. A vow (**Lev. 7:16–17; 22:18–23**) is a commitment made to God if God sees fit to answer one's request. This commitment could take the form of money or some other possession that would be turned over to the sanctuary upon the answer to the prayer. . . One should not speak mindlessly about holy matters.

George Mylne: It is no less a snare for a man, after vows, to make inquiry, in order to evade the obligation of his solemn engagements. Some men are much more forward in making, than in paying vows. Their religion lies in transient flows of affection not in solid piety. When their affections are roused by some remarkable providence, or allured by some pleasant blessing; or roused by some alarming sermon then they are ready with their vows to the Most High God. But when their affections return to their usual temper, they endeavor to find out some shift, to free their consciences from their obligations, which they voluntarily took up on themselves. Their conduct draws them into the snares of the devil, who will suggest an hundred pretenses to excuse the breach of them.

We must therefore be cautious and considerate in making vows and speedy in performing them. If we are Christians, we have engaged ourselves to be the Lord's. Justice and truth and gratitude require us to pay our vows, and every transgression derives the great aggravation of treachery from our sacred promises. If our promises to men must be kept inviolate then how much more our promise to God! If it is sinful to make inquiry after vows then who can express the guilt that arises out of downright violations of them!

D. (:26) Purging Evil from the Kingdom

"*A wise king winnows the wicked,*
And drives the threshing wheel over them."

Richard Clifford: In this saying, the royal duty of giving judgment is portrayed in two agricultural images—exposing grain to a current of air so that the chaff is blown away, and rolling a wheel or drum over a cereal to break the husk.

Paul Koptak: The metaphor carries elements of judgment and repayment, just as kings in the ancient Near East were often depicted as driving their chariots over their enemies. Yet this king is not called mighty but "*wise*," hinting at his powers of discernment. To "*winnow*" is also to scatter the chaff to the winds; just as Yahweh scattered the people of Israel in exile (**Jer. 31:10**), so this **wisdom** is also **power**.

Tremper Longman: A wise king is set against evildoers, and he will use his considerable power to destroy them. Evil in the kingdom will destroy it, so before that happens the king should destroy them.

Allen Ross: A wise king purges his kingdom of the wicked. Using loosely synonymous parallelism, the sage draws on the image of winnowing to explain how the king removes evil from his empire. The metaphor implies that the king can identify and rightly judge evildoers. The figure of driving the wheel over them represents a threshing process; the sharp iron wheels of the threshing cart easily served the purpose (cf. **Isa 28:27–28**). So this image also expresses the king's discrimination and ability to destroy evil from his domain.

IV. (:27-30) LIGHT OF THE CONSCIENCE, FOUNDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT, GLORY OF YOUNG AND OLD, AND VALUE OF PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT

A. (:27) Function of the God-Given Conscience

"*The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD,*
Searching all the innermost parts of his being."

Paul Koptak: Yahweh searches out the inner regions, seeking wickedness to drive it out. The image of God's light searching human interior spaces fits in well with neighboring proverbs on the interior life (**20:5–6, 8–9, 26**) and the sages' fascination with the effect of that inner life on human behavior (**20:24–25**). . . Wisdom allows a person to do what the lamp does—to reveal what is hidden.

Tremper Longman: The point of the saying is that the person lives only because of Yahweh. The use of *nišmâ* for "*breath*" here clearly invites us to recall the very creation of the first human in **Gen. 2:7**. The lamp image makes more sense in connection with the second colon. In essence, nothing is hidden from the lamplike illumination of Yahweh, who knows us inside and out (**Prov. 15:11; Ps. 139**).

Allen Ross: The *nešāmâ* (GK 5972) is that inner spiritual part of human life that was inbreathed at creation (Ge 2:7) and that constitutes humans as spiritual beings with moral, intellectual, and spiritual capacities. This spiritual nature includes the capacity to know and please God—it serves as the functioning conscience (the metaphor of "*lamp*").

This point is further developed in the second part; the searching makes it possible for people to know themselves. If one's spiritual life is functioning properly (i.e., yielded to God through salvation and controlled by his Word [**Heb 4:12**]), then there should be increasingly less self-deception or indifference to righteousness.

B. (:28) Righteous Foundations of Government

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

Richard Clifford: The king is the agent of God and so God protects him as he exercises his important function. The venerable word pair "*loyalty and fidelity*" are personified as soldiers who protect the throne, but the king also has his role to play. His own conduct also stabilizes the throne. The saying affirms the importance of divine protection and human virtue, without trying to explore the relation between them.

Allen Ross: It is the Lord and his faithfulness to his covenant that ultimately makes the empire secure; but the enjoyment of divine protection requires the king to rule with loyalty to the covenant.

George Mylne: Truth must be joined with mercy in the administration of a good prince. Faithfulness and uprightness, in conjunction with mercy, are the sure and lasting pillars

of the throne. If truth and mercy were banished from all the world beside it should be found in the hearts of kings.

C. (:29) Distinctives of Different Stages in Life

"*The glory of young men is their strength,*
And the honor of old men is their gray hair."

Tremper Longman: This proverb is an observation on **what brings glory to young and old men** and, in essence, compares them. The observation may serve as motivation for young men to grow in wisdom and for older men not to commiserate for their loss of youthful energy. Vigor has been replaced with something that, certainly within the context of the book of Proverbs, is considered more important: wisdom. The latter is indicated by the reference to gray hair. Here modern Western society is out of odds with ancient Near Eastern and specifically biblical ideas. Today gray hair is almost something to be ashamed of. Youth now is venerated, but in antiquity gray hair, indicating advanced age, was a sign of distinction. The reason age was respected was that, all things being equal, it meant that a person had matured and was wiser than a youth. Experience would have led to advanced knowledge, and the very fact of surviving to old age meant that life strategies were successful.

Ernest Lucas: Murphy comments, "While the strength of youth is not to be disdained, he has a future to face, and it is there that a true judgment of a person lies." The sages certainly did not share the modern veneration of youthfulness over age. The story of Rehoboam's folly (**1 Kgs. 12:1-20**) provides a lesson for a king of the value of wisdom over the 'macho' tendency of youthfulness.

Allen Ross: Both youth and old people have their glory. This observation reminds us that there are different commendations in life. For young men it is strength; for old men it is gray hair.

George Mylne: Equality of age and dispositions naturally produces affection and friendship but difference of age and talents tends too much to produce mutual alienation. To remedy this, the wise man puts the old and the young in mind that each of them have their different endowments, which should endear them to one another.

Old men should not despise the young for their lack of experience and gravity, for God has honored them with vigor of body, which qualifies them for active service to God and their generation. How could old men defend their lives and properties, or how could they exist, if they were not assisted by the strength of the young?

Far less should the young despise the old for their infirmities, or for that fretfulness of temper which old age too often produces. For God has favored them with length of days, and crowned them with gray hair, the badge of their experience, and, it is to be hoped, of their wisdom. If the hoary head is the splendor of old men, it should draw respect from the young, who are commanded by God to rise up before the hoary head, and to honor the face of the old man.

D. (:30) Benefit of Physical Punishment

"*Stripes that wound scour away evil,*
And strokes reach the innermost parts."

Richard Clifford: The words for "*blows*" and "*wounds*" occur together in **Isa. 1:6**. The meaning may be that outer blows destroy the inner person.

Paul Koptak: Even as Yahweh's lamp searches out the "*inmost being*" (*ḥadre—beṭen*, "*the inner chambers of belly*"; cf. **20:27**), so blows and beatings purge the "*inmost being*" of evil. The juxtaposition of discernment and judgment that runs throughout the chapter (see **20:8, 26**) suggests that one can either acquire the capacity for discernment to discipline self or fail to learn discernment and suffer the discipline of another who has.

Sid S. Buzzell: The purpose of corporal punishment is not to inflict pain but to veer one's conduct from sin. Such punishment, however, is not merely to change a person's conduct out of fear of physical pain but to help him mature (to purge his *inmost being*; cf. **v. 27**).

Tremper Longman: Proverbs does not shrink from **physical punishment** to support the acquisition of wisdom and the concomitant avoidance of evil (**10:13; 13:24; 19:18, 25; 20:30; 22:15; 23:13–14; 26:3; 29:15, 17, 19**). Though the proverb may be considered harsh, it does not imply that a person would be hurt seriously. Indeed, the obvious fact that evil flourishes among a generation raised on the advice not to inflict physical punishments like spanking calls into serious question whether modern child-rearing strategies are more beneficial than biblical wisdom. The proverb claims that physical punishment does more than produce outward conformity; **it also helps transform the heart.**

TEXT: Proverbs 21:1-31

TITLE: MISCELLANEOUS PROVERBS

Verse 1 – Divine Sovereignty (over even the King)

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

Richard Clifford: It takes great skill and power to direct water, whether it is confining the cosmic waters at creation to their proper spheres or bringing water to fertilize arid land. Water by its nature is "chaotic"—powerful and elusive. It also takes great skill to direct the heart of a king, for the king's mind is inscrutable and beyond human control. Yet God controls waters and the royal heart with ease.

Paul Koptak: Here the emphasis is on the greater purposes of God. Even the king is a subject of Yahweh, for the seat of human intentions, the heart, is in Yahweh's hand. Just as water is directed to a good purpose by digging irrigation ditches and building dams, so the king's heart will follow the directives of Yahweh to establish his purpose of justice.

Allen Ross: No human ruler is supreme; to put it another way, the Lord is truly the **King of kings**. Scripture offers many examples of the truth of this proverb (**Ezr 7:21; Isa 10:6–7; 41:2–4; Da 2:21; Jn 19:11**).

Tremper Longman: The modern equivalent to the image of a "canal of water" in the hand of Yahweh would be to say that the king is like "putty" in his hands.

Charles Bridges: Most people who reflect about life acknowledge that God is behind everything. In inert matter he acts by physical force; in wild animals, by instinct and appetite; in intelligent beings, by motives suited to their faculties; in his redeemed people, by the influence of grace. This proverb reminds us of one aspect of his providential care. The general truth, previously stated that man is entirely dependent on God is illustrated by the king's heart, which is under God's sway.

George Mylne: The like influence has God upon the hearts of kings. He does not destroy their natural faculties, nor take from them the freedom of their wills; and, what is still more astonishing he leaves them for the most part under the power of those natural corruptions which dispose them to exalt themselves above God, and to oppose his will. Yet still he makes them the instruments of his pleasure, and the ministers of his providence.

Verse 2 – Divine Insight

"*Every man's way is right in his own eyes,*
But the LORD weighs the hearts."

Richard Clifford: Human beings may make judgments about the rightness of their actions, whether their "ways" have been "straight." But Yahweh can scrutinize the heart and judge truly. Human judgment is partial and incomplete, but God's is full and definitive.

Paul Koptak: Yahweh alone can determine what is known and what is hidden from a person's own self-perceptions.

George Mylne: This is the same useful instruction which the wise man already gave us, and no admonition is more necessary to be inculcated than this: that men are too often flatterers of themselves, and ought to remember that they have an omniscient judge who will not be mocked nor imposed on but searches their hearts, to give to every man according to his ways, and the inward disposition of his heart. The inspired writers of both testaments insist greatly on this point, and our Lord in his sermons frequently warned men against the dangerous influence of self-deceit.

Verse 3 – Divine Standard

"*To do righteousness and justice*
Is desired by the LORD rather than sacrifice."

Richard Clifford: The two qualities are the heart of biblical religion, summing up the proper attitude toward God. To live in accord with them is to make of one's own life an offering pleasing to God; there is a sacred dimension to just action.

Paul Koptak: The comparison does not demean devotional practices but does observe that it is easier to have sacrifice without right living than it is to have right living without religious practice. Thankfully, believers do not have to choose. If we did, however, the proverb reminds us that Yahweh has had plenty of experience with people who believed that sacrifice was enough (**21:27; Jer. 7:1–11**). Perhaps this proverb parallels **Proverbs 16:3**, urging us to commit our work to Yahweh in righteousness.

Allen Ross: It does not teach that ritual acts of worship are to be avoided; rather, it stresses that religious acts are valueless without righteous living.

George Mylne: Sacrifices were appointed by God, they typified Christ, they were acceptable to God, as expressions of faith and obedience but they were detestable to him when they were valued on their own account, as if they had been instituted for their own sake, or to give men opportunity of pleasing God so much as to procure an allowance for the neglect of more important service.

Sacrifices were appointed for a single nation -- judgment and justice are required from every nation, and from every man under Heaven. Sacrifices were required by a positive law, which depended on the sovereign will of God, not on the nature of God and the observation of them was dispensed with on many occasions. But the justice is founded in the nature of God, obliges all men at all times, and can never be dispensed with. The law of sacrifices is long ago abolished but the law of righteousness is an eternal statute.

Sacrifices had no goodness in their own nature; and when men rested on them, they were abominable to God. Righteousness and justice are a part of the image of God in man, and have an everlasting excellency in their nature. Sacrifices typified Christ, and were set aside in consequence of his great atoning sacrifice but justice is not abolished by faith in Christ. Nay, it is established, and shall continue when Heaven and earth are no more.

Verse 4 – Sinfulness of Pride

"*Haughty eyes and a proud heart,*
The lamp of the wicked, is sin."

George Mylne: That a haughty look is abominable to God, is no surprise to us for it is abominable even to men, and must be infinitely more abhorred by God. We do not wonder to hear that the proud heart is hateful to him, for he is the Searcher of hearts, and is jealous of his own honor, and cannot bear that men should exalt themselves into a rivalship with him.

Paul Koptak: The wicked take as their guiding light the conceit that they can judge what is right. Believing that what is right for them is all that matters, they do not care what is acceptable to Yahweh (cf. **21:3**). Throughout Scripture, haughty eyes and arrogant kings will be brought low (**Isa. 2:11, 17; 10:12**), but kings who reject arrogance are promised a long dynasty (**Deut. 17:20**).

Tremper Longman: The enigma comes with the metaphor of the "*lamp*." Perhaps the idea is that the eyes and heart (standing for the outer and inner person) are the lamp of the individual, which in the case of the wicked are perverted. In this understanding, there may be an intentional contrast with the "*lamp of Yahweh*" in **20:27**.

Verse 5 – Diligence vs. Hasty Shortcuts

"*The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage,*
But everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty."

Richard Clifford: The diligent will end up with earnings, for they take time to plan and reflect. Frenetic activity leads to waste.

Paul Koptak: Haste in general is disapproved throughout Proverbs (**20:21; 29:20**), but here the contrast of "*poverty*" with "*profit*" may point to a scheme designed to make a fast buck.

Allen Ross: Patience and planning lead to prosperity. By antithetical parallelism the verse exhorts industriousness. . . The text here warns about the danger of hasty shortcuts (see also **10:4; 28:20**).

Matthew Henry: Those that are hasty, that are rash and inconsiderate in their affairs, and will not take time to think, that are greedy of gain, by right or wrong, and make haste to be rich by unjust practices or unwise projects, are in the ready road to poverty.

Their thoughts and contrivances, by which they hope to raise themselves, will ruin them.

Verse 6 – Ill-Gotten Gain Is Fleeting and Destructive

"*The getting of treasures by a lying tongue*
Is a fleeting vapor, the pursuit of death."

Richard Clifford: Treasures acquired by deceitful words are not only ephemeral ("*a fleeting breath*"), but are dangerous ("*deadly snares*") to those who possess them. Ill-gotten goods cry out to heaven for retribution.

Paul Koptak: This saying equates treasures obtained by deceit with things transitory and deadly.

Allen Ross: The point, then, is that ill-gotten gain is a fleeting pleasure and a crime for which punishment is prepared.

Tremper Longman: Proverbs is not against the acquisition of wealth, but it must be done with honesty and industry. Fraudulent pursuit of wealth is consistently condemned (**22:16**) along with any form of lying (**6:16–19; 25:18**). Here the proverb cuts to the reality of the situation. These people think they are going after material possessions, but what they will gain is a meaningless life and ultimately death.

Verse 7 – The Unjust Wicked Will Reap Their Own Violence

"*The violence of the wicked will drag them away,*
Because they refuse to act with justice."

Paul Koptak: Actual physical violence is probably in view here. The irony that the wicked's own violent behavior "*will drag them away*" creates the picture of a person caught and dragged like a fish in a net (**Hab. 1:15**) and extends the metaphor of the snare from **Proverbs 21:6**.

Allen Ross: The wicked will be destroyed in their own devices.

Verse 8 – Actions Reveal Character

"*The way of a guilty man is crooked,*
But as for the pure, his conduct is upright."

Allen Ross: Righteous behavior reveals righteous character. The antithetical clause asserts that it is also true that sinful acts betray the wicked.

Verse 9 – Priority of Peaceful Simplicity

"*It is better to live in a corner of a roof,*
Than in a house shared with a contentious woman."

Paul Koptak: Obviously someone took pleasure in creating **new variations** on the formula to intensify the comparisons. It is better to live in a leaky house (**19:13; 27:15**), no, better to live on the roof of the house (**21:9=25:24**), no, better to live in the desert and not even have a house (**21:19**), than to live with a quarrelsome wife. This woman is known for her ability to stir up conflict—a sign of folly also for a quarrelsome man (**20:3**).

Tremper Longman: While marriage and companionship are positive things in Proverbs, it is better to be alone than with a person who makes life unbearable. Though the roof of an ancient Israelite home was a living space, unlike most modern homes, the location would be an uncomfortable place to live and sleep. Van Leeuwen states well the point of the proverb: "One is better exposed to nature than to a wife's 'storms.'" In its primary setting, this proverb, consistent with the whole book, is directly addressed to a male audience. Women who read it today must simply substitute "man/husband" into the proverb; it can apply with equal force in that direction. The principle is that it is difficult to live with those who are constantly looking for a fight. Similar proverbs may be found at **21:19; 25:24; 27:15–16**.

Verse 10 – Propensity for Evil by the Wicked

"*The soul of the wicked desires evil;*
His neighbor finds no favor in his eyes."

Richard Clifford: Colon A: the wicked (*rāšā*ʿ) are so obsessed by their desire for evil (*rā*ʿ) that (colon B) they totally neglect their neighbor (*rēʿēhû*). In other words, the wicked are so absorbed by *rā*ʿ that they forget *rē*ʿ. Absorption with evil kills one's humanity.

Allen Ross: The person who lives to satisfy his craving for evil thinks only of himself. McKane, 556, observes that since humanity consists of reaching out to help others, "the man who cannot transcend his own self-assertiveness is in a prison and is dehumanized." It is the propensity for evil that constitutes him as "*wicked*."

Tremper Longman: This proverb helps us understand the psychology of the wicked. These are not people who occasionally do bad things; they habitually act in bad ways. Thus, the second colon is not surprising. They do not give their neighbors any slack. If their neighbors stand in the way of the fulfillment of their wickedness, to which they are addicted, then the neighbors will suffer.

George Mylne: Wicked men are not only doers of iniquity but their souls are fully inclined to it. With their souls they crave evil; and although their consciences frequently remonstrate against sin, and are a strong bridle upon the lusts of most unregenerate people yet sin dwells as a king in their inner man, and is not resisted with hatred like a tyrant but is allowed to possess the throne of the heart. This is a miserable disposition, for sin is the worst of all evils. No man expressly and directly desires misery and yet all who love sin desire the worst of misery in reality for sin is the sickness, the death, the ruin of the soul.

Verse 11 – Differing Responses to Discipline

"*When the scoffer is punished, the naive becomes wise;*
But when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge."

Allen Ross: The wise person gains knowledge through "*instruction*," which not only causes him to know but also gives insight into the issues of life. The wise person never stops learning. By contrast the "*mocker*" (*lēṣ*) is unteachable. Nevertheless he should be punished, because the "*simple*" (*petî*) will "gain wisdom" through seeing his punishment (see also **19:25**).

Verse 12 – The Righteous Must Punish the Wicked

"*The righteous one considers the house of the wicked,*
Turning the wicked to ruin."

Paul Koptak: The NIV text note shows that "*the Righteous One*" translates *ṣaddiq* here; that is, the One who brings ruin is **Yahweh**. Throughout the wisdom writings it is God who overthrows the wicked and frustrates the words of the unfaithful (cf. **Job 12:19; Prov. 22:12**).

Allen Ross: **Righteousness will be satisfied when the wicked are punished**. There are two different ways that this proverb can be taken.

- The easiest interpretation is to take *ṣaddîq* to refer to God, "*the Righteous One*." God observes the house of the wicked and then hurls them to ruin (see **22:12**; Toy, 402; Plaut, 220; Kidner, 143). But Proverbs does not refer to God in this way.
- The other interpretation takes *ṣaddîq* to refer to a "righteous man" (see NIV margin), presumably a judge or ruler, who, although he may be kindly disposed to the family of the wicked, is obliged to condemn him (Greenstone, 225).

Charles Bridges: The Righteous One takes note of the house of the wicked and brings the wicked to ruin. The workings of providence are often puzzling. The prosperity of the wicked is an affront to faith and brings about harsh thought about God (**Psalm 73:2-14**). But when the man who trusts in the Lord looks with the eye of faith, he sees far beyond the dazzling glory of the present moment. When you take note of the house of the wicked, you will not just observe its splendor but will reflect on how it will end. Its prosperity will be short-lived, and its destruction is certain. All this is understood by faith.

Matthew Henry:

1. As we read this verse, it shows why good men, when they come to understand things aright, will not envy the prosperity of evil-doers. When they see the house of the wicked, how full it is perhaps of all the good things of this life, they are tempted to envy; but when they wisely consider it, when they look upon it with an eye of faith, when they see God overthrowing the wicked for their wickedness, that there is a curse

upon their habitation which will certainly be the ruin of it ere long, they see more reason to despise them, or pity them, than to fear or envy them.

2. Some give another sense of it: The righteous man (the judge or magistrate, that is entrusted with the execution of justice, and the preservation of public peace) examines the house of the wicked, searches it for arms or for stolen goods, makes a diligent enquiry concerning his family and the characters of those about him, that he may by his power overthrow the wicked for their wickedness and prevent their doing any further mischief, that he may fire the nests where the birds of prey are harboured or the unclean birds.

Verse 13 – No Mercy for the Merciless

"*He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor*
Will also cry himself and not be answered."

Richard Clifford: It would be hard to imagine a more concise and challenging statement of the importance of the poor in God's sight. One must hear the cry of the poor in order to be heard by God. Neglect them and you will be cut off from God. See also **14:31; 17:5; 19:17; 22:22–23; Ps. 41:2.**

Allen Ross: **Those who show no mercy will not obtain mercy**. Measure for measure justice is expressed by this cause-and-effect statement. The one who shuts his ears from the cry of the poor (i.e., refuses to help) will not be listened to when he cries out for help. So talionic justice is meted out for the omission of a commandment as well as for evil acts. See **Luke 16:19–31** for an example.

Tremper Longman: If people do not respond to calls for help, then when they are in trouble, no one will help them. This proverb is a call to be sensitive to requests from the needy. It fits in with others that show a concern for those in need (**22:2; 28:27; 29:7, 14**).

Verse 14 – Effectiveness of Bribes

"*A gift in secret subdues anger,*
And a bribe in the bosom, strong wrath."

Allen Ross: **Bribes can effectively pacify an angry person**. The two clauses are synonymous; the first uses the more neutral word *mattān* ("*gift*") and the second the word *šōḥad* ("*bribe*"). Kidner, 143, notes that their parallelism in the proverb underscores how hard it often is to discern the difference. The verse does not condemn or condone; it merely observes the **effectiveness of the practice**.

Matthew Henry: A handsome present, prudently managed, will turn away some men's wrath when it seemed implacable, and disarm the keenest and most passionate resentments. Covetousness is commonly a master-sin and has the command of other lusts. *Pecuniae obediunt omnia* -- Money commands all things. Thus Jacob pacified Esau and Abigail David.

Tremper Longman: It may be a matter of the right time and right place for a bribe. Perhaps if the motive is good and it does not pervert justice, a bribe was considered the right thing to do. Indeed, one can imagine scenarios where a bribe might actually allow justice to prevail.

Verse 15 – Different Reactions to the Execution of Justice

"*The execution of justice is joy for the righteous,*
But is terror to the workers of iniquity."

Lindsay Wilson: Reading these two proverbs [14 & 15] together is important. The effect of a bribe or gift is sometimes observed quite neutrally in Proverbs (e.g. **17:8; 18:16; 19:6b**), but when it is given in secret or concealed (lit. '*in the bosom'*), it is linked to perverting justice (**17:23**). Thus, while **verse 14** indicates that a bribe or gift can effectively turn aside the anger of another, **verse 15** introduces the **wider concept of justice** that acts as an implied critique of this form of bribery. The doing of justice (**v. 15**) is an alternative to securing unwarranted favour by bribery, and when justice prevails, the righteous delight but wrongdoers are terrified or dismayed.

Richard Clifford: When justice is done, prosperity ("*joy*") comes to the righteous, and ruin comes to the wicked. "*Joy*," as in **10:28** and **21:17**, means outward rejoicing, and suggests prosperity.

Allen Ross: How people respond to justice reveals their character. The occasion -- "*When justice is done*" -- can refer to a legal decision or to doing right in general. The point is that people who are law-abiding citizens are pleased with justice; those who are not are terrified by it, tend to ridicule it, and try to get around it in some way.

Verse 16 – Abandoning Wisdom Is Self Destructive

"*A man who wanders from the way of understanding*
Will rest in the assembly of the dead."

Richard Clifford: Leaving the way of wisdom puts one on the way of the wicked, which has its own goal—death. The Rephaim are the shadowy inhabitants of Sheol (**Ps. 88:11; Prov. 2:18; 9:18**). The association of "*way*" and "*path*" with death is frequently made in Proverbs (**5:5; 7:27; 12:28; 14:12; 16:25**).

Allen Ross: **Those who abandon the way of wisdom inevitably ruin their lives**. The verse is a single sentence with the second part providing the predicate. The subject matter is one who wanders away from the "*path of understanding*" or prudence (*haśkēl*), i.e., one who does not live according to the knowledge, discipline, and insight of wisdom. Such a person "*comes to rest*" in the "*company of the shades*" (*qehal repāʾîm*; "*dead*," NIV). The verb "*rest*" (*nûaḥ*, GK 5663) does not carry with it the comforting idea of repose but merely that of "*dwell*," for to rest among the "*shades*" is to be numbered among the dead. Physical death is again presented as the punishment for folly, which is sin. Plaut, 221, remarks, "Errant man will destroy himself before his

time"; he will follow the broad way that leads to destruction and find himself among the dead (**Mt 7:13–14**).

Verse 17 – High Cost of Self-Indulgent Pleasure

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

Richard Clifford: Those who seek primarily the enjoyment of wealth instead of the practice of virtue will not attain the first. Wealth is a gift of God given only to those who practice virtue.

Allen Ross: **Living a life of self-indulgent pleasure leads to poverty**. By two synonymous lines the sage makes his point that the unbridled love of the finest things of life is very costly. "*Joy*" (*śimḥâ*; "*pleasure*," NIV; GK 8525) represents the effect of the good life; "*wine and oil*" represent the cause for joy (so the metonymies work together). "*Oil*" signifies the anointing that goes with the luxurious life (see **Pss 23:5; 104:15; Am 6:6**). There is nothing wrong with joy or with enjoying the finest things in life. The "*love*" that is here portrayed must be excessive or uncontrolled, because it brings one to poverty. Perhaps other responsibilities are being neglected or the people are trying to live above their means.

Verse 18 – Wicked Destined for Punishment

"*The wicked is a ransom for the righteous,*
And the treacherous is in the place of the upright."

Tremper Longman: No matter how one cuts it, **this proverb is difficult**. The idea is clear enough. *The wicked/treacherous are a ransom for the righteous/virtuous*. That must mean that the first pays the penalty for the second. But if the punishment deserved by the righteous is paid by the wicked, where is the justice in that? Further, if the righteous need a ransom, are they really righteous? Perhaps the proverb is being sarcastic. The wicked will ultimately get all the punishment.

Allen Ross: If it is taken to mean that the wicked suffers the evil he has prepared for the righteous, then it harmonizes with Proverbs (e.g., **11:8**). The saying is either a general statement or an ideal that in calamity the righteous escape but the wicked perish in their stead (e.g., **Haman** in the book of Esther).

Verse 19 – Anything Is Preferred to Living with a Nagging Wife

"*It is better to live in a desert land,*
Than with a contentious and vexing woman."

Allen Ross: Being alone is preferable to enduring domestic strife. This verse reiterates the theme of **v.9** (see also **25:24**), with one change -- "*a desert*," which would be sparsely settled and quiet. These verses surely advise one to be careful in choosing a marriage partner and then to be diligent in cultivating the proper graces to make the marriage enjoyable.

George Mylne: Contention and anger commonly go together, and they kindle a flame that can scarcely be extinguished. The wise man has already told us, that it is better to dwell in an ill-thatched house, or even on a corner of the house-top, without any covering from the storm than with a contentious woman. But here he goes further, and says that it is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman. The wilderness would make a very bad habitation, because there are the lion's dens, and the habitation of jackels so that a dweller in the desert would be not only destitute of every convenience but exposed to constant perils of his life.

Yet it would be a more desirable habitation, than a costly house with the company of a woman who was tormenting her husband with everlasting contentions. The contentious woman is a greater monster than the tiger of the desert, and her tongue is more noisome than the tongue of the viper!

Verse 20 – Wise Stewardship of Wealth vs. Squandering Riches

"*There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise,*
But a foolish man swallows it up."

Richard Clifford: The antithesis is in the way the wise and the foolish handle wealth. One preserves it and the other consumes it.

Paul Koptak: This saying contrasts the wise one who practices moderation and foresight and the fool who swallows everything in gluttony and shortsightedness. **Like 21:17**, this proverb urges control of appetite and thrift as two cures for gluttony. However, read along with **Ecclesiastes 2:18–19**, the proverb could be a "somber comment on the ephemeral nature of wealth," for one may gather goods only to leave them to a fool to squander.

Verse 21 – Rewards of Making Righteousness Your Priority

"*He who pursues righteousness and loyalty*
Finds life, righteousness and honor."

Richard Clifford: The Hebrew verb "*to pursue*" is strong, conveying energy and determination, at times having the sense "to hunt down." In this saying, the intense pursuit comes upon something other than the original object of the pursuit—long and vigorous life and honor. Life and honor come from the pursuit of virtue. First pursue virtue and other things will be given. "*First seek the kingdom of God and its justice and all these things will be given to you*" (**Matt. 8:33**).

Paul Koptak: In seeking these virtues, one also finds the three primary desires of the proverbs: life, prosperity, and honor (cf. **3:16; 22:4**). One cannot do better than to find long life, wealth enough to share, and a good name in the community. By implication, this is the same "*wise*" person of **21:20** and **22.**

Verse 22 – Wisdom Can Be More Effective than Strength

"*A wise man scales the city of the mighty,*
And brings down the stronghold in which they trust."

Richard Clifford: "*To go up*" is a Hebrew idiom for mounting a military assault and "*to bring down*" is an idiom for defeating an enemy. This is one of several maxims in wisdom literature about the **superiority of wisdom to strength in war**. Cf. **Qoh. 9:13–16; Prov. 16:32; 24:5**.

Allen Ross: It is more effective to use wisdom than to rely on strength. This proverb uses a military scene to describe the superiority of wisdom; the lines are loosely synonymous. It tells how the wise can scale the walls of the city of the "*mighty*" (*gibbōrîm*) and pull down their trusted stronghold. In a war the victory is credited not so much to the infantry as to the **tactician**, the general who plans the attack. **Brilliant strategy wins wars**, even over apparently insuperable odds (see also **24:5–6; Ecc 9:13–16; 2Co 10:4**, which explains that wisdom from above is necessary for spiritual victory).

George Mylne: If military wisdom is so much preferable to strength then how excellent is that **pious wisdom** so much commended in this book! This divine wisdom even in war has a vast superiority over the wisdom of generals and ministers of state, for it leads men to victory, because it **teaches them to trust in the Lord Almighty**. By this wisdom, Abraham conquered four kings when they were flushed with victory. By this wisdom, David the stripling, overcame lions, and bears, and giants. By this wisdom, many of the old believers waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens for they knew their God, and were strong, and did exploits. By this wisdom the weakest believer is victorious through the blood of the Lamb, and the word of his testimony over the dragon and his demons.

Verse 23 – Value of Controlled Speech

"*He who guards his mouth and his tongue,*
Guards his soul from troubles."

Allen Ross: People who control what they say are more likely to avoid trouble than those who speak freely. The verse is a continuous sentence offering the consequences of an action—guarding the mouth and the tongue. The "*calamity*" (*ṣārôt*) may refer to social and legal difficulties into which careless talk might bring someone (see **13:3; 18:21**); therefore, one should say only what is true, helpful, pleasant, and kind and avoid what is false, destructive, painful, and damaging to others.

George Mylne: As a high-spirited horse, if its fury is not curbed with a strong hand, will hurry its rider along, without regarding pits, or precipices, or deep waters, and expose him to extreme jeopardy of his life so an **unbridled tongue** will make a man hateful to God and men, plunge him into contentions and debates, and expose his estate, and life, and credit, to extreme danger.

Verse 24 – Condemnation of the Proud

"'Proud' 'Haughty,' 'Scoffer,' are his names,
Who acts with insolent pride."

Allen Ross: This verse describes the nature ("*name*") of the irreligious mocker as insolent and proud. He is a most unpleasant fellow, disliked even by his own family.

Tremper Longman: This proverb defines what makes a mocker a mocker: pride. Pride causes people to look at others and make fun of them. Specifically, when they themselves are criticized, rather than taking an inward look and transforming for the better, they defend themselves by ridiculing those who are pointing out their weaknesses.

Verse 25 – Condemnation of the Sluggard

"*The desire of the sluggard puts him to death,*
For his hands refuse to work;"

Allen Ross: The lazy come to ruin because they desire the easy way out. The "*sluggard's desire* [*taʾawat*; '*craving*,' NIV]" must be coupled with "*his hands refuse to work*" to understand the point. Living in a world of wishful thinking and not working will bring ruin (*temîtennû*, "*will be the death of him*," is probably used hyperbolically here). Plaut, 223, suggests that there may be more to this idea; the sluggard might set his goals too high, far out of reach, thus paralyzing himself and producing nothing. At any rate, the verse teaches that doing rather than desiring brings success.

Tremper Longman: It is interesting to read **vv. 25** and **26** together, while not allowing the one to obscure the other. **Verse 25** points out that longings are necessary for survival; **v. 26** warns that uncontrolled longings are harmful.

George Mylne: Wicked men disappoint themselves by their sins, of that wished-for enjoyment, which they seek and hope to obtain by their iniquities. The sensualist deprives himself not only of pleasures but of necessities, by casting away that money that should procure them. The vain and proud bring infamy upon their name, by the very means they take to support their honor. And slothful men, while they seek rest and ease, endure much more fatigue than the diligent man, because they make themselves a prey to the restless workings of their own unbridled desires.

Verse 26 – Greed vs. Generosity

"*All day long he is craving,*
While the righteous gives and does not hold back."

Paul Koptak: The picture of one who craves all day long (**21:25**) is contrasted with one who practices continual giving. This contrast between an appetite that cries for more and a person able to give without saying "that's enough" may describe the wise one of **21:20**. A righteous person like this does not shut his ear to the poor (**21:13**). We may go

further and say that if the righteous give without sparing, the giving goes beyond what one has to spare.

Allen Ross: Consider the contrast between Abram and Lot in **Genesis 13**; Lot chooses the most desirable land for himself, and Abram gives Lot his preference. To be generous in that way requires walking by faith and not by sight.

Verse 27 – Rejected Worship of the Wicked

"*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination,*
How much more when he brings it with evil intent!"

Richard Clifford: The wicked in Proverbs deliberately choose the state of rebellion against God's will; their offerings are by that fact unacceptable. The word *zimmāh*, "*calculation*," in colon B suggests that the insincere sacrificer perverts the very means of being reconciled to God—a liturgical offering. Cf. **15:8**.

Allen Ross: God abhors worship without righteousness. The verse affirms that the "*sacrifice*" (*zebaḥ*) of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord and then intensifies the idea ("*how much more*") by referring to "*evil intent*" (*zimmâ*) with the sacrifice. Hypocritical worship is bad enough; worship with evil intent is deplorable. God does not want acts of worship without repentance; but he certainly detests them from someone still bent on wickedness, who thinks a sacrifice will buy continued acceptance with God. In popular religion people soon came to think that sacrifices could be given for any offense and without genuine submission to God. This happens with all religious acts. But God first requires of the worshiper true repentance and resolution to live righteously.

George Mylne: Nothing can be more detestable, than to cover vice with professions of religion. Some have the daring presumption to walk on in the ways of sin, and to practice the forms of duty that their character may be shrouded under the mask of piety. These are followers of the Scribes and Pharisees, against whom our Lord pronounced so many dreadful woes. They walk in the cursed way of Jezebel, who caused a feast to be proclaimed, that she might destroy an innocent man and yet keep up the forms of religion and law; and they are likely to perish in the gain-saying of Korah.

Verse 28 – Discredited vs. Credible Witnesses

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

Richard Clifford: Perhaps the simplest solution is to suppose that a lying witness quickly loses all credibility as a witness for the future. Accurate (lit., "*hearing*") witnesses, on the other hand, will be called again and again because of their credibility. Their truthfulness brings a good reputation that endures, whereas a lie is only for the moment (**12:19**).

Allen Ross: False witnesses will be discredited and destroyed. The verse in Hebrew is obscure, though it does apparently contrast true and false witnesses. The first line affirms that the "*false witness will perish*"; that is, either his testimony will be destroyed or he will be punished.

The second line literally says, "*A man who listens shall speak forever*." "*The man who listens*" contrasts to the false witness of the preceding line and probably describes a witness who knows and understands what the truth is (Kidner, 146). The NIV, following cognates, sees a homonym meaning "*perish*"—thus the translation "*will be destroyed forever*" instead of "*speak forever*." Toy, 411, expected an idea such as "*will be established*" to contrast with "*will perish*." McKane's suggestion, 556, probably fits the best: The truthful witness "*will speak to the end*" without being put down or refuted (in cross-examination).

Verse 29 – False Bravado vs. Consistent Righteousness

"*A wicked man shows a bold face,*
But as for the upright, he makes his way sure."

Richard Clifford: The possible meanings are two:

(1) A wicked person is defiant (lit., "*makes his face hard*"), but an upright person considers his ways, that is, is willing to consider the counsel of others;
(2) An evil person goes off in his own direction, but an upright person maintains a faithful course.

Paul Koptak: The last Hebrew word in each line carries the bite of the proverb. One attends to his face, the other to his way; one attends only to the self and its preservation, the other to the larger picture of life lived uprightly, in harmony with Yahweh's creation and community.

Allen Ross: The verse contrasts the wicked person who puts up a "*bold front*" with the upright person who solidifies (*yākîn*, "*gives thought*") righteous conduct. The image of the hardened face reflects a hardened heart (Plaut, 224); it portrays one who holds in contempt the opinions and views of others (see **Isa 48:4; Jer 5:3; Eze 3:7**).

George Mylne: The wicked man walks in a crooked path, where peace and happiness never were, nor shall ever be found. God calls upon him to leave this cursed way, and to turn into the straight way of life. He thunders in the curses of his law, and orders his ministers to lift up their voices like trumpets, to proclaim in his ears the dangers of his course. He deals with him by his providence, and makes him to feel some of the first fruits of that vengeance which is the fruit of sin. He sets before him the peace and pleasure to be found in the way of holiness, that he may be encouraged to leave the way of destruction but the perverse sinner disregards the voice and providence of the Lord. The ways of sin are so pleasant to him, that he will venture the consequences, rather than be turned out of them for the present. The wicked man has many devices to harden his face in his sinful course. He thinks that he only walks in the same paths as other men do, and many are much worse than himself. He thinks that he has time enough

before him, to repent and serve God. He does many good things to overbalance his evil deeds, or he will make amends for all at once, by fleeing to the mercy of God at last. By such corrupt reasonings as these, he hardens himself in iniquity, and sets God at defiance, disregarding the terrors of his wrath, and trampling upon the grace and blood of the Redeemer, who came to turn ungodliness from Jacob. By degrees he contracts so powerful habits of sin, that his conversion is almost impossible; he casts off shame and fear, and sins without restraint, until he finds that there is justice and vengeance, as well as forbearance with God.

But the upright man directs and establishes his way. He may slip with his feet but he recovers himself by the aids of divine grace. If he turns aside, as a godly man may occasionally do he will not persist in sin, but, like Job, he confesses with self-abhorrence his vileness, and will proceed no farther in it. He endeavors, in the general course of his life, to keep at a distance from sin and temptation, and to order his conduct with such prudence, that he may not by surprise be ensnared in to sin, nor meet with any occasion of stumbling.

Verse 30 – Divine Wisdom Impervious to Attack

"*There is no wisdom and no understanding*
And no counsel against the LORD."

Lindsay Wilson: The force of the sentence is that nothing can stand, prevail, succeed or happen against God and his purposes.

Tremper Longman: Wisdom flows from Yahweh, and therefore "wisdom" that speaks contra Yahweh is not really wisdom.

Verse 31 – Victory Belongs to the Lord

"*The horse is prepared for the day of battle,*
But victory belongs to the LORD."

Paul Koptak: The war horse is both strong and constrained, a symbol of human power. Riders can harness a horse and even prepare it for battle, but victory belongs to Yahweh, not the one who pulls the reins (**Ex. 15:1, 21; Deut. 20:1; Ps. 20:7; 33:17; 37:9; Jer. 51:2**). Common to this proverb and the one before is the theme of human effectiveness—intellectual effort in preparing and planning and physical prowess. The two proverbs name different but related errors: The first and most obvious is to go against God; the second and more subtle, to forget to thank God for victory and trust in your own foresight and strength. The parallelism in both verses reminds the reader of the mysterious relationship between human initiative and divine purposes that have come to the forefront in this second half of the collected proverbs (**Prov. 16:1–22:16**).

Allen Ross: Ultimate success comes from God and not from human efforts. The contrast here is between the plans and efforts for the battle ("*the horse is made ready for the day of battle*") and the true acknowledgment of the source of victory ("*the LORD*"; see **Pss 20:7; 33:17**).

Charles Bridges: The horse may legitimately be used as a means of defense. But never let our confidence be in the material of warfare. Use the means, but do not idolize them. Those who put their trust in them will fall. Those who remember that their safety is in the Lord will stand upright. When it comes to spiritual warfare, it is even more important to exercise active faith and dependence on God. Salvation comes from the Lord. It is free, complete, and triumphant, an everlasting victory over all the powers of hell.

TEXT: Proverbs 22:1-16

TITLE: INSIGHTS INTO RICHES AND PROVEN STRATEGIES FOR LIFE

I. (:1-7) GENERAL INSIGHTS INTO RICHES AND AVOIDING TROUBLE

A. (:1) What's Better than Riches?

"*A good name is to be more desired than great riches,*
Favor is better than silver and gold."

Richard Clifford: Human beings are inherently social and find their happiness in society. Without the acceptance by others that is founded on esteem and trust, one becomes an unfulfilled outsider. Riches, though more immediately alluring, are less essential to the human spirit than that which enables someone to live happily with others—a good name.

Paul Koptak: If one chooses riches above all else, the actions that follow will break relationships of trust and tarnish one's name. Wealth in itself is not condemned in Proverbs, but it is always secondary to honorable relationships and reputation. The "*good name*" (*šem*) implies that good character will make itself known around town. "*Esteemed*" (*ḥen*) uses a word translated elsewhere as "*favor*" (**3:4; 13:15; 28:23**) or "*grace*" (**1:9; 3:34; 4:9**); it is translated as "*gracious*" in **22:11**.

Tremper Longman: It is better to be in a healthy relationship with other human beings than it is to have an abundance of impersonal material possessions. If one has to choose between the two, and that is not always the case, it is better to choose the things that bring us into more intimate relationship with other people.

Allen Ross: The point is that a good reputation excels other blessings in life (see m. ʾAbot 4:17). Kidner, 146, says that our proper joy is "not in the power we wield, but in the love in which we are held."

Charles Bridges: It is far better that others should tarnish our name than that we should wound our consciences. "Two things there are," says St. Augustine, "about which everyone should be especially chary [vigilant] and tender: his conscience and his credit. But his conscience must be his first concern. His name and his credit must be content to come in the second place. Let him first be sure to guard his conscience well; then he may give attention to his name. Let his top priority be to secure everything inside him, by making peace with God and in his own heart. Once this is done, and not before this happens, he can look further afield if he wants to and strengthen his reputation with and before the world" (Bishop Sanderson).

George Mylne: Riches are greatly esteemed in the world, and, under the management of wisdom, serve very valuable purposes but they don't contribute so much to the quiet and happiness of life, as the esteem and love of our neighbors; nor do they qualify us so much to honor God and do good to men. Paul does not require it as a qualification in

church rulers to be rich but he requires that, along with knowledge and good behavior, they should have a good report among Christians, and even heathen. . .

We must value our character above money, and avoid everything that is base, although it might promote our outward estate. We must not only attend to the secret duties of religion but those also that recommend it to the world, and take all care that our good be not evil spoken of, and that the gospel meets with no reproach by our misconduct. We should be thankful to God, if we enjoy the benefit of a good name, and employ our influence for the advancement of his glory but we must abhor the thoughts of making any sinful compliances with the course of the world for the sake of our credit, remembering that instructive saying of God, "*Those who honor me, I will honor but those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed*."

B. (:2) What Do the Rich and Poor Have in Common?

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

Tremper Longman: On the surface, those who are rich and those who are poor have plenty of differences. In most societies, ancient Israelite as well as modern, the two keep a healthy distance between themselves. Even in Proverbs, the two social classes are discussed separately, and, all things being equal, the wise devise living strategies that will bring them material blessings, while the poor often, but not always (**13:23**), are poor because of poor life choices (particularly laziness**: 6:6–11**; etc.). However, this proverb reminds all, probably particularly the rich, that the poor are human beings, fashioned by the same Creator. This observation should lead the rich to avoid oppressing those who have less than they do. The idea of these two classes meeting together should likely be understood more in the sense of "have (the following) in common" rather than the idea of mixing in the real world, though that happens to a limited extent. See also **14:31; 17:5; 29:13**.

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 2** is ostensibly about both the rich and the poor, but the real focus is on the **poor.** No-one would think that the rich are not made by God, but in practice many treat the poor as if they do not have any significance derived from being made by God. While there is a difference, there is **no distinction in value** (so they lit. *meet together*, esv = '*have this in common'*, niv, nrsv). A common theme in Proverbs is that God has created the poor (**14:31; 17:5**), while other sayings remind us of **our obligation to the poor** because of God (**19:17; 22:22–23; 29:13**).

Charles Bridges: There is great diversity in the circumstances of mankind. Yet the difference is mainly superficial, and the equality in all important matters is clear for all to see. The rich and the poor, apparently so remote from each other, have much in common. All are born into the world. All come into the world naked, helpless, unconscious beings. All stand before God. All are dependent on God for their birth. All are subject to the same sorrows, illnesses, and temptations. At the gate of the invisible world the distinction of riches and poverty is dropped.

George Mylne: Such is the vanity which generally attends riches and power that great men often treat people of lowly station, as if they were some lower rank of animals. The poor and rich are made of the same blood, and the same glorious power is displayed in the formation of their bodies, and the creation of their souls. They breath the same vital air, and enjoy the light of the same sun. They owe their support equally to the earth and shall return to the same dust. Their souls are equally precious, and shall dwell in the same eternal habitations unless there is a distinction between them of a very different kind from that which makes the rich too often to trample upon the poor, and the poor to return their contempt with the no less criminal passion of envy. They are alike lost in Adam, and have the same right to salvation, through Christ revealed in the gospel. They meet together in the same family, and church, and nation, and they are useful to each other, if they comply with the designs of providence.

C. (:3) How Do the Naïve Get Themselves into Trouble?

"*The prudent sees the evil and hides himself,*
But the naive go on, and are punished for it."

Paul Koptak: The prudent one practices **foresight**, looking ahead to see the consequences that issue from choices (**12:16, 23; 14:8, 15, 18**; and here **22:3** [cf. **27:12**]). The word for "*danger*" (*raʿah*) is translated as "*evil, wicked*" (**11:19, 27; 16:27, 30; 17:13; 24:1, 16**) or "*trouble, harm*" (**1:33; 3:29–30; 13:21; 16:4; 27:12**), depending on context; both meanings may be intended here. The prudent, knowing the effects of evil, see it coming and hide, while the simple, not even knowing the danger (**chs. 1; 7; 9**), walk straight toward it (cf. **22:5**).

Allen Ross: The prudent know where the dangers and pitfalls are in life; they are wary. They are the product of training in wisdom and discipline, for one of the purposes of Proverbs is to make the naive (*petî*) wary (*ʿārûm*; see **1:4**). The simple person is unwary, uncritical, and credulous; he is not equipped to survive in this world and so blunders into trouble (McKane, 563).

George Mylne: Many of the feathered tribes, before the cold sets in, fly away to warmer climates. How then do you say that we are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us, if you are more senseless than the beasts of the earth, and less wise than the birds of Heaven? Will you call yourselves reasonable creatures, when neither reason nor revelation can make you so prudent about your best interests, as instinct alone renders animals that cannot boast of these precious gifts.

D. (:4) What Produces Riches?

"*The reward of humility and the fear of the LORD*
Are riches, honor and life."

Richard Clifford: Humiliation can lead one to know one's place in God's world, which is one definition of "fear of the Lord." And fear of the Lord, or revering Yahweh, brings the blessings of wealth, honor, and long life. The axiom probably is meant to counter the view that humiliation is an unqualified evil. On the contrary, a humbling can help

one recognize one's place and foster an earnest search for God who is the source of all blessings.

Tremper Longman: Those who fear Yahweh and thus know their place in the cosmos are by definition humble. They know they are not the center of the universe. The proverb describes the rewards to such persons, who are truly wise, as wealth, honor, and life.

Allen Ross: This verse simply lists two spiritual qualifications (humility and fear) and three rewards (wealth, honor, and life).

George Mylne: Christian humility is that which has the promises belonging to it, and it is always joined with the fear of the Lord. It arises from an apprehension of the glorious excellencies of God. For when our eyes are open to his awesome majesty we cannot but perceive our own baseness. When we behold his spotless purity we must be ashamed of our own loathsomeness. When we contemplate his solemn authority we feel our obligations to deny our own perverse wills. When his sovereignty is felt we cannot but yield the management of all our concerns into his hand. When we have the knowledge of his righteousness we are obliged to renounce our own works, and submit to the righteousness of God.

E. (:5-6) How Do You Avoid the Pitfalls of Life?

1. (:5) Guarding Your Way

"*Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse;*
He who guards himself will be far from them."

Tremper Longman: The idea behind the proverb is fairly clear. It is simply that the lives (represented by the path) of crooked people are beset by all kinds of obstacles. Therefore, those who care about the course of their lives ought to stay far removed from such people. This proverb fits in with those that encourage people to associate only with the wise and to avoid connections with fools.

2. (:6) Proper Training of a Child

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

Allen Ross: In the book of Proverbs there are only two "*ways*" a child can go: the way of the wise and the righteous, or the way of the fool and the wicked. Moreover, it is difficult to explain why a natural bent needs training. . . McKane, 564, agrees that "*according to his way*" must mean **the way he ought to go**: "There is only one right way—the way of life—and the educational discipline which directs young men along this way is uniform."

Richard Clifford: The interpretation that best explains the phrase "*according to his way*" is to take the command as **ironic** (like the ironic command in **19:27**). Let a boy do what he wants and he will become a self-willed adult incapable of change!

Paul Koptak: "*Way he should go*" is (lit.) "*at the beginning of his way*" (*darko*); thus, four views on the proverb have been proposed.

1. The moral view stresses the good way;
2. the vocational view stresses the position a young man would take in society or court;
3. the personal aptitude view stresses the learner's capacities;
4. and in the personal demands view, the proverb ironically observes that a spoiled child will never change.

In my judgment, the proverb speaks not so much of early childhood training as of the initiation to adulthood and the teaching of its expectations and responsibilities.

Tremper Longman: Additionally problematic is the way that people understand the second colon. It sounds like a promise, but a proverb does not give a promise. The book of Proverbs advises its hearers in ways that are most likely to lead them to desired consequences if all things are equal. **It is much more likely that a child will be a responsible adult if trained in the right path**. However, there is also the possibility that the child might come under the negative influence of peers or be led astray in some other way. The point is that this proverb encourages parents to train their children, but **does not guarantee** that if they do so their children will never stray. This insight into the form of the proverb is particularly important for parents to grasp when their adult children have not turned out well; otherwise, the verse becomes a sledgehammer of guilt—a purpose that it was not intended to carry. On the other side, the proverb should not become a reason for pride if one's children turn out well either. The proverb is simply an encouragement to do the right thing when it comes to raising one's children.

Lindsay Wilson: Some find here a promise that if they bring their children up in the ways of God, then they can guarantee that their children will be believers. Yet this is confusing a proverb with a promise. **A proverb describes what is typically true, not what is universally true**. Not all children of godly parents do follow God, and it is simply not in our power to make someone else trust in God – that is God's work. This proverb gives us encouragement to value the influence we can have on our children and youth by noting that godly training has a real lasting effect on how they turn out.

F. (:7) What Is the Relationship between the Rich and the Poor?

"*The rich rules over the poor,*
And the borrower becomes the lender's slave."

Tremper Longman: The proverb begins with an observation that is hard to gainsay. **Those with material means usually call the shots in a society**. The wealthy are those who hire the poor and therefore can tell them what to do. The wealthy are typically in positions of government that dictate societal rules. It is not necessarily the case that the proverb is approving of this, but it is a good guess to suggest that this proverb implies that it is better to be a wealthy person ruling over the poor than vice versa.

This preferential reading is certainly supported by the second colon, though typically the sages discourage lending rather than borrowing (**6:1–5; 11:15**; etc.). However, there is no question who in the borrower/lender relationship has the bulk of the power. Thus, there is no doubt but that this proverb **discourages borrowing**.

Paul Koptak: The rich rule over poor, with implication that only one party has access to the power that money brings. The second line adds that those who borrow, whether by necessity or choice, put themselves under that power. Many commentators take this saying as a warning to the poor against borrowing, but perhaps a more general observation about the responsibilities of power is intended (cf. **22:9, 16; 18:23**).

II. (:8-16) PROVEN STRATEGIES FOR DIFFERENT AREAS OF LIFE

A. (:8) Proven Strategy for Achieving Futility

"*He who sows iniquity will reap vanity,*
And the rod of his fury will perish."

Paul Koptak: This version of "*you reap what you sow*" (cf. **Job 4:8; Gal. 6:7**) extends the idea of **responsibility** from **Proverbs 22:7**. One can share with the poor or oppress them (**22:9, 16**), but each action will receive the same treatment in turn.

Tremper Longman: This proverb expresses the simple idea of **retribution**. Those who do bad things will suffer bad things themselves. They may try to hurt others with "*the rod of their fury*," but their efforts will be thwarted. The proverb does not say how this will come about, and indeed sometimes, if not often, it appears that this simple idea of retribution does not work out in actual life. However, understood as a **general principle** and not as a guarantee, one can recognize the truth of this "*live by the sword, die by the sword*" principle (cf. **Matt. 26:52**).

Lindsay Wilson: The warning in **verse 8** is **not to use power unjustly**. The imagery of sowing, and reaping what we sow, builds in accountability to the rich not to use their wealth in an unfair and self-serving way. Those who act unjustly will reap trouble or disaster. The second part of **verse 8** repeats this warning by noting that their symbol of power (their staff or club or sceptre) will come to an end and be no more (*kālâ*, a verb that has the sense of being completed, used up, finished; fail, esv, nrsv; '*broken*' niv). **Power used in the wrong way will become powerless**.

B. (:9) Proven Strategy for Attaining Blessing

"*He who is generous will be blessed,*
For he gives some of his food to the poor."

Allen Ross: There is a reward for being **generous to the poor**. The generous person is here *ṭôb-ʿayin* ("*a good eye*"), in contrast to the "*evil eye*," which is stingy and covetous. This person has a benevolent disposition, keen social conscience, and concern for the poor. The irony is that because he is not the prisoner of his selfish desires, he achieves the highest degree of self-fulfillment (McKane, 569).

C. (:10) Proven Strategy for Dealing with Contention

"*Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out,*
Even strife and dishonor will cease."

Paul Koptak: The proverb does not advocate the suppression of conflict, only unnecessary arguing. Whereas many conflicts can be worked out with attention to proper process, not all are due to misunderstanding. "Sometimes," said a humorist, "people just act like jerks."

Tremper Longman: Mockers are those who pick fights. They respond to criticism in a defensive manner. In general, they are self-protective people who respond to any perceived assault with a counterattack. Thus, the solution to a situation of conflict may be to get rid of the troublemaker. In other words, this proverb says that it is often not the situation but rather the people involved in a situation who cause problems. Sometimes it is necessary to remove a difficult individual to preserve the harmony of a community.

Allen Ross: One can think of a heckler who is present only to disrupt a meeting; before serious discussions can begin, he will have to be removed.

D. (:11) Proven Strategy for Winning the Support of Rulers

"*He who loves purity of heart*
And whose speech is gracious, the king is his friend."

Richard Clifford: The route to power is through wisdom, which the saying defines as speaking gracious words from a true heart. The implicit corollary of the axiom is that it is dangerous to worm one's way into the king's confidence by dishonorable means. As God's chosen, the king will see through such tricks and vent his wrath upon those who try them. Cf. **14:35; 16:13; 20:2**.

Tremper Longman: Those who do have a pure heart will speak gracious words, because words are the reflection of the heart (**16:23**). The result is positive. Such people have the king as a friend, and it is always good to have friends in high places.

George Mylne: The **pureness of heart**, here meant, consists chiefly in sincerity and uprightness, and stands opposed to all deception and hypocrisy. A pure heart is necessary to grace in the lips, which must be directed by an honest heart, and admit no pollution of flattery and doubleness, which so much stains the communication of a great part of mankind. The lips may assume an appearance of purity and sincerity, when there is none in the heart but this empty appearance cannot be long supported. A very small degree of sagacity will enable a man soon to discover it, and the discovery is attended with abhorrence.

Grace in the lips is necessary to reveal pureness of heart. We ought always to speak the words of truth but we ought to speak it in the most pleasing manner possible, that we may not render it unacceptable by our manner of representing it. Daniel showed his

integrity and politeness at once, by the manner of his address to Nebuchadnezzar, when he was called to give him very disagreeable information.

Every man ought to be a friend to the man of integrity, and the king himself, if he is not an absolute fool, will be a friend to him who joins purity of heart with gracefulness of tongue. Daniel, the captive, on this account, found favor with two haughty kings of Babylon.

E. (:12) Proven Strategy for Maintaining Integrity

"*The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge,*
But He overthrows the words of the treacherous man."

Richard Clifford: The axiom states that Yahweh scrutinizes and safeguards the knowledge that comes to expression in words. If one's words do not express faithfully what one knows, Yahweh will subvert those deceptive words. In **Ex. 23:8** and **Deut. 16:19**, a bribe "*undermines the words*" (*sillēp dĕbārîm*) of the innocent person in a legal trial. **REB** assumes a legal context: "The Lord keeps watch over every claim at law, / and upsets the perjurer's case." God watches the plans of the human heart and subverts lying words.

Allen Ross: The Lord ensures that truth, not deception, succeeds. The lines are in antithetical parallelism, contrasting how God deals with truth and error: He "*frustrates*" the words of the "*traitor*" (*bōgēd*; "*unfaithful*," NIV), but he keeps "*watch over knowledge.*" The point is clear enough—**the Lord acts to vindicate the truth**.

F. (:13) Proven Strategy for Wasting Life as a Sluggard

"*The sluggard says, 'There is a lion outside;*
I shall be slain in the streets!'"

Richard Clifford: The sluggard always has a reason not to act, no matter how ridiculous.

Charles Bridges: The sluggard is a coward. He has no love for his work, and therefore he is always ready to invent some flimsy excuse that will prevent him from doing his duty. He shrinks back from any work that is likely to involve him in any trouble. Imagined dangers frighten hi from real and present duties.

G. (:14) Proven Strategy for Manifesting a Cursed Existence

"*The mouth of an adulteress is a deep pit;*
He who is cursed of the LORD will fall into it."

Tremper Longman: The woman is strange in that she acts outside of the bounds of traditional social and religious mores restricting intimate sexual relationships to the commitment of marriage. The woman's mouth is particularly attractive to young men, not simply because of her kisses but even more because of the flattery that appeals to the man's vanity (**5:3; 6:24; 7:5**). But though attractive on the surface, **her mouth is a source of great danger**, into which those who succumb to temptation will fall. Here the

latter are described not as fools, but rather as those with whom God is angry, though the two are not ultimately separate groups.

Charles Bridges: Adultery is indeed a deep pit. It is easy to fall into but hard, nest to impossible, to get out of. For this sin overwhelms the body, the mind, and the conscience. There is no more humbling proof of the total depravity of human nature than the fact that those affections that were originally given for the purest enjoyments of life can become the corrupt spring of such a defilement. The sin and snare seem to be inflicted on those who willfully reject God. They have turned away from instruction; they have hated reproof; they have given themselves over to their wicked desires. They have clearly abandoned God. Must not God's holiness and justice be against those who deliberately choose evil and reject both God's warnings and love? They are under the Lord's wrath.

H. (:15) Proven Strategy for Disciplining Children

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

Richard Clifford: Folly is attached to the heart of a youngster in the way that the outer membranous covering (the husk or hull) is attached to a seed. The agricultural metaphor is maintained in colon B, where "*rod*" (*šēbet*) means both a rod that is applied to the back of the recalcitrant (**13:24; 23:13–14**) and a "*flail*" (see **22:8b**).

Matthew Henry: We have here two very sad considerations:

1. That corruption is woven into our nature. Sin is foolishness; it is contrary both to our right reason and to our true interest. It is in the heart; there is an inward inclination to sin, to speak and act foolishly. It is in the heart of children; they bring it into the world with them; it is what they were shapen and conceived in. It is not only found there, but it is bound there; it is annexed to the heart (so some); vicious dispositions cleave closely to the soul, are bound to it as the cion to the stock into which it is grafted, which quite alters the property. There is a knot tied between the soul and sin, a true lover's knot; they two became one flesh. It is true of ourselves, it is true of our children, whom we have begotten in our own likeness. O God! thou knowest this foolishness.

2. That correction is necessary to the cure of it. It will not be got out by fair means and gentle methods; there must be strictness and severity, and that which will cause grief. Children need to be corrected, and kept under discipline, by their parents; and we all need to be corrected by our heavenly Father (**Heb. 12:6, 7**), and under the correction we must stroke down folly and kiss the rod.

I. (:16) Proven Strategy for Achieving Poverty

"*He who oppresses the poor to make much for himself*
Or who gives to the rich, will only come to poverty."

Richard Clifford: Who in their right mind would give to the wealthy? On reflection, however, colon B makes sense. Many people try to bribe the wealthy or ingratiate themselves with them by means of presents. The rich may accept the money and presents but are sufficiently cunning not to be fooled or coerced. The rich will always do what they want. Those who curry favor with them end up the poorer. The seemingly absurd antithesis memorably expresses the great gulf between the poor and the rich.

Allen Ross: The punishment for extortion and bribery is **poverty**. The Hebrew is a little cryptic: "*Oppressing the lowly, it is gain for him; he who gives to the rich, it is loss*." Perhaps both are to be seen as folly and resulting in poverty, the first being an immoral act (*ʿōšēq*, "*oppresses*") that God will punish and the second being a waste of money.

Tremper Longman: It is clear that the subject of the first colon is the oppressor of the poor. This is followed by an infinitive clause "*to multiply for himself*," and we understand this phrase as referring to the intention of the oppressor to get rich off the poor. The second colon mentions another class of people, those who give, probably gifts or maybe bribes, to the rich, likely with the intention of getting more in return. The final phrase seems to indicate that these two strategies will fail. After all, if someone tries to multiply their riches on the backs of the poor, it is like trying to squeeze water from a stone. And those who give to the wealthy to get back more will also fail. The right way to proceed is to give generously to the poor; these are the ones who will get a good return for their money (**28:27**).

Charles Bridges: These two ideas seem to contradict each other. But both of the people described are devoid of God's love and love for their brother. **Both seek to please themselves**. The one who gives gifts to the rich hopes to receive something in return. Both actions, paradoxical as it may seem, lead to the road of poverty. "Sin pays its servants very bad wages; for it gives the very reverse of what is promised. While the sin of oppression promises mountains of gold, it brings them poverty and ruin (**Jeremiah 12:13-15**). Injuries done to the poor are sorely resented by the God of mercy, who is the poor man's friend and will break in pieces his oppressor" (Lawson).

TEXT: Proverbs 22:17-21

TITLE: PROLOGUE TO THE WORDS OF THE WISE

Paul Koptak: The shift from individual sayings to the address of a teacher in **22:17** tells us that we have entered a new section of the book, one that spans **22:17 - 24:22**. We set this section apart here because

(1) there is a new title, "*the sayings of the wise*" (**22:17**);
(2) the style returns to the instruction-like writing we encountered in **chapters 1–9**; and
(3) a generation of biblical scholarship has drawn comparisons between **22:17 – 23:11** and the Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope, noting similarities and differences in form and content.

Lindsay Wilson: Within these words of the wise, there are three subsections after the introduction in **22:17–21**: **22:22 – 23:11**; **23:12–35**; and **24:1–22**. Clifford (1999: 199) proposes that the first part is addressed 'to young people ambitioning a career', while the second deals with the concerns of youth, and the third covers the destinies of the righteous and the wicked.

John MacArthur: This introductory section offers an exhortation, reminiscent of **2:1-5; 5:1, 2**, to be alert to hear and speak the wisdom of God.

Allen Ross: In the introductory call to attention, the sage urges greater trust in the Lord and promises solid teachings that will prove reliable. This extended introduction reminds us that the wise sayings are not curiosity pieces; they are revelation, and revelation demands a response. The call is laid out with the exhortation to learn and pass on the teaching (**v.17**), followed by three motivations:

(1) there will be a pleasing store of wisdom (**v.18**);
(2) there will be deeper trust in the Lord—a distinctively Israelite aspect of wisdom literature (**v.19**); and
(3) it will build reliability—he will grasp the truth (**v.20**) and see himself as a special envoy to keep wisdom in his heart and on his lips (**v.21**; Kidner, 149).

Tremper Longman: **Proverbs 22:17–21** provides an introduction to the next main division of the book. The speaker exhorts hearers to listen to the "*words of the wise*" (**22:17**), comprising thirty (**22:20**) sayings (through **24:22**) supplemented by additional sayings from the "*wise*" (**24:23–34**). Since early in the twentieth century, this portion of Proverbs has been regarded as having an interesting special relationship to ancient Egyptian literature, particularly the Instruction of Amenemope.

Caleb Nelson: **Proposition**: The thirty sayings of the wise teach us the wisdom of faith and truth.

I. Introduction: A New Section of Proverbs

A. Its Title: The Sayings of the Wise, **v. 17**

B. Its Source
C. Its Content: Thirty Sayings, **v. 20**

II. The Command: Listen to the Words of the Wise, v. 17

III. The Reason: It Will Be Pleasant, v. 18

IV. The Goals
A. The Central Goal: Your Personal Faith in Yahweh, **v. 19**
B. Knowing Truth, **v. 21a**
C. Returning an Accurate Report, **v. 21b**

I. (:17-18) CALL TO ATTENTION

A. (:17) Exhortation to Learn Wisdom

"*Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise,*
And apply your mind to my knowledge;"

Caleb Nelson: Right off the bat we are told that this section and the next are not composed of proverbs by Solomon. Rather, these are proverbs that he gathered from elsewhere -- that is, from "*the wise*".

Paul Koptak: A prologue of sorts includes a **call to attention** and **motivations for learning**, much like the prologue of **1:1–7**, yet this introduction is not as comprehensive as the preview to the entire book. Three imperatives make up the charge: "*pay attention*," "*listen*" (lit., "*turn your ear and hear*"), and "*apply your heart*" (cf. **2:1–2**), linking hearing with the seat of human intention and purpose. "*Sayings of the wise*" (cf. **1:6**) is parallel with "*what I teach*" (lit., "*my knowledge*"), identifying this teacher as one of the wise or someone who teaches using words.

George Mylne: Solomon was well acquainted with the heart of man, and knowing how many would read or hear his excellent precepts without bestowing proper attention on them he rouses us by frequent calls for our most earnest heed to the things that are spoken. We must bow down our ears to hear him with attention, reverence, and humility. The words of the wise deserve this regard from us, for they are means of communicating their wisdom to us.

And if the words of wise men merit so much respect we can never attend too earnestly to the words of the only wise God. He made our ears and shall he not be heard by us? Our hearts must be applied, as well as our ears, to the knowledge contained in this book. We should labor . . .

- to understand it with our minds,
- to fix it in our judgments,
- to impress it on our consciences,
- to have it treasured up in our memories, that it may be constantly ready for our use.

B. (:18) Motivation = Storehouse of Wisdom to Share with Others

"*For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you,*
That they may be ready on your lips."

Tremper Longman: To guard them in your stomach is a picture of integrating them into the inmost part of a person's being. The integration of the teacher's wisdom is prerequisite to its use in the student's own life. In other words, appropriation into students' character is then followed by their own ability to express the wisdom.

Charles Bridges: Observe the attractiveness of wisdom. It is both pleasing and profitable. But worldly people do not understand how anything linked to religion can be pleasurable. For such people, religion spoils all their pleasure. But heart-religion always conveys vital happiness. The fruit comes from the tree of life and is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.

George Mylne: As the Word of God is pleasant to the relish of a saint, so its dwelling in the heart is attended with happy consequences, for it shall be uttered by the lips. The knowledge of truth will supply the lips with wisdom, and enable them to talk with discretion and judgment.

II. (:19) ULTIMATE GOAL = RELIANCE ON THE LORD

"*So that your trust may be in the LORD,*
I have taught you today, even you."

Paul Koptak: **Verse 19** warns that knowledge and wisdom are necessary for successful living, but they are not the source of one's confidence; teaching is to inspire trust in Yahweh, integrating intellectual study and faith.

Tremper Longman: **Verse 19** gives the **theological motivation** for the teaching of wisdom, the **increase in trust in Yahweh**. This gives the teacher the urgency to impart instruction to the pupil. It is not made explicit how the teaching will increase trust, and so we are left to speculate. Perhaps the idea is that as the advice works in life, then it breeds confidence in its ultimate author. Or perhaps it is calling on trust in Yahweh as the first step toward implementing the advice found here. As one practices trust by following the advice, which may direct one in a not so obvious way (for instance, to be generous in order to grow more wealthy [**11:24**]), then one grows in trust as the unexpected consequences come.

George Mylne: Confidence in God, is our shield against temptations, and the means of deriving from God through Christ, all the supplies of grace needful for our assistance and support in the ways of holiness. Everything said in this book, when it is duly considered, will contribute to strengthen our trust, as well as to direct our practice. That our trust in God may be encouraged, and our steps directed, we must read and hear this book with application to ourselves.

III. (:20-21) PURPOSE OF THESE PROVERBS

A. (:20) Communication of God's Excellent Nuggets of Wisdom

"*Have I not written to you excellent things*
Of counsels and knowledge,"

Matthew Henry: The worth and weight of the things themselves which Solomon in this book gives us the knowledge of.
They are not trivial things, for amusements and diversion, not jocular proverbs, to be repeated in sport and in order to pass away time. No; they are excellent things, which concern the glory of God, the holiness and happiness of our souls, the welfare of mankind and all communities; they are princely things (so the word is), fit for kings to speak and senates to hear; they are things that concern counsels and knowledge, that is, wise counsels, relating to the most important concerns; things which will not only make us knowing ourselves, but enable us to advise others.

The **excellent things** which God has written to us are not like the commands which the master gives his servant, which are all intended for the benefit of the master, but like those which the master gives his scholar, which are all intended for the benefit of the scholar. These things must be kept by us, for they are written to us,

That we may have a confidence in him and communion with him. That thy trust may be in the Lord, **v. 19**. We cannot trust in God except in the way of duty; we are therefore taught our duty, that we may have reason to trust in God. Nay, this is itself one great duty we are to learn, and a duty that is the foundation of all practical religion, to live a life of delight in God and dependence on him.

B. (:21) Confirmation of God's Truth so You Might Respond Appropriately

"*To make you know the certainty of the words of truth*
That you may correctly answer to him who sent you?"

Paul Koptak: We conclude that one function of these teachings is to prepare a young man for some sort of **diplomatic service**. One schooled in wisdom must be prepared to give an answer when representing a king or official, knowing what to say not only in terms of content but also in terms of style and speaking with eloquence that "*is pleasing*" (**22:18**). The two purposes (trust in Yahweh and skill in answering for [or to] a king or official) are complementary, not mutually exclusive.

Charles Bridges: Let us not forget that the great purpose of this revelation is that we may be sure about eternal things. The Gospels themselves were written for this reason (**Luke 1:1-4**). Our confidence in the sure foundations of the Christian faith should not be shaken.

Caleb Nelson: The final reason to listen is so that you can **return an accurate report**. The commentators say that this envisions a setting in the royal court. In that era before

electronic communications, generally the best way to make sure a message got through was to send someone to take it. Upon the messenger's return, then, he would be the most accurate source of knowledge about conditions in the location where he had taken the message. Thus, in this context, returning an accurate report became extremely important, because decisions of state were riding on the accuracy of your report.

Matthew Henry: That we may have a satisfaction in our own judgment: "*That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mayest know what is truth, mayest plainly distinguish between it and falsehood, and mayest know upon what grounds thou receivest and believest the truths of God.*"

George Mylne: A scriptural knowledge will preserve us from being like children, tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine of which we are in constant danger while we are unacquainted with the Scripture, although we had the knowledge of every truth in our religion, by instruction from men. But there is still another great advantage arising from a serious regard to this book. By establishing our minds in the truth, it will enable us to satisfy others that send to us for information about the principles of truth and duty. Men were not born for themselves only, we are members one of another, and ought to consult the good of the body, and of other members of it besides ourselves. As men, when they perform the duties of their callings, are useful members of civil society so if we live as befits saints, and seek after the knowledge of the truth, we will be useful members of the church of Christ, ready to give an answer to everyone who asks us a reason of our faith and hope, to instruct the ignorant, to satisfy the doubts of the scrupulous, and to fix those who waver. Such are the pleasures and advantages to be found in the book of God, and in the Book of Proverbs in particular.

TEXT: Proverbs 22:22 – 23:11

TITLE: THE WORDS OF THE WISE – KEY LIFE CHOICES

I. (22:22-29) OPENING SERIES OF PROBIBITIONS

A. (:22-23) Don't Exploit the Poor

1. (:22) Admonition

"*Do not rob the poor because he is poor,*
Or crush the afflicted at the gate;"

Paul Koptak: While the poverty of these people is reason enough to treat them kindly, most likely the phrase chides the exploiters who see their powerless prey as easy pickings; they crush the poor in court (lit., "*at the gate*," where legal matters were decided). Ironically, those who try to use the system to do wrong will find out that they are called to an even higher court. The double use of *rib* in "*take up their case*" (**22:23**; lit., "*strive a striving*"; cf. **23:11**) echoes the voice of the prophets, who portray Yahweh as judge, prosecutor, and executor (**Isa. 1:17; 3:13; 19:20; 41:21; Jer. 2:9; 25:31; Hos. 4:1; Mic. 6:2; 7:9**).

Tremper Longman: To rob anyone is a crime, but to rob the poor, who are already in difficult straits, is particularly heinous (see also **Exod. 22:21–23; 23:6; Deut. 24:14–15**). The same is true about the oppression of those who are already afflicted. To do so publicly is a particularly bad thing to do. The reference to "the gate" at the least points toward a public setting, and probably more specifically to a legal setting.

Charles Bridges: To exploit the poor because he is poor and so has no means of protection is a cowardly aggravation of the sin [of robbery and oppression]. To crush the needy in court perverts God's sacred authority that was given to protect the needy. God is most resisted in wronging those who cannot resist and defend themselves. "The threatenings of God against the robbers of the poor are sometimes laughed at by the rich and great. But they will find them in due time to be awful realities" (Lawson). "Weak though they [the poor] are, they have a strong one to take their part" (Sanderson). God will plead their case. And wo to the man against whom he pleads. The accumulation of divine vengeance is heaped upon this sin.

George Mylne: The gate was in ancient times, among the eastern nations, the place of judgment, and therefore this instruction is be understood to respect **judges**. They are forbidden to take advantage of the friendless and indigent circumstances of the poor and afflicted to oppress them by perverting justice in favor to the rich. The Scripture forbids us to show favoritism to a poor man in his cause but it is far worse, and more ordinary, and therefore more frequently forbidden, to oppress a poor man in judgement. This is a crying sin, which contains, together with injustice, the most unmerciful cruelty, and is a plain evidence of inhuman and cowardly disposition.

2. (:23) Motivation

"*For the LORD will plead their case,*
And take the life of those who rob them."

Allen Ross: The motivation is that the Lord will plead or "take up their case" and will turn the plundering back on the guilty. Here again the Lord is revealed as champion of the defenseless.

Peter Wallace: The poor are already in a fragile condition. They don't have much. They need someone to plead their cause – they need someone to come to their defense. So if you don't – then the LORD will! But when he does, he will destroy those who sought to destroy the poor.

B. (:24-25) Don't Associate with a Hothead

1. (:24) Admonition

"*Do not associate with a man given to anger;*
Or go with a hot-tempered man,"

Peter Wallace: If you are dealing with a man given to anger – if anger and wrath is what characterizes him, do not look to him as a mentor – do not tie your fate to his. Because the more closely you are connected to him, the more likely you will be entangled in his ways – you may even learn to be like him yourself!

What is meant by a "*man given to anger*"? This is a great phrase in Hebrew: "*baal af*" – *master of a nose*. Make no friendship with a *master of a nose*! The Hebrew word for nose is translated "*anger*" over 200 times in the OT. In fact, it means "*anger*" more often than it means nose! Every time you see the "*anger of the LORD burned against*" someone – it is literally, "*the nose of the LORD burned against*…" because when you get angry, **your nose burns**!

Tremper Longman: The book of Proverbs teaches that we must associate with people of wisdom and avoid those who practice foolish behavior (**1:8–19**). Otherwise, as this passage states, their bad behavior will rub off on us and so will the negative consequences due them. In this case, angry behavior is specifically named as something to be avoided. This passage is talking not just about an occasional outburst of anger but rather about people characterized by their anger. This shows a lack of self-discipline and an absence of emotional intelligence.

2. (:25) Motivation

"*Lest you learn his ways,*
And find a snare for yourself."

Allen Ross: The "*one easily angered*" (*ʾîš ḥēmôt*, lit., "*a man of heat*" // *baʿal ʾāp*, "a hot-tempered man") is denounced here primarily because such conduct is injurious, although the implication is that it is also morally wrong (Toy, 426).

Charles Bridges: Being friends of a hot-tempered man is like living in a house that is on fire. How quickly does a young person, living with a proud man, become like him and turn into an overbearing person. Evil ways, especially those that our temperaments incline toward, are more quickly learned than good ways. We learn to be angry more easily than to be mee. We pass on disease, not health. So it is a rule of self-preservation, no less than the rule of God, not to make friends with hot-tempered people.

George Mylne: Friendship has a mighty influence upon our conduct. "Bad company corrupts good character." When we see bad things practiced by those we love, the horror of them abates, and we are insensibly drawn to the practice of them. And if we make angry men our friends and companions, we are in great danger of becoming like to them, on another account. Although we should be good-natured yet their unreasonable behavior will be apt, on many occasions, to set our temper on fire, and from occasional bursts of anger, we may be led by degrees to contract obstinate habits of getting angry on every trifling occasion. For habit is produced by frequent acts, and in time becomes a second nature.

C. (:26-27) Don't Give Pledges for Debt

1. (:26) Admonition

"*Do not be among those who give pledges,*
Among those who become sureties for debts."

Tremper Longman: Whatever the circumstance, giving a loan is a mistake, because a loan expects a return of the money. And if giving a loan is a mistake, it is even more of a mistake to be a guarantor of a loan. Such people may find their very bed repossessed.

Peter Wallace: Don't put at risk that which you cannot afford to lose! But also – as we've seen in Proverbs before – why would you be tempted to put up security for debts? Because this is an easy way to make money! Someone comes to you and says: "Hey, I need $1,000. I'll pay you $1,100 next year, if you'll loan me the thousand now!" You could make $100 (10% interest!) without doing anything!!

The Law did not allow Israelites to charge each other interest. The idea was that you should not profit off each other – and the assumption was that the only reason why you would borrow money was because you were in dire need.

In our day, we use debt very differently. But the basic principle at stake here is important: **do not try to get something for nothing**. Do not take advantage of others for your own selfish gain. But along with that is the warning: **whatever you risk – you may lose!**

2. (:27) Rationale

"*If you have nothing with which to pay,*
Why should he take your bed from under you?"

Allen Ross: The risk is that if someone lacks the means to pay, his creditors may take his bed, i.e., his last possession (cf. our expressions "the shirt off his back" or "the kitchen sink"). "*Bed*" may be a metonymy for the garment that covers the bed (cf. **Ex 22:26**).

George Mylne: Religion, you see, allows and requires us to pay a proper attention to our own interest and comfort. It requires no instances of self-denial but such as are more for our own interest, than self-gratification in those instances would be. It does not forbid us to love ourselves, when it requires us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Indeed, we cannot hurt ourselves, for the most part, without hurting some other men also. What can we do for the poor, for our families, for our friends if our bed is taken away from beneath us?

D. (:28-29) Don't Try to Increase Wealth Selfishly or Illegally

1. (:28) Admonition – Don't Mess with Property Boundaries

"*Do not move the ancient boundary*
Which your fathers have set."

Paul Koptak: The prohibition here against moving the boundary stone stands alone, with no accompanying motivation or reason (a reason is given in the similar **23:10**). The personal pronoun emphasizing "*your forefathers*" implies that the person on the other side of the property line is kin. The only other reference to the boundary marker in Proverbs names the widow (**15:25**; cf. **Deut. 19:14**). To move that marker for financial gain is therefore to defraud those most vulnerable. If **Proverbs 22:24–25** and **26–27** are about self-protection, the surrounding verses (**22:23** and **28**) are directed toward protecting and caring for the powerless of society.

Allen Ross: The boundaries were sacred because God owned the land and had given it to the ancestors as their inheritance; to extend one's land at another's expense was a major violation of covenant and oath. Of course, property disputes and wars ancient and modern arise because both sides can point to times when their ancestors owned the land.

Tremper Longman: Though important throughout the ancient Near East, there is reason to think that the connection between the land and the people of Israel was an even more critical issue. After all, the land was **distributed by divine choice** to the tribes and then to individual families after settlement. The land was **God's gift** in fulfillment of his promise to Abraham (**Gen. 12:1–3**). Indeed, if for any reason a family was separated from its ancestral lands (perhaps for reasons of debt), their property would be returned to them during the Jubilee Year, which occurred every fifty years (**Lev. 25:24–34**).

The removal of a boundary stone would be an attempt to encroach on or even totally possess the land of another person. Not even a king should take the land of another (the Naboth incident in **1 Kings 21**). We don't know what Israelite boundary stones looked like, but they may have been similar in function to the Babylonian *kudurru*, a stone marker that included a description of the property. Other passages that have to do with

the prohibition of the removal of a boundary stone include **Deut. 19:14; 27:17; Job 24:2; Prov. 23:10; Hosea 5:10.**

George Mylne: Landmarks are means of preserving peace, as well as maintaining justice, and therefore the removing of them is a breach both of peace and honesty. It is so great a sin, that a solemn curse was pronounced against it from Mont Ebal. It is more than three thousand years since this curse was pronounced, and we learn from it that land marks were a very ancient means of distinguishing property. It is the will of God that men should know what is their own, and that every unrighteous invasion of another man's property, is an abomination to him.

Matthew Henry: We may infer hence that a deference is to be paid, in all civil matters, to usages that have prevailed time out of mind and the settled constitutions of government, in which it becomes us to acquiesce, lest an attempt to change it, under pretence of changing it for the better, prove of dangerous consequence.

Peter Wallace: **So how do you increase wealth properly**?! There is but one saying on that in this section! **Verse 29**:

> 2. (:29) Balancing Exhortation -- Excellence in Work
> "*Do you see a man skilled in his work?*
> *He will stand before kings;*
> *He will not stand before obscure men.*"

Peter Wallace: This is not arrogance or selfishness – this is **integrity** – this is wholeness. This is the world is operating as it should.

Paul Koptak: A **three-line saying** in **verse 29** interrupts the series of prohibitions with a **rhetorical question and answer** that holds up **excellence and pride in work**. Mind your own business, it seems to say, neither cheating the poor or getting mixed up in bad company. Do your work well and live well, and you will have the king as your employer, a coveted association (cf. **23:1**). If earlier proverbs about the king stressed his responsibilities for executing justice and his capacities for discerning evil intention (**22:8**), these instructions give advice about working for such a person. One advances through competence and integrity, not cunning or careerism.

Tremper Longman: This proverb states that those who work hard and with skill will succeed in their careers. They will work for the most powerful and influential people in the society, while those who are not diligent will spend their careers working for people on the lower end of the social stratum.

George Mylne: If the diligent man does not obtain the honor of standing before kings, his industry, with God's blessing, will, for the most part, preserve him from the disgrace of standing before obscure men. Some women, by their industry, joined with other virtues, have obtained the honor of an alliance with the noblest families, of which Rebecca and Ruth are famous instances.

II. (23:1-11) ADDITIONAL PROHIBITIONS

A. (:1-3) Don't Overindulge When Invited to a Ruler's Feast

"*When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you;*
2 And put a knife to your throat, If you are a man of great appetite.
3 Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food."

Paul Koptak: Putting a knife to the throat is not a threat of death but rather holding a knife to one's desire, for the word *nepeš* can mean *"throat*" or "*appetite*." The "*delicacies*" uses the same word for the savory food Jacob cooked to deceive his father (**Gen. 27:17, 31**); certainly this "*food is deceptive*," for it is (lit.) the "*bread of lies*."

Richard Clifford: Important is the double meaning of *"set before you*," which refers both to the food and the host: Consider carefully the food/host before you and put your knife not to your food to satisfy your hunger but to your gullet to restrain your hunger. Unless you do, you will obtain neither food nor favor. The versions missed the play in Hebrew *lĕpāneykā*, "*before you*," which can refer both to food set before one (e.g., **Gen. 18:8;24:33; 1 Sam. 9:24**) and to a human being standing before one (e.g., **Gen. 18:22; Deut. 10:11; Judg. 9:39**). The versions (which all read MT) take it only of food and end up in considerable confusion.

Allen Ross: This passage warns against **overindulging** in the ruler's food, because that could ruin one's chances for advancement. The expression "*put a knife to your throat*" (**v.2**) means "to curb your appetite, control yourself" (like "bite your tongue"; see Delitzsch, 2:104). The reason is that the ruler's food may be "d*eceptive*" (*kezābîm*)—it is not what it seems. So the warning is not to indulge in his impressive feast; the ruler wants something from you or is observing you (Delitzsch, 2:105).

Tremper Longman: Dining is actually an opportunity for people to manifest the type of self-control that demonstrates wisdom. Just as the wise are to control their emotional expressions and the frequency and content of their speech, so also they must not let their appetites get control of them. Nowhere would this be a larger temptation than at the sumptuous table of a ruler. If the ruler sees a potential adviser's appetite carry him away, then how could the ruler trust him? In this way, the food is "false": it is a potential trap that would cause the prospective courtier to lose an opportunity.

Lindsay Wilson: While it is quite natural to desire the fine food served, it can come with strings attached. It is described as 'food of lies' or deceptive food. It pretends to be a gift, but as a modern proverb says, there is no such thing as a free lunch. A ruler may have a hidden agenda, perhaps buying our loyalty or silence for some future occasion.

Charles Bridges: Suppose we are invited to a meal with a ruler. We are given this wise warning: Note well what is before you. Think about where you are. What besetting temptation may attack you? What impression is your behavior likely to make? If your

appetite is out of control, ungodly people may criticize you, and you may be a stumbling-block to the weak (**1 Corinthians 8:9; Romans 14:21**).

B. (:4-5) Don't Set Your Hopes on Fleeting Wealth

> "*Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration of it.*
> *5 When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings, Like an eagle that flies toward the heavens.*"

Paul Koptak: The image seems to say, "*Let your eyes stay put on that which lasts instead of flying around to fleeting riches*." Like the "*bread of lies*," riches are also **deceptive** (**23:3**); therefore one should not become weary in their pursuit but have the "*wisdom*" (root *byn*, as in "*note well*" in **23:1**) to know when to stop or "*show restraint*" (cf. **23:2**).

Charles Bridges: Here we are warned about **covetousness**. If riches come as a result of God's blessing, receive them thankfully, and consecrate them wisely and freely to him. But to wear yourself out trying to become rich is to follow earthly wisdom, not the wisdom from above.

Allen Ross: People should not wear themselves out trying to get rich, because riches disappear quickly. "Amenemope" (ch. 7; 9:10–11) says, "They have made themselves wings like geese and are flown away to the heavens" (cf. ANET, 9.10–10.5). In the ancient world the figure of a bird flying off symbolized fleeting wealth. It is therefore folly to be a slave to it (see also **Lk 12:20; 1Ti 6:7–10**). Besides, as m. ʾAbot 2:8 warns, this behavior will only add to the anxiety.

Tremper Longman: This proverb helps people put riches in a proper perspective. As with poverty, there are dangers that are also a part of being rich (**30:7–9**; see also **Eccles. 5:13–17**). Christian readers will note a similar sentiment toward the transience of riches in **Matt. 6:19**, which talks of "*treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal*" (NRSV).

George Mylne: In our fallen condition, we must labor and sweat for our subsistence but that kind of labor is useful both to the body and mind. The labor after riches here forbidden, and is exceedingly hurtful to both. It arises from an immoderate esteem of present things, and an aspiring mind. It is joined with a distrust of God's providence, and a hurry and distraction of men's thoughts, which renders them unfit for the service of God. It destroys all relish for the comforts of life, which might be enjoyed at present and is a continual incentive to unmerciful and unjust behavior. It is a pity that we do not more attentively consider the alarming things that are said by our Lord, and the apostle Paul, on this subject. . .

Those who place their happiness on worldly wealth, build their foundation on the sand. Their joy is short, and dashed with a large infusion of fear and vexation. Their disappointment is certain; their end is dreadful for those who mind earthly things above heavenly things, are enemies of the cross of Christ, and their end is destruction. But true

Christians seek for the true riches, their conversation is in Heaven, and their treasure is in a place where there is no moth nor rust, nor any of those feathers which compose the eagle wings of riches, with which they flee away.

C. (:6-8) Don't Accept Hospitality from the Selfish

> **"***Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, Or desire his delicacies; 7 For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, 'Eat and drink!' But his heart is not with you. 8 You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten, And waste your compliments.*"

Allen Ross: It is a mistake to accept hospitality from a stingy person, for his lack of sincerity will make the evening unpleasant.

Paul Koptak: Framing the instruction on riches is another vignette about **sitting down to eat**, but this time the host's character is clearly stated. He is (lit.) "*bad of eye*" (NIV "*stingy*"), in contrast to the generous person with a good eye (cf. **22:9; 28:22**). Like the ruler of **23:1**, he also has a table of deceptive delicacies (cf. **23:3**), for he says, "Eat and drink," but does not mean it. Perhaps this is a grudging host who sees an unexpected guest as an imposition instead of a chance to show hospitality, halfheartedly offering the welcome that was so important to ancient oriental culture. Therefore, the teacher advises not moderation but total avoidance: "*Do not eat*" (**23:6**). People usually vomit from eating too much, but in this case even a little of this food will not stay down, so everything is lost—the meal and the compliments.

Like chasing riches that fly away (**23:4–5**), craving these delicacies only leads to loss and emptiness. The "*compliments*" are (lit.) the "*pleasing* [words]" of **22:18**, which the wise student stores on the advice of the teacher. Here, however, they are put to a wrong purpose, namely, flattery for greedy gain instead of wise servanthood. Together, the three teachings of **23:1–8** make it clear that **meals are about a lot more than food**. Usually a meal is a sign of hospitality and friendship to all who come by; yet there are other meals where either guest or host is tested, where motives other than friendship are present. Just as Woman Wisdom offered a banquet of life and Woman Folly a meal of death (**9:1–18**), so here food and appetite are used as metaphors for the attitude one brings to riches and the kind of "teaching" one desires.

Richard Clifford: To the author of Proverbs, uninvited banqueters are thieves who will suffer the same consequences as those who rob the poor in Amenemope, **chap. 11**. They cannot keep their unjust gain. Since the setting is a banquet, they vomit up their ill-gotten gains. Like the previous two admonitions, this one warns against strategies to advance one's career by any means other than fidelity to wisdom and to the vocation of sage.

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 7** indicates that such a person has a **façade of being generous**, but is not like that on the inside. The only other place where the expression is used in the OT is in **28:22**, where it refers to one who chases after wealth. So it describes someone who is greedy and not wanting to share, yet still wanting to have a name for

being generous. **Verse 7a** does not clarify the matter, as it has been variously translated (see nrsv: 'for like a hair in the throat, so are they', and esv: for he is like one who is inwardly calculating). The esv probably best grasps the sense, but the verb '*think*' or '*calculate*' occurs only here in the OT. Although these stingy people urge you to eat and drink, they do not really mean it in their heart or inner self (**v. 7b**). The meaning of **verse 8** is clear (you will vomit up what you have eaten and waste your kind words), but the reason for this is not set out. There may have been something bad about the food, but more likely it is a vivid expression for **being revolted when you realize the hypocrisy of the host**.

D. (:9) Don't Offer Wisdom to Fools

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

Allen Ross: A "*fool*" (*kesîl*) despises wisdom, so it is a waste of time to try to teach him. There is no specific connection to Egyptian literature, but the general concept is there that a fool rejects discipline and instruction, often scorning the teacher who tries to change him.

Tremper Longman: The wisest advice will bounce off the ears of fools. Even worse, it will bring on their hostility. Fools are set against wisdom, particularly if that wisdom involves any kind of criticism of their behavior. Jesus makes a similar comment in the Gospels when he admonishes his disciples: "*Don't give what is holy to unholy people. Don't give pearls to swine! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you*" (Matt. 7:6 NLT).

Lindsay Wilson: The reason for refraining from speaking in the presence of fools (those who have rejected the way of wisdom) is that they will treat wise words as of little value (**1:7b; 9:7–8a; 18:2**). They will refuse to be shaped by them, and so speaking to them is actually a waste of time and effort. Fools will not be educated into God's kingdom.

E. (:10-11) Don't Steal Private Property or Take Advantage of the Vulnerable

"*Do not move the ancient boundary, Or go into the fields of the fatherless;*
11 For their Redeemer is strong; He will plead their case against you."

Paul Koptak: Systems of law were created to protect the poor and defenseless; the legal terminology suggests that anyone who misuses the system to abuse them will have it used against himself instead.

TEXT: Proverbs 23:12-35

TITLE: WORDS OF THE WISE – CONCERNS RELATED TO TRAINING YOUTH

I. (:12-14) IMPORTANCE OF DISCIPLINE AND INSTRUCTION IN PURSUING WISDOM

A. (:12) Priority of Personal Discipline and Appropriating Wisdom

"*Apply your heart to discipline,*
And your ears to words of knowledge."

Richard Clifford: A new section **(23:12–35**) begins here, in which positive commands and an affectionate parental tone replace the admonitions of **22:22 - 23:11** (in which there were seven occurrences of the negative particle *'al*). Allusions to Amenemope cease with this verse. The concern from now on is with **issues associated with young people**: finding role models (**v. 17–18**), restraining high sexual energy (**vv. 26–27**), and the dangers of alcohol (**vv. 19–21** and **29–35**). Though beginning a new section, this verse manages to sum up the immediately preceding verses: Avoid shabby self-promotion and self-importance; devote yourself purely to wisdom.

Paul Koptak: A renewed call to attention repeats the words "*heart*" and "*ears*" from **22:17**, this time with a call to "**apply**" oneself to instruction and knowledge. The word for "*instruction*" (*musar*) is translated as "*discipline*" in **23:13**, for both verbal teaching and the correction of the rod are considered instruction.

Lindsay Wilson: Readers are urged to '*bring their heart'*, that is, apply their mind to *instruction* (*mûsār*), a key word in Proverbs from the introduction (**1:2, 3, 7**) and constantly thereafter. It can mean '*discipline*' (e.g. **15:10**), but in parallel with words of knowledge (as also in **19:27**) has the sense of being shaped and instructed by wisdom. Being shaped involves **both discipline and instruction**. The second half of the verse calls on them to listen carefully (apply or 'bring' covers both halves of the verse) to words of knowledge. While instruction is wider than verbal instruction, listening to the words of the teacher is clearly crucial.

Tremper Longman: This passage fits with others that also speak of the need to instruct young people. The fact that the rod is mentioned indicates that the sages had no illusions about young people. It is not a matter of trying to bring the best out of children. Wisdom had to be drummed into them, sometimes literally.

After an initial admonition to put oneself in a posture of learning by subjecting oneself to discipline and instruction, the text turns to the topic of young people. To withhold discipline, even physical discipline, is a matter of neglect. Coercing them to instruction is a lifesaving act. Again, the teaching is based on a paradox. If one doesn't hit a youth, then that youth will die because he or she will not grow in wisdom but will become a fool. Hit children in the context of instruction, and they will live. The sage is not talking about a rigorous beating, but rather something equivalent to a spanking. This may be

surmised from the *matter*-of-fact statement "*They will not die*" as well as this book's general emphasis on moderation, kindness, and gentleness.

Caleb Nelson: Here we are, ten or twelve sayings into the **thirty sayings of the wise**, and we have a clear break. We looked last Sunday at the Ten Commandments of **wealth management**. Now, though, we return to an even earlier theme in Proverbs — the **theme of the heart, of discipline, and the connection between a disciplined heart and a listening ear**. Remember, the purpose of this whole book is to impart the discipline of wisdom. That's the first sentence of the book, after the title in **1:1**. And lest we forget that imperative, Solomon has repeated it in every chapter, sometimes multiple times, since then — either in a directly imperative command to listen, or by providing an illustration of the good things that befall the listener and the terrible things that come to the man who stops his ears. Clearly, brothers and sisters, if you've been paying attention to the book of Proverbs at all, then you know that discipline is important. You know that a wise life is a disciplined life. Remember, we defined discipline as "**the training that makes punishment unnecessary**." It's not just your child that needs it. YOU NEED IT!

And so, the wise tell us to apply our heart to discipline — literally, to bring our heart to discipline. What does that mean? It means bringing your heart to the place where it is ready and willing to learn the correct lesson from the circumstances of life, from the words of God, from the angry denunciation of an upset neighbor, and on and on and on. To apply your heart to discipline is to refuse to let it shy away from that discipline. It's to refuse to let yourself off the hook, but to learn the lesson you need to learn instead. Brothers and sisters, these are the words of the wise! Only a fool would say, "My heart doesn't need discipline."

Charles Bridges: Observe the **link between the heart and ears**. The heart that is otherwise open to sound advice may be shut against Christ and his teaching. It may be closed up in unbelief, prejudice, indifference, and the love of pleasure. A listless heart can, therefore, produce a careless ear. But when the heart is graciously opened and enlightened, the ears instantly become attentive. Awakened spiritual desire brings prayer, and prayer brings blessing. And every work of knowledge is more precious than thousands of pieces of gold and silver (**Psalm 119:72, 127**).

B. (:13-14) Purpose of Parental Discipline of Children

1. (:13) Inflicting Limited Physical Pain

"*Do not hold back discipline from the child,*
Although you beat him with the rod, he will not die."

Richard Clifford: A young person will not die from instructional blows but from their absence, for (premature) death results from uncorrected folly.

Caleb Nelson: But discipline is not limited to the **verbal**, even though the verbal is the primary and most important arena of discipline. The rod — that is, some kind of infliction of **physical pain** at a level too high to be ignored but not so high as to be

dangerous — is another tool of discipline that godly parents use. Different children need different doses of it. But the parent who says "We don't discipline with the infliction of pain" has set himself up as wiser than God. Another way of saying this is that such a parent is a fool. You shall beat your child with the rod, say the sages. You shall cause him physical pain in order to teach him to fear God, which is the discipline of wisdom.

2. (:14) Immunizing from an Early Death and Spiritual Ruin

"*You shall beat him with the rod,*
And deliver his soul from Sheol."

Lindsay Wilson: The goal is not for parents to let off steam, vent their anger or show their power or control. None of these is endorsed in the book. The purpose of discipline is to save their soul (*nepeš*, life) from an early death (*Sheol*, the place of the dead). This discipline is not meant to be cruel or vindictive, but rather life-giving.

George Mylne: But the fond hearts of parents will suggest several objections to this duty. They cannot bear the cries and sobs of their children; they are afraid they will die under their hands. There is no fear of this, answers the wise man, they only wish to frighten you by their complaints. They shall not die, but live. Punish them with the rod, for it is one of the means that God has appointed for delivering them from an untimely death in this world, and destruction in the eternal world.

What an idea does this give us, of the **usefulness of the rod of correction**! What parent who loves his child, and has any sense of the terrors of eternal punishment will spare his rod, after he has heard this saying of God? Would you not force your children to undergo an operation by the surgeon, if you saw it necessary for the preservation of their lives? Are their souls less precious than their bodies?

You think that gentle means are always the best but does not God tell you that this does not hold in every case? No doubt Eli and David wished well to their children, and their parental fondness told them that gentle admonitions and time, would correct all the disorders in their families. But they mourned at last over these children, who had been so much hurt by their indulgence.

Whether the disorders in David's family were the occasion of Solomon's making so many proverbs on this subject, I shall not say but after what he has said, and after what Eli and David suffered those parents who do not perform this duty, are more inexcusable than these godly men were. Your children may perhaps complain of your severity, when there is no ground for it. But this is easier to be borne, than it would be to hear them curse you, at the last day, and from the bottomless pit, for allowing them to take their course in sin.

II. (:15-21) INSIGHTS REGARDING PURSUING WISDOM

A. (:15-16) Wise Children Bring Joy to Their Parents

1. (:15) Cause and Effect Relationship between Wisdom and Joy

"*My son, if your heart is wise,*
My own heart also will be glad;"

Tremper Longman: A wise heart will lead to words of integrity, and from the words of integrity, the hearer can deduce a wise heart. Perhaps this passage is to be taken as words of inspiration to students who can make their teacher happy by pursuing wisdom and speaking with integrity.

2. (:16) Cause and Effect Relationship Restated

"*And my inmost being will rejoice,*
When your lips speak what is right."

Lindsay Wilson: The willingness of the young to be shaped by wisdom leads to joy and delight in those who are training them.

Allen Ross: A **wise heart** is one that makes wise choices; the "*right*" (*mêšārîm*) speech refers to direct and honest speech, in which there is no discrepancy between the speech and the intentions. McKane, 387, summarizes: "[The] function of speech is then always to clarify and never to deceive"; to speak *mêšārîm* is to speak in contrast to deception that uses ambiguity to darken counsel.

B. (:17-18) Wisdom Is Rooted in the Fear of the Lord which Banishes Envy

1. (:17) Command Regarding Present Focus

"*Do not let your heart envy sinners,*
But live in the fear of the LORD always."

Richard Clifford: **Peer groups** exercise a strong influence on young people. The sage warns against becoming a member of the wicked, who, as a doomed group, will have no descendants (cf. **1:8–19**). Rather, one should learn to admire those who revere Yahweh, a group that has a future. The advice not to envy or emulate the wicked was common (**Ps. 37:1; Prov. 3:31; 24:1, 19**). In **Psalm 37** (esp. **v. 1**) the temptation to envy sinners is answered, as it is here, by assuring a blessed future to the righteous. The warning against envying the wicked is repeated within the section in **24:1–2, 19–20**.

George Mylne: When we see the wicked flourishing in prosperity, and the people of God languishing under oppression we are sometimes tempted to doubt whether there is a divine providence, and whether the promises and threatenings of God are true or not and to grudge that there is not a present distribution of rewards and punishments, according to the works of men.

Unfit as we are for managing our own affairs, we are too much disposed to usurp God's office of governing the world; and if he does not shower down blessings into the lap of those whom we esteem, and fire and brimstone upon the head of the wicked then we think that God cannot see things through the dark cloud, or is unfit to manage them.

But we are here directed to banish envy from our hearts, and as an antidote to this mischievous passion, to be in the fear of the Lord continually. Envy of the wicked is a great enemy to the fear of the Lord. Asaph's feet had almost stumbled when he looked with a grudging eye at the prosperous circumstances of the wicked but by the fear of the Lord, he was preserved from falling, and was recovered from his dangerous situation. For a deep and heart-affecting impression of the infinite excellencies of the divine nature, will silence our murmurings and subdue the insurrections of our hearts. If we are deeply impressed with a sense of the righteousness and holiness of God, and of his wisdom and goodness we will believe that his ways are always right, and that there can be no unrighteousness in his administration, even when we cannot discern the reasons of it. "*Clouds and darkness are round about him but righteousness and judgment are still the habitation of his throne*."

We are required to live in the fear of the Lord all the day long. Whether we are in prosperous or in adverse circumstances, and whether the wicked around us rise into affluence and power, or sink into insignificance and misery an impression of God's perfection, and of the happiness that attends true religion, and the misery that follows sin must dwell upon our hearts, and govern our conduct.

This fear of God will banish from our minds impious reflections upon God, and dispose us to keep his way, even when wicked men are in power, and threaten to banish all religion out of the world. For still we shall believe that it will be well with the righteous and ill with the wicked, perhaps in this world but most certainly in the next.

2. (:18) Encouragement Regarding Future Hope

"*Surely there is a future,*
And your hope will not be cut off."

Allen Ross: These lines advise us always to be zealous for the *fear of the Lord* rather than be envious of sinners. The contrast is between **right and wrong envy**; the one is spiritual exercise and the other a disease. The difficulty, of course, is that the sinful world seems more attractive. Thus the motivation provided is that the future belongs to the righteous. Kidner, 152, remarks that the remedy for envying sinners is to look up ("*fear the LORD*" in **v.17**) and look ahead (there is a "*future hope*," **v.18**).

C. (:19) Wisdom Comes from Assimilating Instruction

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

Tremper Longman: This passage begins with an exhortation to be wise. It is followed by another imperative admonishing the son to march in the way of his heart. What is surprising about this is that elsewhere it is assumed that the natural inclination of a person, particularly a youth, is negative. I think the best understanding of the dynamics of this verse is that it assumes that the son is on the path of wisdom through making a commitment to pursuing the right path. Once the decision to be wise is made, then the exhortation becomes one to continue in that way.

D. (:20-21) Wisdom Comes from Avoiding Evil Companions

1. (:20) Prohibition – Avoid Drunkards and Gluttons

"*Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine,*
Or with gluttonous eaters of meat;

Richard Clifford: To listen to one's own mind (lit., "*heart*") rather than to evil companions is difficult, especially for young people.

There are serious obstacles to acting out of one's own convictions; two of these are alcohol and luxurious living. Excessive consumption of alcohol (and meat) symbolizes here a **decadent style of living**. In **Deut. 21:18–21** the verbs "*to quaff*" and "*to devour*" describe a son who refuses to listen to his father and mother; he is judged deserving of death. There may be an allusion to that ancient law here, except that here not listening to father or teacher leads to poverty rather than death. Anyone trying to play at being rich by conspicuous consumption will end up poor.

George Mylne: We are forbidden, not only to be drunkards or gluttons but to be found in the company of such people. For bad company is the common temptation which the devil uses to draw men to these sins. By giving them our company, we are exposed to their solicitations, and many who were once sober, have been enticed by them to go to excess, and, by a repetition of the same rash conduct have been led on, step by step, to the greatest excesses, and the most confirmed habits of intemperance until they became senseless brutes, a burden to their friends, and fit only for being laid in the grave, and consigned to those regions which shall be the everlasting habitation of those who make their belly their God.

2. (:21) Rationale – Lack of Self Control and Overindulgence Lead to Poverty

"*For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty,*
And drowsiness will clothe a man with rags."

Paul Koptak: The warning combines fears of **gluttony** and **laziness**; the "*drowsiness*" may come from the wine or simply from love of sleep. Like the table scenes of **Proverbs 23:1–11**, this teaching calls for restraint when encountering food and drink that fail to nourish or satisfy, as well as independent thinking in the face of peer pressure.

Lindsay Wilson: **Self-control** is the missing virtue here, as the drunkard's and glutton's self-indulgence will only lead to further misery.

George Mylne: The drunkard or glutton may flatter himself with vain hopes that he shall escape poverty, and that tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant but reason and experience, as well as Scripture, confirm the truth in our text. For if the slothful man bring himself to poverty, the waster must do it much sooner, especially as luxury and reveling bring drowsiness and sloth in their train. For by a course of sensual indulgence, a man is indisposed to labor and prudent care; so that, while he throws

away with one hand he gathers nothing with the other to supply his numerous needs. The slothful man is brother to him who is a great waster but when the great waster is likewise a slothful man, as is generally the case, poverty is coming to him with hasty steps, and with resistless force.

Tremper Longman: Elsewhere the rationale for criticizing getting drunk has to do with clouding one's ability to think and make decisions. In other words, it disrupts one's wisdom. The same can apply to overeating, which would lead to lethargic behavior, not the kind of diligent work so frequently encouraged in the book. However, the explicit motive given here against overdrinking and eating is that such overindulgence would lead to poverty. [Ed: However, not just because of the excessive costs of the indulgent activities but also because of the resultant poor decision making.]

III. (:22-35) INSTRUCTING AND DISCIPLINING CHILDREN PROTECTS AGAINST THE SEDUCTIONS OF ILLICIT SEX AND STRONG DRINK

A. (:22-25) Supreme Value of Wisdom

1. (:22-23) Make Wisdom a Priority

a. (:22) Gain Wisdom from Parental Counsel

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

Allen Ross: Because of parents' position and experience, their wise counsel should be heeded. The idea of honoring here takes on the precise nuance of listening to instructions (Toy, 436).

b. (:23) Get Wisdom at All Costs

"*Buy truth, and do not sell it,*
Get wisdom and instruction and understanding."

Tremper Longman: **Verse 23** adopts a commercial metaphor to emphasize the importance of wisdom and its associated qualities of truth, discipline, and understanding. The son should buy (acquire) wisdom but not sell it. After all, as we have seen in many places in Proverbs, there is no amount of wealth that would be worth parting company with wisdom.

Allen Ross: Getting truth means acquiring training in the truth, and gaining understanding means developing the perception and practical knowledge of the truth (Toy, 436).

George Mylne: We must show the same sacred regard to wisdom, and instruction, and understanding, which are inseparably connected with the truth. For we have no true hold of the truth, however clear our apprehensions of it are, or however zealously we profess it if we are not made wise, and led in the way of duty by its influence. That wisdom and understanding which is not grounded in truth is but cunning craftiness and splendid ignorance. That instruction which is not according to truth, is poison to the

soul. Truth is to be received into the mind and heart, and rule our conduct. Those only are wise unto salvation, who receive the truth in the love of it, and hold it forth in their profession, and walk in it until they reach the end of their course.

2. (:24-25) Make Your Parents Rejoice over Your Spiritual Maturity

a. (:24) Joy of the Parents of the Righteous

"*The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice,*
And he who begets a wise son will be glad in him."

b. (:25) Joy of the Parents Reemphasized

"*Let your father and your mother be glad,*
And let her rejoice who gave birth to you."

George Mylne: Can you resist the wishes of your parents, and blast their hopes of gladness, when the joy they expect from you is no selfish pleasure but that pure and unselfish joy which arises from your own happiness? Can you bear the thoughts of embittering their old age, when it is attended with so many unavoidable pains and griefs which will be sweetened by your good behavior? Will you be the wretched instruments of bringing down the gray hair of your parents with sorrow to the grave?

B. (:26-28) Seduction of Illicit Sex

1. (:26) Temptations Are Governed by the Heart and Eyes

"*Give me your heart, my son,*
And let your eyes delight in my ways."

Tremper Longman: Again, the father appeals to his son to pay attention to his teaching. He desires that his son follow his instruction and thus stay on the right path. The path is a metaphor for the course of one's life and derives from the idea that life is a journey, with a beginning, middle, and end. This metaphor is rather extensively used throughout Proverbs, but particularly in **chaps. 1–9**.

Lindsay Wilson: Keeping our **eyes** (focus, attention, what we look at) on wisdom and her ways is a key to the warnings that follow about the loose woman. Sexual unfaithfulness often has its origin in what we look at, and where our heart is. Two examples of loose women are given in **verse 27**: the prostitute and the adulteress. The adulteress is literally a '*foreign*' or '*strange*' woman, but it is a term that is characteristically used of an adulteress in the foundational chapters of the book (**2:16; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5**). The prostitute is also used in **chapters 1 – 9** as a clear example of folly in practice (**6:26; 7:10**).

2. (:27-28) Temptress of Illicit Sex Exposed as Extremely Dangerous

a. (:27) Deep Pit and Narrow Well

"*For a harlot is a deep pit,*
And an adulterous woman is a narrow well."

Richard Clifford: The danger of the prostitute is expressed by the metaphor of a deep pit and narrow opening, which in **22:14** and elsewhere may have a sexual connotation.

b. (:28) Robber and Destroyer
"*Surely she lurks as a robber,*
And increases the faithless among men."

George Mylne: The profligate woman is not only a deep pit but a robber. For a single comparison is insufficient to show the numberless harms occasioned by her seductions. She lies in wait, not to rob men of a few pounds but to rob them of all their substance and credit, of their health and comfort, of their bodies and souls! And those who voluntarily comply with her alluring insinuations, are confederates with her and the devil, against God and themselves. She increases the transgressors among men. For she spreads her nets and entangles those unwary men, of whom better things might have been reasonably expected, if they had escaped her. And when she has them fast, she blindfolds them, and leads them on through the ways of sin and folly, until she plunges them into the gulf of eternal perdition! She is not only a servant, but an emissary of the wicked one, drawing as many as she can into his snares. Therefore if we love our own souls, we must avoid the doors of her house. Would we be preserved from this mischievous enchantress, who has been the instrument of drowning such multitudes in destruction and perdition? Let us turn our hearts to the divine instructions of this book, and call wisdom our sister, and understanding our kinswoman. Let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.

C. (:29-35) Seduction of Strong Drink

1. (:29-30) Brings Self-Inflicted Consequences

a. (:29) Rhetorical Questions Highlighting Problems Associated with Strong Drink
"*Who has woe?*
Who has sorrow?
Who has contentions?
Who has complaining?
Who has wounds without cause?
Who has redness of eyes?"

Paul Koptak: Another warning about drunkenness (cf. **23:20–21**) takes the form of a satire, using key words from the chapter ("*eye*"; "*beat*" or "*punish*," **23:13–14, 35**; "*end*," *aḥarit*, **23:18, 32**) to make a summary point. A series of **rhetorical questions** begins with general descriptions of woe and sorrow and ends with the hangover problem of eyes that are bloodshot (or bleary, cf. **23:29**). If we have a riddle in **23:29**, the answer is provided: The person who has these problems is the one who lingers over wine.

Tremper Longman: This proverb warns against the **dangers of alcoholism** by providing a frightening picture of the **grip of addiction**. The passage begins with a series of questions that are easily answered by reading the remainder of the text, particularly

v. 30. Alcoholics cry "*woe*" and "*alas*" because of the pain and distress the compulsion brings to their lives. Alcoholics get into conflicts and fights that produce bruises because under the influence of drink they lose all sense of propriety. They say the wrong thing and do the wrong thing at the wrong time, and this gets them into trouble. Alcohol brings a literal glaze to their eyes, but this may also speak metaphorically to an inability to properly see circumstances correctly. They do not see clearly, think clearly, and act rightly under the influence.

b. (:30) Relevant Answer

"*Those who linger long over wine,*
Those who go to taste mixed wine."

Lindsay Wilson: **Mixed wine** is not diluted wine, for it was common to mix rich spices with the wine to bring out a richer flavour.

Allen Ross: The sage gives a vivid picture of the one who drinks too much: he raves on and on, picks quarrels and fights, poisons his system with alcohol, gets bloodshot eyes, loses control, is confused, is unable to speak clearly, imagines things, and is insensitive to pain. While alcoholism is a medical problem, it is also a moral problem because it involves choices and endangers other people.

2. (:31-34) Brings Deceptive Pain and Destructive Disorientation

a. (:31-32) Deceptive Pain

"*Do not look on the wine when it is red,*
When it sparkles in the cup,
When it goes down smoothly;
32 At the last it bites like a serpent,
And stings like a viper."

Lindsay Wilson: The expression *it sparkles in the cup* is literally 'it gives [puts forth] its spring in the cup', a way of describing the wine bubbling up like mineral springs. It seems full of life and fun. It tastes rich and mellow in that it goes down smoothly, so it is tempting by both its appearance and its taste. Ironically, smoothly translates the Hebrew word *mêšārîm*, used in **verse 16** in its normal sense of righteousness, but it is also used of wine going down smoothly in **Song 7:9 (7:10 Heb**.). **Verse 31** indicates that drinking can often be an enjoyable – even enticing – experience at the time, but the rest of the passage then sets out the **forgotten consequences of excessive drinking**.

b. (:33-34) Destructive Disorientation

"*Your eyes will see strange things,*
And your mind will utter perverse things.
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.

Richard Clifford: The description begins with the visual and tactile sensations that the wine produces and develops the effects of the drink in images:

- the bite of a snake,
- the sway of the sea,
- and the nausea of a sailor.

The author cites the foolish thinking of the drunkard. **Isaiah 5:11** paints a similar picture: "*Ho, you who rise early in the morning to pursue liquor, who tarry in the evening, inflamed by wine*."

Tremper Longman: But before it kills, it **disorients**. It blurs the vision, so the drunk sees things that are not there. How can one react with wisdom if one cannot know the reality of a situation? Also, the mouth starts speaking things that are offensive. Again, this goes counter to the wisdom enterprise. The metaphors of v. 34 well capture the sickening lack of balance of a drunk. In a sense, one even loses the ability to physically orient oneself. It softens pain in an unhelpful way. If one does not feel pain, then there is no motivation to remove oneself from the source of pain. In such circumstances, there will be plenty of pain once the "anesthetic" wears off.

Matthew Henry:

It makes men impure and insolent, **v. 33.**

(1.) The eyes grow unruly and behold strange women to lust after them, and so let in adultery into the heart. *Est Venus in vinis*—Wine is oil to the fire of lust. *Thy eyes shall behold strange things* (so some read it); when men are drunk the house turns round with them, and every thing looks strange to them, so that them they cannot trust their own eyes.

(2.) The tongue also grows unruly and talks extravagantly; by it the *heart utters perverse things*, things contrary to reason, religion, and common civility, which they would be ashamed to speak if they were sober. What ridiculous incoherent nonsense men will talk when they are drunk who at another time will speak admirably well and to the purpose!

It stupefies and besots men, **v. 34**. When men are drunk they know not where they are nor what they say and do.

(1.) Their heads are giddy, and when they lie down to sleep they are as if they were tossed by the rolling waves of the sea, or upon the top of a mast; hence they complain that their heads swim; their sleep is commonly unquiet and not refreshing, and their dreams are tumultuous.

(2.) Their judgments are clouded, and they have no more steadiness and consistency than he that sleeps upon the top of a mast: they drink and forget the law (**ch. 31:5**): they err through wine (**Isa. 28:7**), and think as extravagantly as they talk.

(3.) They are heedless and fearless of danger, and senseless of the rebukes they are under either from God or man. They are in imminent danger of death, of damnation, lie as much exposed as if they slept upon the top of a mast, and yet are secure and sleep on.

Lindsay Wilson: The inner thoughts (heart) of excessive drinkers will be expressed in perverse or twisted speech (**v. 33b**), presumably as they lose self-control. They will put themselves in situations of reckless danger (**v. 34**, lying down in the sea; sleeping on top of a mast or rigging – a hapax so its precise meaning is not certain, but it is clearly foolish). They may be physically injured or beaten up, but not aware of the damage done (**v. 35a**). The pain will certainly be felt after they have sobered up. The lack of direction in life is seen in that when they wake up from their drunken stupor, all they can think about is the next drink. There is no further purpose in life beyond this downward spiral.

3. (:35) Brings a Downward Cycle of Unending Addiction

"*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."

Tremper Longman: The tragedy of addiction, however, is that despite the horrible experience of being drunk, once one sobers up, there is a frantic search for the next drink.

Charles Bridges: Though we see the whole nature so depraved in taste, so steeped in pollution, we ask, is anything too hard for the Lord? May his name be praised for a full deliverance from the enslavement to sin – to all sins and to every individual sin – and even from the chains of this giant sin. The drunkard becomes sober, the unclean holy, the glutton temperate. The love of Chrit overpowers the love of sin. Pleasures are then enjoyed without a sting, for no serpent or adder can live in his presence, and the newly planted principle transforms the whole man into the original likeness to God. See **1 John 3:9; 5:18**.

TEXT: Proverbs 24:1-22

TITLE: DESTINIES OF THE WISE AND THE WICKED

I. (:1-14) CONTRAST BETWEEN THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF WISDOM AND THE EVIL BEHAVIOR OF FOOLS

A. (:1-2) Do Not Envy the Wicked

1. (:1) Prohibition – Do Not Envy the Wicked or Associate with Them

"*Do not be envious of evil men,*
Nor desire to be with them;"

Paul Koptak: The choice of companions often begins in the desire to emulate. But what kind of company can one have with people who think and speak about trouble? What is there to envy except easy gain?

Tremper Longman: In the present passage, association with the wicked is prohibited because the sages understood the power of influence. If one envies and associates with evil people, then it is more than likely that they will become evil themselves. The second verse reminds the reader of the nature of evil people, once again showing the connection between the heart and lips. Their heart, representing their inner character, desires destruction, so their lips speak trouble that will lead to their ultimate goal.

2. (:2) Rationale – They Cause Trouble

"*For their minds devise violence,*
And their lips talk of trouble."

Richard Clifford: This admonition occurs three times in the thirty sayings (**23:17–18**, here, and **24:19–20**). Common to all the admonitions is the verb *qannē'*, "*to be jealous, zealous, envious*," which also occurs in **1:15–19** and **3:31**. The motive stated in the first and the third occurrence—the wicked have no future—is expressed indirectly here. **Their malicious planning and speaking invites retribution**. **Verses 7–9** and **10–12** detail their self-destruction.

Matthew Henry: Do not speak like them, for their lips talk of their mischief. All they say has an ill tendency, to dishonour God, reproach religion, or wrong their neighbour; but it will be mischief to themselves at last. It is therefore thy wisdom to have nothing to do with them. Nor hast thou any reason to look upon them with envy, but with pity rather, or a just indignation at their wicked practices.

David Guzik: The kind of evil this proverb has in mind is the kind associated with violence and troublemaking. The seemingly quick and easy money and status gained through violence and troublemaking is a temptation to be resisted.

Lindsay Wilson: The nature of their *evil* (*rā'â*) is not specified in **verse 1**, but it involves what they are like on the inside (*their hearts*) and their outward speech (*their*

lips). They internally 'plot/plan' violent destruction (*šōd*), and use their speech to create mischief/trouble ('*āmāl*, **v. 2; 1:11–16**). *Trouble* commonly has the sense of 'work' or 'toil', but here means mischief or harm (as in **Job 4:8; Ps. 10:7**). We need to choose our friends well, and seek out a helpful group of companions.

B. (:3-4) Build Your Life on Wisdom

1. (:3) Wisdom Provides the Best Foundation

"*By wisdom a house is built,*
And by understanding it is established;"

Paul Koptak: Wealth may be obtained by violence and deceit (**24:1–2**; cf. **1:13**), but only by wisdom does one have a place to live. This theme is picked up in **24:27–34**; without wise work in the field, the house will be empty.

Tremper Longman: Wisdom implies the ability to say the right thing and act the right way to build up community and not destroy it. We should also remember that Yahweh constructed the cosmos by means of his wisdom (**3:19–20; 8:22–31**). We also think of **Prov. 31:10–31**, where the noble woman builds her house through wisdom.

2. (:4) Wisdom Provides the Best Blessings

"*And by knowledge the rooms are filled*
With all precious and pleasant riches."

Allen Ross: In **9:1** wisdom is personified as a woman who builds a house, but here the emphasis is primarily on the building—it is a sign of security and prosperity (Toy, 442). One could make a secondary application to building a family (cf. **Ps 127**). Plaut, 247, observes: "The replacement of book shelves by television sets and of the study by the 'den' in modern homes (regressing from human to bestial habitats!) is a sad commentary on our times." It certainly is true that **if it takes wisdom to build a house, it also takes wisdom to build a household.**

Lindsay Wilson: a picture of delighting in life's overflowing blessings (see **3:9–10**).

C. (:5-6) Gain Power for Victory from Wisdom

1. (:5) Wisdom Leads to Strength

"*A wise man is strong,*
And a man of knowledge increases power.

Tremper Longman: Indeed, the value of wisdom is not that it necessarily avoids war, but that it can provide the strategy through which strength can find its most efficient expression and thus lead to victory. Ecclesiastes provides statements and anecdotes that back this up and yet also acknowledge that ultimately even wisdom itself has its limits (7:19; 9:13–16).

2. (:6) Wise Counselors Lead to Victory

"*For by wise guidance you will wage war,*

And in abundance of counselors there is victory."

Richard Clifford: The paradox that the wise are mightier than warriors is proven true in war. Though usually regarded as a showcase of physical strength, war is in fact won by brains not brawn.

Lindsay Wilson: The positive value of wisdom is set out in these verses, which claim that the guidance wisdom gives is stronger than physical or military power. Real strength is found in a wise person, a man of knowledge (**v. 5**). Strength must be harnessed to some goal, and the wise have the power to live the good life to its fullest extent, which will include self-control, humility and concern for the community. Similarly, military battles are not always won by the army with the most resources, because it is the tactical decisions that hold greater sway. Thus, **verse 6** affirms that proper guidance, part of the goal of the book (**1:5**), is crucial for military success, as is the advice of many counsellors (**11:14; 20:18; 21:22**). A key element of being wise is knowing the limits of our wisdom, and therefore looking to wise advisors. If this is so for times of war, it can also be applied to other occasions as well.

D. (:7-9) Mark People Devoid of Wisdom

Tremper Longman: This unit is bound together by the repetition of the term "*stupid people*" (*ʾĕwîl/ʾiwwelet*) in **vv. 7–9**. In **vv. 8** and **9** is also the repetition of nouns built on the verbal stem *zmm*, meaning "*scheming*." The purpose is to negatively characterize stupid people as those who in the final colon are identified as **mockers**, the most extreme form of fools.

Stupid people cannot be wise because it is beyond them, with the result that they are quiet in a key place of community leadership: "*the gate*." They may not plan beneficial community strategy in a public place like the gate, but they do plot and secretly scheme in a way that is destructive to the community. The latter we can derive from the fact that it is called "*evil*" and "*sin*." The final colon reveals that the community despises such people. As Clifford puts it, "Folly . . . alienates one from the community."

1. (:7) Fools

"*Wisdom is too high for a fool,*
He does not open his mouth in the gate."

Richard Clifford: According to **v. 7** fools can neither grasp nor express wisdom.

Paul Koptak: If guidance and counsel help one win a battle, the fool has none to give at the gate, where public decisions and judgments are made (**24:7**).

Charles Bridges: The commendation of wisdom continues. The person who is richly endowed with wisdom comes with authority and speaks at the gate among the wise. The fool, destitute of wisdom, is barred from such an honor. The simple and diligent

prove that the treasure is not really out of reach; but it is too high for a fool. His groveling mind can never rise to so lofty a matter. He has no understanding of it, no heart to desire it, no energy to hold it. Its holy spirituality is too high for his reach. Nobody seeks his counsel. His opinion, if given, is of no account. While he may have a babbling tongue in the street, at the gate he has nothing to say. He is totally unfit to give judgment in the presence of wise and judicious men. This is not the result of any natural defect, but the result of deliberate perverseness.

George Mylne: **A fool does not see the excellency of wisdom**. Although he may value the reputation of it yet he lacks eyes to behold the real glory of wisdom. Or if he has any sense of its value yet he cannot bring his mind to that degree of care, and diligence, and self-denial, which is necessary to obtain the knowledge of it. Far less can he resist the imperious tyranny of his passions, to put his soul under the government of wisdom. Therefore he continues a fool under all the means of wisdom that are used with him. A desire to get wisdom is of no use but to render his folly more inexcusable. For he has no heart to it but is deeply in love with his folly, and must bear the shame and misery to which it exposes him.

2. (:8) Evil Schemers

"*He who plans to do evil,*
Men will call him a schemer."

Allen Ross: The general public disapproves of a wicked person who plots evil things. The picture of the wicked person is graphic: he devises evil and is a schemer, a sinner, and a scorner (*lēṣ*). *Zimmâ* is "*scheme*"; elsewhere it describes outrageous and lewd schemes (see **Lev 18:17; Jdg 20:6**). Here the description "*schemer*" (*baʿal-mezimmôt*) portrays him as a cold, calculating, active person: "the fool is capable of intense mental activity (*mezimmâ*) but it adds up to sin" (McKane, 399). This type of person flouts all morality, and sooner or later the public will have had enough of him.

Charles Bridges: **vv. 8-9** – What a picture of human depravity is given here. We see its active working, its corrupt source, and its fearful end! Talent, imagination, and an active mind are so debased as to be all concentrated on Satan's own work.

George Mylne: Words are insufficient to express the malignity of that man's heart, who needs no temptation from the devil at all but contrives and plots sin in his own mind, spending his thoughts devising iniquity when he is lying on his bed, or sitting in his house, and searching out the most dextrous and effectual methods of gratifying his own depraved mind, and doing harm to others.

3. (:9) Scoffers

"*The devising of folly is sin,*
And the scoffer is an abomination to men."

George Mylne: Earthly judges cannot penetrate into the hearts of men, and have no business with their secret thoughts but it is the glory of the universal Judge, that He is

the sovereign and searcher of minds. He requires from us, truth in our inward parts; and when he comes to judge the world, all shall know that he searches the hearts, and tries the thoughts of men.

E. (:10-12) Support Neighbors in Danger

Richard Clifford: Excuses for not coming to the aid of the neighbor in distress do not suffice before the God who sees through self-serving excuses. The context escapes us. Is this about the judicial process (Plöger) or more generally about the necessity of every person to stand up for justice in serious cases?

1. (:10) Show Strength, Not Weakness at Crisis Time

"*If you are slack in the day of distress,*
Your strength is limited."

David Guzik: The day of adversity did not make your strength small; it revealed your strength to be small. There is a sense in which we should welcome the day of adversity as a revelation of our strength or weakness.

Paul Koptak: The one who falters in 24:10 is one who has little strength (cf. 24:5); the repetition of the root for "trouble" (ṣrr) allows for a literal translation, "You let down in the day of trouble; troubled, your strength!" This saying may be the climax to 24:1–10, but it also continues into the pair at 24:11–12. If so, then your strength has faltered when you have been called on to help others.

Allen Ross: **Test of Adversity** -- How well one does under adverse conditions reveals how strong that person is. The verse uses a paronomasia to stress the connection: "*If you falter in the times of trouble* [*ṣārâ*], / *how small* [*ṣar*] *is your strength*!" You never know your strength until you are put into situations that demand much from you. Of course, a weak person will plead adverse situations or conditions in order to quit (Kidner, 154).

George Mylne: As gold is tried in the fire, so our strength is tried in the furnace of affliction. And surely when men are tried, it is their interest and honor to see that they come forth as gold, and not as reprobate silver. Trials are necessary for us, and appointed to us and the times of trial are critical seasons. Therefore we ought to be prepared for them, that the trial of our faith may be found unto praise, and honor, and glory. But how shall we be furnished with strength to stand in the evil day? Paul gives us necessary directions for this purpose. Christ is the author of all grace. Faith, hope and patience, are fruits of his Spirit; and we must not only receive those militant graces but depend on his power to maintain them in our souls. And then neither persecution, nor distress, nor anything else shall be able to overthrow our souls, or destroy our comfort.

2. (:11) Rescue Those in Mortal Danger

"*Deliver those who are being taken away to death,*
And those who are staggering to slaughter, O hold them back."

Tremper Longman: The death is not the result of an actual killing, but rather of **foolish behavior** that leads to death. For instance, **Prov. 7** pictures a young man who goes to a promiscuous woman, and the sage likens him to an ox going off to the slaughter. If this type of situation is implied, then the passage is a call to courage for **trying to stop people from their foolish behavior, with its consequences of death.**

Lindsay Wilson: Behind these ideas is the principle of **taking initiative to help others**, even if it is not our specific responsibility (see the parable of the Good Samaritan in **Luke 10:25–37**). This leads nicely on to the reason for being **proactive** in our care of those who are suffering. We are going to face an evaluation of our lives by God (**v. 12**). God is described obliquely as the one *who weighs the heart* (**21:2**) and the one '*who guards your life*' (similarly, **2:8**, but often using wisdom, **2:11**). We cannot plead a lack of knowledge of the need, because God knows and evaluates not simply our words but our inner beings (the *heart*). God guards our life (so niv), rather than our *soul* (as in esv/nrsv), since he is keeping watch over all of our life, not just one part of it. **Verse 12** climaxes in the clearest expression of our **accountability** in the **retribution principle** that he will repay us according to our earthly work. This is also a NT principle (e.g. **2 Cor. 5:10**), and one that does not undermine the doctrine of grace.

David Guzik: The story of Esther is one wonderful example of someone who did deliver those who are drawn towards death. Esther's courage saved her people, even when it would have been easy for her to ignore her duty.

Matthew Henry: A great duty required of us, and that is to appear for the relief of oppressed innocency. If we see the lives or livelihoods of any in danger of being taken away unjustly, we ought to bestir ourselves all we can to save them, by disproving the false accusations on which they are condemned and seeking out proofs of their innocency. Though the persons be not such as we are under any particular obligation to, we must help them, out of a general zeal for justice. If any be set upon by force and violence, and it be in our power to rescue them, we ought to do it. Nay, if we see any through ignorance exposing themselves to danger, or fallen in distress, as travellers upon the road, ships at sea, or any the like, it is our duty, though it be with peril to ourselves, to hasten with help to them and not forbear to deliver them, not to be slack, or remiss, or indifferent, in such a case.

George Mylne: God is the keeper of our souls, and therefore we need not be afraid to risk our lives in obedience to his will. We cannot exist one moment without his kind providence so why should we scruple to risk everything dear to us in the service of him in whom we live, move, and have our being? We are always safe in the way of duty and we are never safe in neglect of it. For safety comes from the Lord our judge and lawgiver; and if our lives are exposed in his service, be can easily preserve them, or compensate the loss, if he allows them to be taken from us. But if we preserve them by declining our duty, we expose them to more dreadful dangers than death.

3. (:12) Don't Make Excuses for Not Helping

"*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?"

Paul Koptak: There are no valid excuses for standing idle when it is possible to help. The fourth line restates a common theme, that Yahweh will pay back according to deeds.

Caleb Nelson: Proposition: Every Christian is responsible to protect human life, according to his or her place and calling.

I. The Command: Protect Those Whose Life Is Endangered, **v. 11**
II. The Method: According to Your Own Place and Calling, **Matthew 25:31-46**
III. The Warning, **v. 12**
   A. Ignorance Is No Excuse, **v. 12a**
   B. The Judge Is Watching, **v. 12b**
   C. The Penalty Is Certain, v**. 12c**

F. (:13-14) Wisdom Is Sweet and Offers a Desirable Future

1. (:13) Wisdom is Sweet to the Taste

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

Allen Ross: One should develop wisdom because it has a **profitable future**. The proverb draws on the image of honey; its health-giving properties make a good analogy to wisdom. While the literal instruction is to eat and enjoy honey, the point is to know wisdom.

2. (:14) Wisdom Provides a Desirable Future

"*Know that wisdom is thus for your soul;*
If you find it, then there will be a future,
And your hope will not be cut off."

Tremper Longman: The benefit of wisdom is that it **provides a future** for a person. It gives that person **hope**. At the simplest level, this would refer to the fact that living by the principles of wisdom as enunciated by Proverbs would provide the strategy to avoid problems that might lead to an early death. On the other hand, and certainly read from a canonical perspective, the pursuit of wisdom that entails a relationship with divine Wisdom would lead to life even beyond death.

II. (:15-22) 4 PROHIBITIONS BASED ON THE ULTIMATE DESTINY OF THE RIGHTEOUS VS. THE WICKED

A. (:15-16) Do Not Attack the Righteous Who Will Always Rise Again

1. (:15) Prohibition – Don't Attack the Righteous

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

Allen Ross: It is futile and self-defeating to mistreat God's people, for they survive, whereas the wicked do not! The warning is against attacking the righteous; to attack them is to attack God and his program, and that will fail (see **Mt 16:18**). The consequence, and thus the motivation, is that if the righteous suffer misfortune any number of times (= "*seven times*," **v.16**), they will rise again; for virtue triumphs in the end (Whybray, 140). Conversely, the wicked will not survive; without God they have no power to rise from misfortune. The point, then, is that **ultimately the righteous will triumph** and those who oppose them will stumble over their evil.

George Mylne: It is vain for the wicked to hope that they shall be able to do any real harm to the righteous. They may flatter themselves with the hopes of success in their unrighteous designs; they see the righteous fall before them, and persuade themselves that they shall not be able to arise but the God who maintains their cause, allows them to fall into trouble to try and refine them, and when he has accomplished his work upon them, will raise them up with renewed vigor, and take a severe vengeance upon their enemies.

2. (:16) Rationale – You Can't Keep the Righteous Down

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

Paul Koptak: The righteous may fall, but they rise again—not like the wicked, who are brought down for good (cf**. 4:19; Jer. 6:15; 8:15; 20:11**).

Richard Clifford: In this saying, the ambusher rather than the ambushed is the one actually in danger, for the righteous person always ("*seven times*") makes a comeback. The wicked person, however, is tripped up by only one fall—perhaps the very act of ambushing. The proverb can be extended to ethics generally, where it is a sign of a righteous person to be able to rise up after a fall (Alonso Schökel).

Tremper Longman: From the proverb, the sages understood that the righteous wise would suffer in life, but they also have the endurance to withstand the attacks of life. Life may beat them down, but they have hope (previous passage) because of wisdom. They see beyond the present misfortune. The number "*seven*" is to be understood not literally but rather as a symbolic number for completeness, meaning that **the righteous will always get up**. On the other hand, **the wicked will fall easily**.

Lindsay Wilson: The idea of retribution is not that righteousness is always rewarded on every occasion, but rather over the course of one's life. **Verse 16** makes it clear that a righteous person can fall (suffer a setback, reversal or difficulty) seven times (symbolic of completeness), even though that is not the end (**Ps. 34:19 [Heb. 20**]). This makes it important for us not to judge a person's righteousness only by their current

circumstances. Of course, life also tells us that there are many other reasons (famine, being born in a poor country, etc.) why people do not prosper materially. Yet there is a truth that those who live in a way intended by God will find 'the good life' (including in its fullest NT sense), while those who take the path of folly will experience obstacles in their pathway.

Charles Bridges: Hatred toward the righteous is deeply rooted in wicked men. They imagine, especially if they are in power, that they can tyrannize them with impunity. But remember that anyone who touches any of God's followers touches the *apple of God's eye* (**Zechariah 2:8**).

B. (:17-18) Do Not Gloat over Fallen Enemies

1. (:17) Prohibition – Do Not Gloat

"*Do not rejoice when your enemy falls,*
And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;"

Paul Koptak: Yahweh would rather have us rejoice over rescues (cf. **24:11–12**) and leave matters of judgment to him (see **24:19–20**).

2. (:18) Rationale – God May Reverse His Punishment

"*Lest the LORD see it and be displeased,*
And He turn away His anger from him."

Allen Ross: The point is a little complicated. It is the property of God to judge, and it is not to be taken lightly or personalized. God's judgment should strike a note of fear in the hearts of everyone (see **Lev 19:17–18; Mt 5:44**). So if we want God to continue his anger on our enemies (by implication, the wicked), we should not gloat at their punishment. The proverb refers to **personal enemies**; the imprecatory psalms, directed against the enemies of God and his program, address a different set of circumstances.

Lindsay Wilson: The reason given in **verse 18** is quite unexpected for a proverb. We are to avoid gloating over our enemy's setbacks lest the Lord sees us gloating, is displeased by our attitude, and turns back his anger from our enemy. In other words, if we delight in our enemies tripping up, God will help them. God is even prepared to aid those who oppose him.

George Mylne: The whole book of Obadiah seems to be written to show the miseries which men bring upon themselves, by triumphing in the ruin of their enemies; and many chapters of the Bible insist on the same necessary subject.

C. (:19-20) Do Not Envy Evildoers

1. (:19) Prohibition – Do Not Envy Evildoers

"*Do not fret because of evildoers,*
Or be envious of the wicked;"

Lindsay Wilson: Evildoers are not to be envied or feared as they have no prospect of a life that can be enjoyed (**23:17–18; 24:1–2**).

2. (:20) Rationale – Consider Their Destiny

"*For there will be no future for the evil man;*
The lamp of the wicked will be put out."

Tremper Longman: This passage is the third time within the "*sayings of the wise*" where the sage warns against envy toward wicked people (see also **23:17–18; 24:1–2**). It must have been a **common temptation** for the wise to get their blood boiling as they saw godless people do well in life. In the present passage, appeal is made to the lack of "*future*" for the wicked, which certainly implies that **the godly have a future**. In regard to the nature of the future envisioned here, it certainly is true that this passage and ones like them could not be used to proof-text a belief in the afterlife. On the other hand, it seems banal to the extreme to think that the sages were thinking only of this life. After all, if the passage is alluding to physical death in **v. 20**, the sages were smart enough to know that the wise too died, and some of them even died at a young age. At the least, this passage is suggestive of the idea that life lasted beyond the grave.

Bruce Waltke: Keeping the extinction of their lamp in view will extinguish burning envy.

D. (:21-22) Do Not Associate with Rebels but Fear the Lord and the King

1. (:21) Prohibition – Do Not Associate with Rebels

"*My son, fear the LORD and the king;*
Do not associate with those who are given to change;"

Tremper Longman: Sages knew that successful living came from knowing one's right place in the power structure of the universe and their culture. They understood that it was important to respect the powers above them, both divine and human. This is particularly the case when those powers have the ability to destroy them. The latter is certainly the case with both God and king. Here is an unusual collocation of "God" and "king." We might consider the fact that the proverb likely presumes a godly king who would reflect God's kingship.

Allen Ross: People should fear both God and the government, for both **punish rebels**.

David Guzik: The revolutionary often finds that their calamity will rise suddenly, and they can bring great ruin in their revolution.

Charles Bridges: Man's independence, however, naturally kicks against submission. Men love change for the sake of change. To become leaders of a party, they disturb the public peace by proposing changes, without any promise of solid advantage. "He who goes about," says our judicious Hooker, "to persuade men that they are not so well governed as they ought to be shall never lack attention and favorable hearers." Beware

of the destruction that the Lord and the king may inflict on those who despise their authority.

Matthew Henry: **Religion and loyalty must go together**. As men, it is our duty to honour our Creator, to worship and reverence him, and to be always in his fear; as members of a community, incorporated for mutual benefit, it is our duty to be faithful and dutiful to the government God has set over us, **Rom. 13:1, 2**. Those that are truly religious will be loyal, in conscience towards God; the godly in the land will be the quite in the land; and those are not truly loyal, or will be so no longer than is for their interest, that are not religious. How should he be true to his prince that is false to his God? And, if they come in competition, it is an adjudged case, we must obey God rather than men.

George Mylne: How many were destroyed in the gainsaying of Korah, and in the rebellion of Absalom? Who knows what ruin awaits those who are guilty of rebellion, which is as the sin of witch craft; or how suddenly the tempest of vengeance may hurl those men into perdition, who fear not God, or do not reverence those who are authorized by him to administer justice among men.

2. (:22) Rationale – Consider Their Destiny

"*For their calamity will rise suddenly,*
And who knows the ruin that comes from both of them?"

Paul Koptak: Like the descriptions of the wicked in **24:16–17, 20**, the **rebels**' downfall is certain, but it comes suddenly, beyond expectation and prediction ("*Who can know*"; cf. "*know*" in **24:14**). The dangers of bad association have been highlighted throughout the words of the wise (**22:24–27; 23:20–21; 24:1**); this final word assures us that there is **no alliance that can withstand the wrath of God and king**.

TEXT: Proverbs 24:23-34

TITLE: APPENDIX TO WORDS OF THE WISE

(:23a) STRUCTURAL TRANSITION

"*These also are sayings of the wise.*"

Paul Koptak: A new section begins with the title, "*These also are sayings of the wise*." It is distinct from the "*sayings of the wise*" (**22:17 – 24:22**) in what it lacks: There is no father's address to son or any mention of Yahweh or wisdom. It does present further instruction on right judgment and a first-person moral tale in which a sage reports on a learning experience (cf. **4:3–9; 7:6–23**; also **Ps. 37:35–36**). The two overlap in something like a dovetail joint.

Lindsay Wilson: There are two useful ways of **structuring the material**.

- It can be grouped into **verses 23–25** (the role of judges in administering justice); **verses 26–29** (promoting community in speech and work); and **verses 30–34** (the folly of laziness).
- Alternatively, there could be two parallel sections (**vv. 23–27, 28–34**), each starting with a focus on the law courts (**vv. 23–25, 28–29**) then moving on to daily life (speech and work in **vv. 26–27**; laziness in **vv. 30–34**).

Perhaps it is part of the cleverness of Proverbs that both structures seem grounded in the text, but the first has most to commend it.

I. (:23-25) PARTIALITY IN JUDGMENT LEADS TO CURSING INSTEAD OF BLESSING

A. (:23) Condemnation of Showing Partiality in Judgment

"*To show partiality in judgment*
is not good."

Josh Moody: Bias in judgment is a cruel and terrible thing. Be careful that we do not act in partisan or tribal ways when we have the responsibility for making decisions about other people's lives.
https://godcenteredlife.org/devotional/proverbs-2423-34-more-sayings-of-the-wise/

Trapp: Hebrew, *To know faces*; to regard not so much the matter as the man; to hear persons speak, and not causes; to judge not according to truth and equity, but according to opinion and appearance – to fear or favour.

Matthew Henry: As subjects must do their duty, and be obedient to magistrates, so **magistrates** must do their duty in administering justice to their subjects, both in pleas of the crown and causes between party and party. These are lessons for them.

1. They must always weigh the merits of a cause, and not be swayed by any regard, one way or other, to the parties concerned: It is not good in itself, nor can it ever do well, to have respect of persons in judgment; the consequences of it cannot but be the perverting of justice and doing wrong under colour of law and equity. A good judge will know the truth, not know faces, so as to countenance a friend and help him out in a bad cause, or so much as omit any thing that can be said or done in favour of a righteous cause, when it is the cause of an enemy.

2. They must never connive at or encourage wicked people in their wicked practices.

B. (:24-25) Consequences of Judging Wrongly or Rightly

1. (:24) Judging Wrongly

"*He who says to the wicked, "You are righteous,"*
Peoples will curse him, nations will abhor him;"

Richard Clifford: The motive proffered for judges to be even-handed in the courtroom is the universal abhorrence they will incur if they let off the guilty. On the other hand, happiness and blessings will be theirs if they judge justly.

Tremper Longman: No reasons are given for this faulty judgment, but since it probably presumes that the judges know better, it may envision a bribe and the possibility that the defendant is a crony of those making judgments.

2. (:25) Judging Rightly

"*But to those who rebuke the wicked will be delight,*
And a good blessing will come upon them.

George Mylne: Those magistrates who faithfully execute their trust, shall have much pleasure from the testimony of their own hearts, and from the happy effects of their faithful and impartial administrations. They shall have the blessings of those who live under their government and the blessings of men, when they are well earned, are ratified by God.

II. (:26-29) RIGHT SPEECH AND RIGHT PRIORITIES

Lindsay Wilson: These verses all deal with some aspects of being members of the community, either in what we say (**vv. 26, 28–29**) or how we work constructively (**v. 27**). While **verses 28–29** address how to behave in a court setting, they deal with how to act as a witness not a judge. The principle behind the exhortations will also have a wider application in society. . .

Honest and gracious words are not only good work priorities, but also build up our community. **Benefiting others strengthens our society**, while being self-serving and vindictive does not.

A. (:26) Benefit Others by Speaking Honestly

"*He kisses the lips*
Who gives a right answer.

Tremper Longman: This stand-alone proverb repeats a thought commonly heard in proverbs, that **truth is not only right but also beneficial** (**12:17, 19; 14:25**). Kissing and truth-telling are two positive and pleasurable acts one can perform or receive from lips. Telling the truth is a kind act.

Derek Kidner: Note the paradox, that a proper forthrightness, costly though it may seem, wins gratitude, and has its special charm.

Lindsay Wilson: **An honest answer is commended**. The absence of any legal language, and the surrounding community setting, suggest that **verse 26** has honest speech in general in view (so Clifford 1999: 217). The phrase *kisses the lips* (**v. 26b**) is not found elsewhere in the OT. Kissing is sometimes an action of affection or homage, neither of which suits the context here. DCH suggests it means 'seal' and so 'be silent' (as in similar expressions in **Gen. 41:40; Job 31:27**). Certainly, the act of kissing involves putting the lips together, so the idea here is that once you have said all that needs to be said, you add nothing else. This seems better than the niv suggestion that an honest answer is 'like' a kiss on the lips (i.e. something delightful). While this is also true, the preposition 'like' is not part of the Hebrew text, nor does it seem implied. Waltke (2005: 293) argues that the 'saying instructs the disciple to express his devotion to his superiors or peers by giving a straightforward, not devious and/or distorted, answer'.

Paul Koptak: Lips that speak truth are like lips that kiss. The kiss in the ancient world communicated **loyalty** as well as **affection**. The honest answer comes from one who (lit.) "*returns words that are right*" (cf. **22:21**). Interpreters debate whether the legal context of **24:23–25** determines the meaning. The main comparison is that of doing good for another with one's lips, a strong contrast to the deceitful lips of **24:28**.

Richard Clifford: the kiss is a gesture of respect and affection. The greatest sign of affection and respect for another is to tell that person the truth.

George Mylne: History of all ages proves the truth of this proverb. When we are asked an important question, or consulted on an affair of consequence, every man will esteem and love us, if we give an honest answer; and that our answer may be honest, it is necessary that it should be sincere, prudent, and meek. We must not give an answer calculated merely to please the person who questions us. For that would not be consistent with integrity. We must consider all the circumstances of the affair, that we may give a proper and pertinent answer; and we must speak with that meekness, which renders wisdom lovely. If our answers to those who question us have these qualifications, although they may be sometimes distasteful, because truth compels us to speak things disagreeable yet they will tend, on the whole, to the advancement of our character. Our character is no contemptible object, because the goodness of it is

necessary for us in accomplishing the great business of life, glorifying God, and doing good to men.

B. (:27) Work Diligently as the Priority before Comfort

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

Lindsay Wilson: The saying clearly endorses hard work and diligent preparation, but it also requires an appropriate set of priorities. At the very least, as Garrett (1993: 201) suggests, it means that 'one should not provide for personal comfort until a means of income is established' (similarly McKane 1970: 576, 'Wealth must be produced before it is consumed'). Doing tasks in the right order is also an important aspect of wisdom.

Allen Ross: A man should be financially secure before starting a family. Before entering marriage one should have a **well-ordered life**. Whybray, 153, thinks that the meaning is not restricted to marriage but in general teaches us to keep first things first.

George Mylne: Solomon takes it for granted, that we have already a house in which we can live, and enjoy shelter from the inclemencies of the weather but perhaps we wish to have a more elegant and commodious house. A wish of this kind is not unreasonable, only it must be kept in due subordination to our most important concerns. The work of the field, on which our subsistence depends, is of more importance than the building of a better house, and ought therefore to be first attended to. And then we are at liberty to build our house, if we can afford time and money for it. . .

God is a God of order; and he requires us to do all things in their proper order, both in our civil and religious business.

C. (:28-29) Avoid the Temptation to Harm Your Neighbor

1. (:28) Do Not Be a False Witness

"*Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause,*
And do not deceive with your lips."

Richard Clifford: Lying witnesses use their lips to deceive, which is a dishonorable thing. In the long run, a false witness will suffer loss of reputation by practicing deceit. Cf. **Ex. 20:16; Deut. 5:20.**

Charles Bridges: The welfare of society may sometimes constrain a witness to testify against his neighbor, but this must never be without cause. Yet when compelled to this unpleasant duty, whatever the temptation or consequence is, do not use your lips to deceive. Speak plainly, truthfully, the whole truth.

George Mylne: We must not deceive with our lips, either before a judge or in private conversation. The gift of speech was given to us for glorifying God, and doing good to

men. It is a wicked perversion of it to make use of it for dishonoring God and deceiving men, by flattery or falsehood, or by speaking truth in such a manner as to deceive.

2. (:29) Do Not Seek Revenge

Do not say, 'Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me;
I will render to the man "according to his work.""

Josh Moody: Revenge can seem sweet, but it will only start a feud. Look at Christ and for his sake forgive.

Trapp: Nothing is more natural than revenge of wrongs, and the world approves it as right temper, true touch, as to put up wrongs is held cowardice and unmanliness. But we have not so learned Christ.

Richard Clifford: The admonition forbids using the principle, "*I will treat others as they have treated me*." Though the principle may seem reasonable at first hearing, it comes perilously close to **playing God**, for the statement "*I will repay each individual as his deed deserves*" is a quote of the divine speech in **24:12d**, where it is God who repays each person. Proverbs here and in **24:17–18** warns against interfering with the divine process of retribution, which has its own dynamic. Relationships between people cannot be ruled by human beings taking vengeance into their own hands. Cf. **20:22**.

George Mylne: When we revenge injuries at our own discretion, we may do hurt to our enemies but we do much greater hurt to ourselves. For the punishment of malice and revenge to which we expose ourselves, is far worse than any vengeance which our feeble arm can inflict. Let us therefore show ourselves to be the disciples of Christ, by loving our enemies and recompensing evil with good. Thus we shall heap coals of fire upon the head of our enemies, to melt them but by following an opposite course, we heap them on our own, to our destruction.

Matthew Henry: Even a righteous cause becomes unrighteous when it is thus prosecuted with malice. Say not, I will render to the man according to his work, and make him pay dearly for it; for it is God's prerogative to do so, and we must leave it to him, and not step into his throne, or take his work out of his hands. If we will needs be our own carvers, and judges in our own cause, we forfeit the benefit of an appeal to God's tribunal; therefore we must not avenge ourselves, because he has said, *Vengeance is mine*.

III. (:30-34) LAZINESS LEADS TO POVERTY

A. (:30-31) Description of the Vineyard of the Sluggard

1. (:30) Character of the Sluggard

"*I passed by the field of the sluggard,*
And by the vineyard of the man lacking sense;"

Tremper Longman: Laziness is the height of foolish behavior and deserves to be parodied. After all, it leads to difficult consequences for both the individual and the community, and it is easily remedied. The latter is the case for true laziness, not lack of work for other reasons such as disability. If one is simply lazy, then the antidote is hard work.

George Mylne: The sluggard is wise in his own conceit but in Solomon's judgment, sluggard is another name for a man void of understanding. For what understanding can that man have who buries himself alive, and neither performs the duties of life, nor takes the proper method of being able to enjoy and relish its comforts.

2. (:31) Condition of His Vineyard

"*And behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles,*
Its surface was covered with nettles,
And its stone wall was broken down."

Lindsay Wilson: Even **basic maintenance** of a vineyard would involve clearing away thorns and weeds/nettles (see the mention of the sluggard and thorns in **15:19**). In the hill country of Israel stone walls were used to terrace slopes, enabling trees to take root and preventing water from running away. Failure to maintain such walls was self-destructive (see the positive pattern in **Isa. 28:24–29**, using wisdom language).

George Mylne: How could it be otherwise? Thorns and thistles, since the fall of man, spring up everywhere, to remind us of our rebellion against God and the greatest industry can scarcely keep them down. But where slothfulness leaves them to spring up at will, the field must be covered with them, and every useful plant choked. Or, if anything useful springs up among them, it becomes a prey to every spoiler, because the stone wall is broken down and left in ruins. Such is the situation of the sluggard's field and vineyard!

Just so, spiritual sloth is productive of the like effects in the soul of man. If we are careless about our spiritual interests, our souls will soon be overrun with noisome and pernicious vice, and left without guard against those destructive enemies, "*who go about seeking whom they may devour*."

A neglected garden is disagreeable to the eye but a neglected soul is a spectacle of horror! The stinging nettles of envy, the thorns of anger, and ungovernable lusts spring up abundantly in that scene of desolation. Every lust and every temptation have an uncontrolled influence and the roaring lion out of the bottomless pit wastes it at his pleasure!

Matthew Henry: Note:
(1.) Our souls are our fields and vineyards, which we are every one of us to take care of, to dress, and to keep. They are capable of being improved with good husbandry; that may be got out of them which will be fruit abounding to our account. We are charged

with them, to occupy them till our Lord come; and a great deal of care and pains it is requisite that we should take about them.

(2.) These fields and vineyards are often in a very bad state, not only no fruit brought forth, but all overgrown with thorns and nettles (scratching, stinging, inordinate lusts and passions, pride, covetousness, sensuality, malice, those are the thorns and nettles, the wild grapes, which the unsanctified heart produces), no guard kept against the enemy, but the stone-wall broken down, and all lies in common, all exposed.

(3.) Where it is thus it is owing to the sinner's own slothfulness and folly. He is a sluggard, loves sleep, hates labour; and he is void of understanding, understands neither his business nor his interest; he is perfectly besotted.

(4.) The issue of it will certainly be the ruin of the soul and all its welfare. It is everlasting want that thus comes upon it as an armed man. We know the place assigned to the wicked and slothful servant.

B. (32-34) Destiny of Poverty for the Sluggard

1. (:32) Life Lessons Based on Reflection

"*When I saw, I reflected upon it;*
I looked, and received instruction."

George Mylne: Our wisdom lies in learning from the example of other men, compared with the law of God, what we are to do, and what we are to avoid. We see the sluggard, the drunkard, the lukewarm professor but we see no good arising out of their vices but much harm to themselves. They are condemned by the providence as well as the Word of God. Their souls are unprosperous, and the outward circumstances of some of those kinds of sinners, have the marks of divine displeasure mingled with them.

Is it not better to learn wisdom at the cost of other people, than at our own expense? Solomon learned instruction from this dismal spectacle, the field and vineyard of the sluggard; and the instruction which he received, he communicates to us in a proverb, which, for its importance, is repeated from a former chapter.

2. (:33-34) Life Lessons Make the Connection between Laziness and Poverty

a. (:33) Cause = Laziness

"*A little sleep, a little slumber,*
A little folding of the hands to rest,"

George Mylne: The sluggard had no intention of allowing his field to be all covered with weeds, he only wished to indulge himself a little while in ease and sleep, and then he designed to rouse himself and root up all the weeds. His ruin was, that, when he had got a little sleep, he wished for a little more; and when he had taken the little more, he felt himself as little disposed to work as before. And so he loitered and wasted away the time, day after day, doing nothing at all, or nothing to purpose until his field was all overrun with noisome weeds, and every good plant destroyed, and his vineyard lay in

ruins. Thus poverty came upon him swiftly and unexpectedly, and with irresistible fury, and plunged him into the gulf of misery and remorse!

Would you avoid sloth? Beware of every temptation to it, and allow no place to any thought of delaying a necessary business. It was a maxim of a certain prince, who was celebrated for his success in every undertaking, never to defer that until tomorrow, that which should be done to day. Putting off things until tomorrow, is the thief of time. It is unsafe in any business. It is infinitely dangerous in our spiritual concerns. Boast not therefore of tomorrow. For you know not what a day may bring forth but whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might!

b. (:34) Consequence = Poverty
"*Then your poverty will come as a robber,*
And your want like an armed man."

Lindsay Wilson: As seen elsewhere in the book, laziness is not criminally wrong, but simply **self-destructive**. Failure to work or produce anything leads to the possession of no food, and no means to buy any. While sluggards are described in comic terms, their life is really a tragic mistake.

David Guzik: This is the destiny of the lazy man or woman. Because of their sinful neglect, poverty will come upon them as suddenly, as strongly, and as unwelcome as an armed man. In this case, the lazy man thinks himself innocent because he did not deliberately, actively sow the thorns or break the wall, but his neglect of duty did them – and he is without excuse.

Richard Clifford: Sluggards lose not only their health and household, which **v. 27** declares depends on the field, but also their reputation insofar as their impoverishment leads to beggary and dishonor.

Josh Moody: Proverbs has a lot to say about laziness, and these verses are some of the more evocative. A little sleep, a little slumber—poverty. It is the reality of our fallen world that, left to their own, things tend to fall apart. We must constantly be putting energy in to bring things together. That does not mean there is no time for rest (the Sabbath is also a biblical principle). But laziness will only in the end lead to even more work, as well as pain and difficulty. Save yourself the trouble now and take the time to take care of your responsibilities.

Paul Koptak: Juxtaposing this inductive lesson on vineyard keeping with teaching on righteous speaking suggests that diligence in both demonstrates wisdom and is essential for successful living. Negligence in either area exacts a high price. So Jesus calls wise those stewards who look after the house and its servants, and he calls wicked those who forget the master, beat the servants, and indulge in overeating and drinking (**Matt. 24:45–50**). . .

The indirect teaching of the field metaphor brings home the point of **24:13–22** as well as the entire teaching of the "**sayings of the wise**" (**22:17 – 24:34**). **Wisdom comes first, and all else follows**: "*Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom*" (**4:7**). In the individual proverbs, we saw that the sluggard is like stinging vinegar and smoke to the one who hires him as a messenger (**10:26**). Here a sluggard is one who has not learned to take care of himself, to serve an employer, or to be a responsible member of a community. **To be lazy about the matters of wisdom is to make a mess of everything else.** Just as a fool heads for bed without having prepared the field and goes against the basic principles of life and survival, so fools ignore the values of wisdom and truth in word and deed and find themselves in an overgrown tangle of weeds.

TEXT: Proverbs 25:1-15

TITLE: WISDOM IN ROYAL SETTING, IN DISPUTES AND IN COUNSELING

(:1) PROLOGUE

A. Author

"*These also are proverbs of Solomon*"

Van Leeuwen: Analysis of **chapters 25-27** identifies the following components:

1. **25:2–27** – a 'proverb poem' addressed to courtiers, about social rank and social conflict;
2. **26:1–12** – a 'proverb poem' dealing with the fool, and life situations that call for a wisdom approach;
3. **26:13–16** – a 'proverb poem' about the sluggard;
4. **26:17–28** – a poem developing themes taken from **chapter 2**5;
5. **27:1–22** – a collection of miscellaneous proverbs, set out in couplets (**vv. 1–2, 3–4**, etc.), although Waltke sees here two parallel sets of instructions on friends and friendship;
6. **27:23–27** – an admonitory poem, which can be read as advice to a farmer, but on a deeper level is addressed to the king as 'shepherd' of his people.

Charles Bridges: These are more proverbs of Solomon, copied by the men of Hezekiah king of Judah. . . The selection was probably made from the 3,000 proverbs that Solomon spoke (**1 Kings 4:32**). The New Testament fully authenticates this section of the book as a part of the inspired canon (compare **verses 6-7** with **Luke 14:7-10**; **verses 21-22** with **Romans 12:20**; **26:11** with **2 Peter 2:22; 27:1** with **James 4:14**). We are not reading, therefore, the maxims of the wisest of men; the voice form heaven proclaims that these are the true sayings of God.

B. Agents (Transcribers)

"*which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, transcribed.*"

Paul Koptak: The mention of Hezekiah's men points to a tradition of collecting and arranging the sayings to be passed on to another generation.

Lindsay Wilson: Solomon ruled from about 961 to 922 bc, while Hezekiah was king from around 715 to 687 bc.

Tremper Longman: Hezekiah was king of Judah from 715 to 687 BC. Though he had lapses in good judgment, he was essentially a king known for his devotion to God (2 Kings 18–20; 2 Chron. 29–32; Isa. 36–39). It is likely that along with other acts of reform and renewal of worship following the destruction of the northern kingdom in 722, he also initiated more care in the transmission of sacred literature. . .

The biggest mystery has to do with what ["*the men of Hezekiah*"] were doing with the text. . . Perhaps we should surmise that it was recognized that these Solomonic proverbs were also authoritative and needed to be added to the growing collection that up to this point was being transmitted separately

George Mylne: Those servants of Hezekiah who copied out the following part of Solomon's proverbs, and joined them to the rest, are here mentioned to their honor. They were the publishers, and not the composers of the following chapters but they performed a piece of service to the church for which their names shall live.

I. (:2-7) WISDOM IN ROYAL COURT SETTING – ROLE OF KINGS

A. (:2) Glory of God vs. Glory of Kings

1. Glory of God = Concealment

"*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter,*"

Allen Ross: Kings must make things understandable to people, but **God's providence is beyond knowing**. This first saying expresses a **contrast between God and kings**. On the one hand, it is the glorious nature of God to "*conceal*" things. God's government of the universe is beyond human understanding—humans cannot fathom the divine intentions and operations. McKane, 579, rightly observes that this is appropriate to God: "When it is supposed that everything is known about God, it is no longer possible to worship him." He explains further that religion becomes ordinary and flat if there is no boundary to our understanding of him.

On the other hand, it is the glory of kings to "*uncover*" or "*search out*" things. Plaut, 257, says that human government cannot claim divine secrecy. Kings have to investigate everything; then they must make things open and intelligible to their subjects, especially judicial matters (Greenstone, 263). The juxtaposition of these two lines basically forms a contrast; but kings who rule as God's representatives must also try to represent his will in human affairs; they must inquire after God to reveal his will.

Charles Bridges: Are not the clouds of his concealment of the effulgence of his glory as the most simple, yet the most incomprehensible Being, whom the mightiest intellect can never totally understand? "As there is," says Bishop Hall, "a foolish wisdom, so there is a wise ignorance. I would fain know all that I need, and all that I may. I leave God's secrets to himself. It is happy for me that God makes me of his court, though not of his council. O Lord, let me be blessed with the knowledge of what you have revealed. Let me content myself to adore your divine wisdom in what you have not revealed."

George Mylne: How arrogant are those men who must know the reasons of all God's works. Or, if that exceeds their capacity, to call them into question, or find fault with them as if they knew better what God ought to do than God Himself! There are unsearchable mysteries in the excellencies and ways of God. His way is in the sea, and His path in the mighty waters, and His footsteps are not known and it is His glory that

they are not known. He would not be God if we could understand Him to perfection. Nor would His sovereignty absolute if He were obliged to do nothing but what His creatures would approve.

2. Glory of Kings = Discovery

"*But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.*"

Paul Koptak: Kings find glory in searching out matters that God has concealed, not in conquests or in great accumulations of wealth.5 Kings were recipients of divine wisdom in the ancient Near East, and so Solomon asked for such wisdom (**1 Kings 3:16–28**); thus, nothing was hidden from him (**1 Kings 10:3**).

Richard Clifford: God's world is full of conundrums and puzzles beyond the capacity of ordinary people, but the king is there to unravel them and lead people to serve the gods. In this saying, the close affinity between God's wisdom and the king's wisdom is expressed by the repetition of the first and last word of each colon - "*glory*" and "*matter*," "*God*" and "*king*" (the latter pair rhyme in Hebrew, '*ĕlôhîm* and *mĕlākîm*). "*Glory*" here means "**action worthy of glory**." The Contemporary English Version, though free, catches the nuance: "*God is praised for being mysterious; / rulers are praised for explaining mysteries.*" Cf. **16:10**.

Lindsay Wilson: It is the God-given task for those in authority to explore and discern God's glory hidden in the created world (**v. 2**). The same Hebrew word is used for what God conceals and what kings are to search for. Such matters are hidden not to remain undiscovered, but rather to give rulers a quest in life. However, the inner thoughts (lit. heart) of kings are so complex to fathom that they are pictured as difficult to search. It is like finding an object in a location as high as the sky and as low as the earth's depths (**v. 3**; '*ereṣ*, earth, may here mean 'underworld'). Putting these two verses together suggests that while kings' intentions are seldom clear (and this may be a riddle), **their key task is to explore God's glory.**

David Guzik: It is the glory of great men (*kings*) to search out what God has concealed. This speaks to our pursuit of God's mysteries in the spiritual world, but perhaps even more so to God's mysteries in the material world. When men and women seek out scientific knowledge, trying to understand the mystery and brilliance of what God has concealed in His creation, they express an aspect of the glory of humanity, even the glory of kings. Therefore, we say to the scientist, search on, and do so with all your strength.

In all their searching, the scientist should still keep this humble remembrance: *It is the glory of God to conceal a matter*. "What I see amazes me, but God has concealed even greater treasures of knowledge and wisdom in His creation (**Romans 1:19-20**). I must not arrogantly think that I can figure it all out." As G. Campbell Morgan wrote, "That is the principle of all the triumphs of scientific investigations; and it is the deepest secret of all advance in spiritual strength."

B. (:3) Inscrutability of Kings

"*As the heavens for height and the earth for depth,*
So the heart of kings is unsearchable."

Paul Koptak: Just as no one can fathom all there is to know of creation or the greatness of Yahweh, who brought it into being (**Job 5:9; Ps. 145:3; Isa. 40:28**), so the heart of the king is never fully known, perhaps even to himself (**Jer. 7:10**).

Tremper Longman: In both cases, God and king are honored and held in high respect, though clearly the hierarchy is God first, next the king, then the rest of humanity. The second proverb teaches about the inscrutability of the king's heart, presumably his thinking, motives, and emotions—his whole inner life. This is compared with other grand matters like the heavens and earth.

The proverb is addressed primarily to the sages who would work with the king, perhaps instilling within them proper respect. It may also warn them about trying to psychoanalyze (using a modern term) the monarch.

Allen Ross: Using formal—almost emblematic—parallelism, the sage records a simple political fact. While a king ought to make judicial matters clear to the people (**v.2**), many things are not made known, perhaps because of his superior wisdom, his caprice, or the necessity of maintaining confidentiality. But the comparison with the heavens as high and the earth as deep capture the nature of the king—he must be resourceful, inscrutable, always one step ahead, to keep a firm grip on power and to enhance his perception by the people.

George Mylne: But the heart of kings is often unsearchable another sense. Their designs cannot be known by their subjects, or by foreign princes because they industriously conceal them from the knowledge of all but their privy counselors; and this is often necessary, because a discovery of their counsels would obstruct the execution of them. Besides, the affairs of government are so various and complicated, they have so many designs to carry on, so many harms to obviate, so many opposite tempers of men to consider, and so many unknown difficulties to encounter that people in a lower station cannot possibly understand the reasons of a great part of their conduct, or the ends which they have in view. It is therefore presumptuous in subjects to pry too narrowly into their behavior, or to be rash with their censures on the public management. Those who take a liberty to despise authorities, and speak evil of dignities, should be sure that they do not speak evil of those things which they do not understand. If the heart of kings, who are infinitely inferior to God's, is so unsearchable then how foolish is it to think that we can search out God unto perfection!

C. (:4-5) Kingdom Stability Secured by the Purging of the Wicked

1. (:4) Illustration of Refining Silver

"*Take away the dross from the silver,*
And there comes out a vessel for the smith;"

Paul Koptak: These two proverbs are linked by the catchword "remove" or drive out, as well as by parallel form and repetition of Hebrew sounds. Although each saying can stand alone, the first states the **general principle** while the second names the **specific situation of rebellion and judgment** treated in the previous chapter (**24:21–26**; cf. **16:12; 20:28; 29:14**). The puzzle of "*material*" that comes out of (or "*from*," NIV text note) the smith's fire may best be understood as a technical term that encompasses both the refining and the casting of the metal, used for the calf that came out of the fire (**Ex. 32:24**) and the weapon "*forged*" (**Isa. 54:16–17**). No one prefers a corrupt government any more than anyone wants impure silver; it is in this sense that the throne is "*established through righteousness*." The king searches out matters (**Prov. 25:2**) so that he can remove wickedness from his presence.

Caleb Nelson: The king searches things out. And what he especially searches out is the guilt or innocence of those around him. You can state positively what these verses say, which is that the king is comparable to a silver refiner whose job is to get the impurities out and therefore that he needs to have good people in his cabinet. But the text states it negatively. It says that the king needs to fire the wicked. Get them out! David said in Psalm 101 that he would not tolerate a wicked man in his court, and Solomon now says the same thing. For a king to have his throne established in righteousness requires that he purge impurities out of his administration. Good policies can't be enforced by bad men.

2. (:5) Application to Purging the Wicked

"*Take away the wicked from before the king,*
And his throne will be established in righteousness."

Richard Clifford: If you remove scum you get pure silver; if you remove scoundrels from the king's court you get a stable dynasty in that a just dynasty assures divine protection. In **Psalm 101**, especially **v. 7**, the king expresses similar sentiments: "*One who deals deceitfully will not live in my house, one who speaks lies shall not remain before my eyes.*" "*The king's circle*" has the meaning it has in **1 Kings 12:8**. Cf. **16:12**.

Lindsay Wilson: While the king is also mentioned in **verse 5**, the focus is now on the **wicked**, and how their presence **impedes the work of the king**. They are depicted as dross that needs to be removed from the silver in order to make it pure (**v. 4**). The parallel is clear: take away the dross and the silver material can then be used; take away the wicked and the king can have a sustained rule that embodies righteousness (**v. 5; 16:12b**). A variety of wicked characters will be explored in **verses 16–26**, and these will all impede a king's righteous rule, which is an equivalent expression to searching out God's glory.

Allen Ross: The point is clear: Remove the wicked, and the throne will be established in righteousness. Greenstone, 264, says, "The king may have perfect ideals and his conduct may be irreproachable, but he may be misled by unscrupulous courtiers." When

these are purged, then the government will be left with righteous counselors and therefore "*established through righteousness*."

D. (:6-7) Humility before the King

1. (:6) Renounce Self-Promotion and Vain Ambition

"*Do not claim honor in the presence of the king,*
And do not stand in the place of great men;"

Paul Koptak: A prohibition and a "better than" saying are paired by not only theme but also by the terms for up and down, small and great. The saying in **verse 6** is also linked with **verse 5** by the phrase "*king's presence*" (cf. **25:1–3; 22:29**). If the king will not tolerate the wicked, neither will he tolerate sycophants and hangers-on who hope to gain something by hobnobbing with people of status and means. The prohibition is clear: Do not put yourself in the company of the great; let the king bestow that honor. If you claim it for yourself, you will be put in your place, (lit.) "*a lower place before a noble*" (cf. **16:19; 29:23**); it is better to choose humility than to be humiliated. There are three "*do not*" prohibitions in **25:6, 8,** and **9**, with three corresponding instances of shame in the eyes of others for being too proud, litigious, or talkative. It is better to show restraint in all three cases, to hold back and take your time.

Lindsay Wilson: The young men in the court are admonished neither to claim honour for themselves ('*exalt yourself*', niv; *put yourself forward*, esv/nrsv), nor to do this physically by standing among those (presumably in the court) who are important. As Jesus was later to say (**Luke 14:7–11**), it is better to be invited up higher than to be told to get to the end of the queue where you belong.

2. (:7) Embrace Humility and Faith

"*For it is better that it be said to you, "Come up here,"*
Than that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince,
Whom your eyes have seen."

Charles Bridges: Our Lord applies this proverb more generally (**Luke 14:8-11**). Who does not need this caution against ambition? Loving to be preeminent is the bane of godliness in the church. Let each of us set about the work of throwing down our high tower of conceit. We must cultivate a deep sense of our own unworthiness. Think of Christ who made himself the most humble of men.

Matthew Henry: Not that we must therefore pretend modesty and humility, and make a stratagem of it, for the courting of honour, but therefore we must really be modest and humble, because God will put honour on such and so will men too. It is better, more for a man's satisfaction and reputation, to be advanced above his pretensions and expectations, than to be thrust down below them, in the presence of the prince, whom it was a great piece of honour to be admitted to the sight of and a great piece of presumption to look upon without leave.

II. (:8-10) WISDOM IN LEGAL COURT SETTING – CONFLICT RESOLUTION

A. (:8) Avoid Hasty Litigation

"*Do not go out hastily to argue your case;*
Otherwise, what will you do in the end,
When your neighbor puts you to shame?"

Richard Clifford: Formally, the verse is an admonition with a motive. Avoid rash recourse to law courts, for your adversary could win and you could be shamed. The phrase "*What your eyes have witnessed*" has a legal sense as in **Deut. 21:7**. To go immediately to law only on the basis of what has been immediately observed is unwise. One needs to investigate the circumstances to find out if a crime has been committed and whether the courts are an appropriate remedy. The key question, "*What will you do at its end* …?" occurs in **Jer. 5:31** and with variants in **Isa. 10:3** and **Hos. 9:5**.

Lindsay Wilson: The issue here seems to be **hasty litigation** (as in **20:3**) rather than a deceitful process (as in **24:28**). This haste is envisaged in **verse 8**, when a neighbour's response to a legal claim ends up reversing the outcome. The self-righteous litigant is shamed or dishonoured as the whole picture emerges. A better way forward would be to speak personally to the neighbour to see if the matter can be resolved or explained, before hastily dragging the information out into the public arena. This teaching is also echoed at the beginning of the process set out by Jesus (**Matt. 18:15–20**).

Tremper Longman: Eyes can be deceptive, so one must reflect on a situation before making an accusation. It could also be that one saw truly but can't prove it, and so one's accusation looks like a trumped-up charge. If the charge is false or unproved, then the neighbor can cast aspersions on one who makes charges.

Allen Ross: This is a warning to be cautious in divulging information. McKane, 581, urges that the verse speaks more of broken confidence than of hasty legal action and that it also applies to an administration that sees and hears things it must not divulge.

Charles Bridges: Dissension under any circumstances is a serious evil. The considerate Christian will concede his rights rather than insist on them to the detriment of his own soul and to the injury of the church (**1 Corinthians 6:1-7**). Many unholy arguments would be restrained by the practice of these rules of wisdom and love. Obviously the person most at fault should give way. But if, as is usually the case, he is too unreasonable to do so, let us by a generous and self-forgetting kindness deny ourselves the pleasure of a triumph instead of standing on punctilious forms or waiting for an acknowledgment from the offender. And if we find it easier to talk about our neighbor's faults to others than wisely and prayerfully to tell him about them alone, we must ask for self-discipline and for the mind of Christ (**Colossians 3:15**).

B. (:9-10) Address Grievances Directly with Your Neighbor

1. (:9) Keep Private Disputes Private

"*Argue your case with your neighbor,*

And do not reveal the secret of another,"

Richard Clifford: If you must pursue the quarrel, keep it between the two of you; don't involve others. Others will become enemies from the breach of trust.

Tremper Longman: Here the advice is to criticize one's neighbor directly and make the charge without going public. The secret is the criticism that one has of a neighbor. The fear is that the criticism may be overheard by a third party, perhaps sympathetic to the neighbor, and then the accuser will have the reputation of being a gossip, something roundly condemned by the book of Proverbs (**11:13; 17:4; 18:8**).

George Mylne: If we are forced into debate, the more privately it is managed the better; and therefore, if we think ourselves ill used, our best course is to reason the matter with the offender in the spirit of meekness, to convince him of the wrong he has done to us; and to show him a forgiving spirit, which will be the most effectual means of bringing him to repentance, and to put an end to the difference if possible, without exposing ourselves or our neighbors to the censure of the world, which will conclude that there are faults on both sides.

2. (:10) Escalating Disputes Increases Vulnerability

"*Lest he who hears it reproach you,*
And the evil report about you not pass away.

Lindsay Wilson: The trigger for this undesirable loss of community respect and status is revealing another person's secret (**v. 9b**; in **Ps. 25:14** it refers to being in the inner circle where you hear the most private of conversations). Few things are as destructive of community as gossip and betrayal of trust (**11:13; 20:19**).

III. (:11-15) WISDOM IN SPEECH – ESPECIALLY COUNSELING SITUATIONS

A. (:11) Beautiful Speech with Maximum Impact

"*Like apples of gold in settings of silver*
Is a word spoken in right circumstances."

Paul Koptak: Just as a jewelry maker sets a finely wrought apple of gold into its silver setting, wise people know how to bring the right word to a situation. Each displays a beauty that is the mark of a skilled artist. What is the "*word aptly spoken*"? It can be a word of reproof or correction, yet it must find a receptive listener (**15:23**). The sender must be careful not only to craft persuasive words but also to exercise discernment in determining when it is best to speak and when to keep silent.

Tremper Longman: The wisdom formula is to speak the right word to the right person at the right time (**15:23**).

Allen Ross: The point is obviously the immense value and memorable beauty of words used skillfully (Whybray, 148).

B. (:12) Effective Speech to a Receptive Audience

"*Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold*
Is a wise reprover to a listening ear."

Allen Ross: A wise rebuke that is properly received is of lasting value. Another emblematic parallelism compares the rebuke to ornamental jewelry—it is pleasing and complimentary. The verse presents the ideal combination of a wise teacher and a willing student. ("*Listening ear*" means that the disciple is obedient in response to the rebuke.)

Matthew Henry: If it be well given, by a wise reprover, and well taken, by an obedient ear, it is an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold, very graceful and well becoming both the reprover and the reproved; both will have their praise, the reprover for giving it so prudently and the reproved for taking it so patiently and making a good use of it. Others will commend them both, and they will have satisfaction in each other; he who gave the reproof is pleased that it had the desired effect, and he to whom it was given has reason to be thankful for it as a kindness. That is well given, we say, that is well taken; yet it does not always prove that that is well taken which is well given. It were to be wished that a wise reprover should always meet with an obedient ear, but often it is not so.

C. (:13) Faithful Speech that Refreshes the Sender

"*Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest*
Is a faithful messenger to those who send him,
For he refreshes the soul of his masters."

Richard Clifford: A simile breaks the series of paired sayings in the chapter. It is not clear whether snow from the mountains was actually brought to refresh ordinary harvesters in the heat or only to the wealthy. There may be a reference to ice and snow brought from the mountains in jute packing.

Lindsay Wilson: This is compared to the cold of snow at harvest time – not a destructive cold, but one that is a refreshing change from summer heat. Snow at harvest time would be unlikely, but it may refer to runners bringing down compacted snow or ice to the valley to cool down their masters (Van Leeuwen 1997: 219).

Allen Ross: To "*refresh the spirit*" is *wenepeš . . . yāšîb*, the idea being that someone who sends the messenger entrusts his life (i.e., his soul) to him; and a mission faithfully accomplished "*restores*" it to him. **Faithfulness is always refreshing**.

Peter Wallace: Remember that in those days, there is no email – there are no text messages! If you want to send a message, then you will need to send a person to deliver the message. And while it was possible to send a written note – very few people knew

how to read or write – and so the most common way to send messages was to **send a messenger.** You tell the messenger – "here's what I want you to say…" And then you trust the messenger to go say it!

How often, do you suppose, did the messenger mess up the message?! If your messenger secretly hates you, he could screw it up on purpose! But even if he likes you, there are so many ways that this could go wrong! A faithful messenger refreshes the soul of his masters!

- Are you trustworthy?
- Are you reliable?
- Are you faithful in the discharge of your duties?
- When you say that you will do something for someone, do you do it?

Josh Moody: Having someone you can trust to do what they say they are going to do, and to take what you wanted said and accurately deliver the message when you are not there, that is a good thing and a great thing. How much more should we be faithful with the message of the gospel!

D. (:14) Empty Speech that Promises But Fails to Deliver

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

Richard Clifford: In the ancient Near East, to promise gifts was to proclaim oneself a patron and an important person. To promise gifts to clients and then not give them was to make one a rain cloud without the rain.

Lindsay Wilson: Faithful speech is life-giving; empty promises only increase frustration and result in shame for the 'giver'.

Tremper Longman: Not to get rain is a disappointment, especially in an area like Palestine, where rainfall is not abundant and is desperately needed for agriculture. In other words, colon 1 is a way of saying that something is "**all show and no results**."

This helps us understand the "false" or "deceptive" gift of the second colon. In what way is it deceptive? It likely refers to those who say they will give a gift, and indeed brag about it, but then never give it. They may preannounce a gift in order to get in the good graces of the supposed recipient and then never actually give the gift. If this interpretation is correct, then the proverb serves as a warning to watch out for these false claims and not give favors based on the promise of a gift.

Allen Ross: The promises of a boaster are empty. The illustration here is clouds and wind that lead one to expect rain but do not produce it; they gain attention but prove to be disappointing and hence deceitful. Similar is the windbag who brags of gifts to be bestowed, but the promise is deceitful (*šāqer*, "*he does not give*")—there are none. The lesson, of course, is not to make false promises.

George Mylne: It is shameful to behave in this manner, raising expectations and then disappointing them, and perhaps reducing to great straits and perplexities the very men who were trusting to their friendship.

E. (:15) Patient and Gentle Speech that Proves Persuasive

"*By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded,*
And a soft tongue breaks the bone."

Lindsay Wilson: The two virtues of patience and persistence in speech are commended. Just as water can wear down rocks over many years, gentle and determined words of counsel can change rulers.

Tremper Longman: This proverb tells the reader that tough things are won over not by force or a show of force, but by patience and tenderness. This is the exact opposite of what might be expected. A military commander is presumably a tough individual, one who is accustomed to dealing with confrontation. The unexpected, "patience," wins him over. In the second colon, one might expect the best results from a harsh word, but here it is the tender word.

Allen Ross: By soft speech a bone can be broken; that is, stiff opposition can be broken down. The verse recommends "conciliatory and persuasive advocacy which succeeds in the end over against the most determined and studied recalcitrance" (ibid.; see also **14:29; 15:1, 18**).

Peter Wallace: If you are a gossip – he won't trust you with information. If you are too hot-tempered to rebuke well – and too proud to listen to others – then you won't be around very long. If you are unreliable and unfaithful in the discharge of your duties, you won't get a hearing. But if you are wise and faithful in your words and deeds, then with patience a ruler may be persuaded.

Bones are rigid. Bones do not bend. But even the most rigid, inflexible ruler may bend to a soft tongue – to gentle words – whereas harsh words will not accomplish much at all!

TEXT: Proverbs 25:16-28

TITLE: UNWISE BEHAVIOR LACKS SELF CONTROL, EXPOSES KEY AREAS OF FAILURE AND UNDERMINES COMMUNITY

Lindsay Wilson: In this section on **wicked characters**, there appear to be six sections with negative figures mentioned: a hateful friend, false witness, faithless man/tormentor, enemy, backbiter/bad wife and the wicked (so Bryce 1972). **Verse 27b** operates as an inclusio with **verse 2**, while **verse 27a** picks up the honey imagery of **verse 16**. . .

Bracketed by a **concern for God's glory**, this section draws attention to **how to behave in the presence of those in authority**. **Carefulness rather than self-indulgence** is the key to such potentially dangerous yet rewarding opportunities. The largely positive advice of **verses 6–15** is about knowing our place, seeking to resolve broken relationships and speaking wisely, faithfully and patiently. Furthermore, **verses 16–27** warn us about actions and characters to avoid if we wish to do well in such a setting. **We need to have self-control, avoiding false witness and false trust**. Our actions and words need to be appropriate to the context, and seek to be transformative. If we do this, we will bring life and promote the well-being of the community.

I. (:16-17) UNWISE BEHAVIOR LACKS SELF-CONTROL

A. (:16) Lack of Self Control in Eating

"*Have you found honey?*
Eat only what you need,
Lest you have it in excess and vomit it."

Paul Koptak: Like the pair at **25:4–5**, here a metaphor is applied to a specific situation. Another saying on temperance recognizes that honey is a treat few will refuse (**24:13**), but the taste can, as the abbot said to Romeo, become "loathsome in its own deliciousness." The intense flavor that makes honey so desirable is also what demands moderation (**23:1–3, 6–8**). Just as too much of a good thing becomes the opposite, so friends and neighbors are good, even sweet, as long as visits are not too frequent or too long. The phrase "*too much of xx*" is repeated to underline the point, as is the admonition to (lit.) "*make rare*" one's steps, using the root often translated as "*precious*" for stones or jewels (**3:15; 20:15; 24:14**).

Lindsay Wilson: Self-control of our appetites is commended in **verse 16**, with the figure of the glutton implied as the alternative. Honey is not only used for survival in a desert culture, but can also be added to rich food as an extra touch (honey is viewed positively in **16:24; 24:13**). However, excessive consumption of any food is unhealthy. This may lead to vomiting, which involves the loss of any nutritional value, as well as the unpleasant experience of bringing up food.

Charles Bridges: In earthly pleasure, however, we can never forget how slight the boundary line is between the lawful and the forbidden path. Sin and danger begin on the extremity of virtue. For does not the legitimate indulgence of appetite to its utmost point bring us to the bring and often hurry us to the allowance of gluttony?

George Mylne: The God who has replenished the earth with his goodness, has not required us to lead a beggarly and uncomfortable life. He allows us to eat as much honey, and to enjoy as much of every earthly comfort as is sufficient for us, to strengthen our bodies, and to refresh our spirits. All that he forbids is that excess in eating and drinking, and other physical enjoyments, which would enfeeble our frame, clog our souls, and end in bitterness.

John Lawrence: Having good things is profitable to us. It is when we allow these good things to go beyond where they should that good things become a problem - and possibly even an addiction. Moderation is wise in just about every area of life. To moderate ourselves makes us take time to consider what we really need. Yet, because of the fall of man into sin, we are no longer wired for moderation. We are wired for the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life. That kind of wiring can get us in serious trouble. When we overindulge our desires - we can build that desire into something that we no longer control. Our desires control us. We see this in every kind of addiction. The addict can no longer control their desires. Their desires control them - and dominates them to the point of being able to command them what they WILL do. This leads to an "out of control" lifestyle - which becomes horribly destructive to the one caught in it.

The wisdom of God is to live life in moderation - especially when it comes to anything that flies in the "lust" zones of our lives. What is good can become what is overdone. When it reaches these levels it then can become that which makes us sick - sick in body, but also sick in our minds and our spirits as well. Knowing this the wise man approaches all things with a desire that they remain under the control of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of Scripture. This is how he avoids trouble that comes from fallen desires gone wild.
https://www.calvarychapeljonesboro.org/proverb-a-day/good-things-gone-wild-proverbs-2516

B. (:17) Lack of Self Control in Visiting Neighbors

"*Let your foot rarely be in your neighbor's house,*
Lest he become weary of you and hate you."

Richard Clifford: Too much of a good and delightful thing, honey or friendship, can be a bad thing. Restraint safeguards the pleasure.

Tremper Longman: It is not that the sage recommends having nothing to do with one's neighbors. It is a matter of overdoing it and, as our own expression states it, "overstaying your welcome." A person who does so will become a nuisance rather than a friend or a help. While both of these proverbs have their applications in a particular

aspect of life (eating and social relationships), they still raise the question of application even more broadly. Too much of virtually any good thing will have **negative consequences.**

Allen Ross: The motivation for the warning is that **familiarity breeds contempt**.

George Mylne: The freedom of friendship does not consist in a liberty to weary one another but in a liberty to contribute to one another's happiness and comfort.

Matthew Henry: He that sponges upon his friend loses him. How much better a friend then is God than any other friend; for we need not withdraw our foot from his house, the throne of his grace (ch. **8:34**); the oftener we come to him the better and the more welcome.

II. (:18-20) UNWISE BEHAVIOR EXPOSES KEY AREAS OF FAILURE

Paul Koptak: This trio of sayings uses **experiences of pain** to describe people who cannot be trusted or counted on. Linked with the verse before by the repetition of "*neighbor*," **verse 18** compares weapons designed for war with false testimony, which is also designed to injure (**Ex. 20:16**). Unlike the soft tongue that is strong enough to break bones **(Prov. 25:15**), weapons like these are meant to coerce, not persuade. Bad teeth and lame feet cannot be relied on to do their jobs; moreover, they are often painful. Therefore, trusting in unfaithful people is a lot like bearing down on a sore foot or trying to eat with an aching tooth; the word for "*unfaithful*" may even denote treachery (bgd, **25:19**; cf. **11:3; 21:18**).

One who sings songs to a heavy heart (**25:20**) probably does not mean to cause pain, but the poor timing has the effect of pulling off a needed coat or dissolving soda with vinegar (cf. **25:11–12** on right timing). In each case, what is needed is lost or missing, particularly the word of comfort or understanding. Each action is inappropriate and therefore hurtful.

A. (:18) Failure to Testify Truthfully

"*Like a club and a sword and a sharp arrow*
Is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor."

Richard Clifford: Three horrific weapons of war are listed, each capable of inflicting a fatal wound upon an enemy. Such is any individual who tells judicial lies that lead to a finding of guilt. The lie need not lead to capital punishment, for a guilty verdict destroys one's place in the community, which is a kind of death sentence. Proverbs often states its abhorrence of perjury (**6:19; 12:17; 14:5; 19:5, 9**).

Charles Bridges: What a picture there is here of **cruelty** and **malice.** The tongue becomes the weapon of death. Open perjury, like a sword or a sharp arrow, pierces the fountain of life. And little better are those calumnies and unkind insinuations, all

breaches of love, uttered so freely in common conversation. "Consider, you who indulge in such conversation, whether you care about those you gossip about. Do you think that you act as Jael did with Sisera, or Joab did with Abner? Would you shrink with horror at the thought of beating out your neighbor's brains with a hammer, or of killing a person with a sword or a sharp arrow? Why then do you indulge in a similar barbarity? Why do you seek to destroy others' reputation, which is as dear to men as their life, and so wound all their best interests by mangling their character?" (Lawson).

B. (:19) Failure of Reliability

"*Like a bad tooth and an unsteady foot*
Is confidence in a faithless man in time of trouble."

Richard Clifford: Teeth and legs are things we rely on without thinking about them and hence we are stunned when they fail. That is what it is like when a friend whose support we took for granted or a thing we relied on implicitly betrays us in a crisis.

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 19** is fairly straightforward, describing the folly of trusting in those who are treacherous or will betray us. Again this is a metaphor, but the force of calling someone a bad tooth or an unstable foot is to make a comparison. Do not rely on what is unreliable. An unstable foot might collapse as we put pressure on it, and a weak tooth might break if we eat something hard. In order to be useful as a foot or tooth, there needs to be good grounds for trusting them. A treacherous person – one given to betrayal – is even less trustworthy.

Tremper Longman: The comparison invites the hearer to think about the character of one's associates and assess whether they will help or hurt when trouble starts up.

C. (:20) Failure to Demonstrate Empathy

"*Like one who takes off a garment on a cold day,*
or like vinegar on soda,
Is he who sings songs to a troubled heart."

Lindsay Wilson: The incongruity of singing songs (usually songs of joy or praise) to someone with a heavy heart is the key idea of the verse, and this is seen to be as odd as taking off some clothes on a cold day, or pouring vinegar on a wound (which would irritate, but not bring relief). The word '*wound*' (*neter*) could alternatively mean natron, a form of sodium carbonate used in making soap (hence esv *soda*), but '*wound*' fits better with the anomaly in the verse.

Tremper Longman: It makes things worse to sing a happy song when someone is down. Removing a garment certainly does not help warm a cold person. Vinegar also reacts violently when mixed with soda (mixing an acid with an alkali). Happiness just aggravates a troubled heart. This would instruct a sage as to how to approach a depressed individual.

Charles Bridges: Though no unkindness is intended, inconsiderate levity or even excessive cheerfulness is like a sword in the bones. The **tenderness** that shows a brother's tears, knows how to weep with those who weep, and directs the mourner to the mourner's friend and God – this is Christian sympathy, a precious balm for the broken heart.

III. (:21-26) UNWISE BEHAVIOR UNDERMINES COMMUNITY

A. (:21-22) Canceling Vindictiveness by Blessing Your Enemy

1. (:21) Command

"*If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat;*
And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;"

Tremper Longman: This proverb presents a remarkable statement of **compassion toward enemies** that works against this natural inclination. Instead of harming opponents when their weakness presents an opportunity, we are to help them!

The motivation to do this does not appeal to many modern readers, who may prefer a more lofty reasoning. Such behavior, it is said, will actually be a form of vengeance. One's enemies will be exasperated by the acts of compassion. Furthermore, God will reward the one who acts in such a way.

George Mylne: It is easy for us to say that we forgive our enemies but do we make it evident in our works that we forgive them in love? We may bring our minds without very great difficulty to overlook their injuries, and to bury them in silence but a sullen disdain of injuries is no Christian grace. Our duty is to wish real happiness to our enemies in this world and the next, and to show the truth of our love in praying for them, and in doing them good as opportunity presents, and their needs require.

2. (:22) Rationale

"*For you will heap burning coals on his head,*
And the LORD will reward you."

Paul Koptak: Interpretations have for the most part followed one of two options set forth in antiquity:

1. the burning coals either symbolize "*burning pangs of shame*" that lead to repentance (Augustine and Jerome)
2. or the final punishment of an enemy who refuses to be reconciled, even after being fed (Origen and Chrysostom).

Allen Ross: The imagery of the "*burning coals*" represents **pangs of conscience**, more readily affected by kindness than by violence. These burning coals produce the sharp **pain of contrition** through regret (see **18:19; 20:22; 24:17; Ge 42–45; 1Sa 24:18–20**; cf. Paul's use in **Ro 12:20**).

Lindsay Wilson: Paul picks up these verses in **Romans 12:17–21** in a context of **peacemaking**, and urges his readers not to take revenge, leaving that with God, but to act honourably even when others have wronged us, and to pursue peace. It takes on a similar thrust here.

Tremper Longman: I include myself in the vast majority who have no doubt that it refers to some kind of **punishment or pain inflicted on the enemy**.

B. (:23-24) Condemning Contentious Behavior

1. (:23) Backbiting Speech

"*The north wind brings forth rain,*
And a backbiting tongue, an angry countenance."

Lindsay Wilson: These verses 'portray things that precipitate conflict' (Van Leeuwen, 1988: 85). As surely as the north wind brings rain (this may suggest an Egyptian origin, since in Israel the rain comes from the Mediterranean to the west), so backbiting speech creates anger in others (**v. 23**). **Backbiting** – hidden words spoken behind someone's back – provokes a strong reaction in return when the truth comes out. Suggestions, comments and other words, whose purpose is to undermine another and gain something for ourselves, destroy trust and community.

Allen Ross: One problem in the verse concerns the north wind, for it is the west wind that brings rain to Palestine (**1Ki 18:41–44**). Toy, 468, suggests that the expression is general and means a northwest wind (possibly even in error). McKane, 583, summarizes and refutes the view of J. P. M. van der Ploeg ("*Prov. 25:23*," VT 3 [1953]: 189–92) that the saying may have originated outside the land, perhaps in Egypt; if so, the saying is being used in a geographical area in which it doesn't apply. Whybray, 149, suggests the solution lies with the verb *teḥôlēl*; rather than meaning "*brings forth*," perhaps it means more literally "*distresses*" (i.e., "*repels, holds back*"). His interpretation then is that as the north wind holds back the rain, so an angry glance prevents slander. In this case "*sly tongue*" denotes a "*quiet tongue*" that drives anger away. **I prefer the basic meaning that as northerly winds bring rain, the sly tongue brings angry looks. The verse stresses inevitable results.**

2. (:24) Marital Contention

"*It is better to live in a corner of the roof*
Than in a house shared with a contentious woman."

Richard Clifford: This humorous saying is one of several about domestic unhappiness. Better to live outdoors in discomfort than indoors with an angry spouse.

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 24**, similar to **21:19**, alerts us to how destructive marital discord can be, initiated by either the husband or wife. We are urged to stay away from such conflict, probably for our own good as much as for the rest of the household.

C. (:25-26) Contrasting Examples of Community Impact

1. (:25) Refreshing Good News

"*Like cold water to a weary soul,*
So is good news from a distant land."

Paul Koptak: A pair of similes compare good and bad sources of drinking water to the positive and negative experiences of life. To people who relied on messengers instead of e-mail, good news from a faraway land was like cold water on a parched throat. The news might be of family, or it might be about the success of a king's army. The word for "*cold*" is rare; its root is used only six times in the Old Testament, and the only other occurrence in Proverbs associates cool temper with restrained speech (**17:27**). Both **verse 25** and the saying in **verse 13** bring together images of cool refreshment with a messenger.

Lindsay Wilson: A balance of two contrasting '**water images**' (Lucas 2015) is presented in these verses. **Good news from a distant land is refreshing and energizing**, in the same way that a drink of cold water revives a person who is thirsty (alternatively, *nepeš* could mean '*throat*' that is parched). News from a far land could be about a friend or family member, or even business interests established a long distance away. Without news there is anxiety; with good news there is fresh encouragement.

2. (:26) Unsettling Spoiling of the Righteous

"*Like a trampled spring and a polluted well*
Is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked."

Paul Koptak: As refreshing as a cold drink can be, it is not always available, however; sometimes the source is contaminated. **Verse 26** plays on expectations; one expects a spring to provide drinkable water and one expects the righteous to remain true to character. Ezekiel rebuked both the Egyptian pharaoh and the leaders of Israel for stirring up the water with their feet, making it muddy and unusable (**Ezek. 32:2; 34:18**). Whether the "*righteous man who gives way to the wicked*" is a victim or someone who fails to stand for righteousness and protect others (cf. **Prov. 24:11**), the outcome for those who need the clear water of fair treatment is the same.

Lindsay Wilson: The second image is one of **a valuable thing spoiled**. A fresh source of water like a spring or fountain is life-giving, but when muddied or polluted (corrupted, made useless), it can no longer fulfil its purpose. Righteous people can greatly benefit a community, but this is frustrated if they give way to (lit. '*totter, shake, slip*') or crumble before the wicked. Whybray (1994: 370) sees here a recognition that 'the wicked do sometimes triumph over the righteous.' If the righteous cease to live righteously, they will allow wickedness to spread. Edmund Burke famously said, 'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.'

Tremper Longman: This verse envisions "a righteous person who staggers [from *môṭ*] before a wicked person"! This is not the way it is supposed to be, but this proverb

acknowledges that sometimes it does happen that the righteous will be ill-treated in favor of the godless. But such a situation is not right. It is like a **poisoned water source**.

Allen Ross: This verse has often been interpreted to refer to the **loss of integrity** by the righteous. Perowne, 161, says, "To see a righteous man moved from his steadfastness through fear or favour in the presence of the wicked is as disheartening as to find the stream turbid and defiled, at which you were longing to quench your thirst." But the line may refer to the **loss of social standing and position** by plots of the wicked (Toy, 470). For the righteous so to fall indicates that **the world is out of joint** (see also McKane, 593).

George Mylne: A righteous man falls down before the wicked when he is oppressed and cannot obtain justice but is obliged to submit to injury and violence. When such injustice prevails in a country, everything is in a state of disorder. The fountain of justice is poisoned. The public administration, instead of being public blessing, is a general curse. Those who should be the fathers and guardians of the poor, are worse than street robbers, for they not only pillage them of their property but grind their faces, and pull of their skins and pick their bones.

He who poisons a public well or fountain, deserves a thousand deaths. Just so, those who corrupt the fountains of justice must be equally criminal in the sight of God. He is an enemy not to men only but to God, by giving encouragement to wickedness, and suppressing goodness, and perverting an ordinance of God into an engine for serving the designs of Satan! Those righteous men who fall before the wicked, must take care that they fall not into sin, for they are strongly tempted to it by their unjust circumstances.

When wicked men drive the righteous into sin, the fountains become corrupt, in another and worse sense than that now mentioned. For those who are like springs of water for the refreshment of their neighbors becoming polluted and loathsome, are a means of perverting and poisoning those who are too much disposed to judge of religion and duty from the behavior of religious people. When the righteous persist under temptation in duty, they have rich sources of comfort in the promises of God, and the doctrine of a future judgment.

Matthew Henry: [2 Possible applications:]

1. For the righteous to be oppressed, and run down, and trampled upon, by the violence or subtlety of evil men, to be displaced and thrust into obscurity, this is the troubling of the fountains of justice and corrupting the very springs of government, **ch. 28:12, 28; 29:2. 3**.
2. For the righteous to be cowardly, to truckle to the wicked, to be afraid of opposing his wickedness and basely to yield to him, this is a reflection upon religion, a discouragement to good men, and strengthens the hands of sinners in their sins, and so is like a troubled fountain and a corrupt spring.

IV. (:27-28) CONDEMNATION OF LACK OF SELF CONTROL

A. (:27) Advocating Moderation and Humility

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

Paul Koptak: Two proverbs about **self-discipline** and **restraint** use metaphors drawn from the field and the city. Honey again is used to recommend moderation (cf. **25:16**), but this time in comparison with seeking one's own honors (lit., "*the search of their glory is glory*," or "*to seek glory upon glory*," repeating the roots *ḥkr* and *kbd* from **25:2**). If kings find their glory in searching out the matters of wisdom and right rule, so should those who read these sayings, forsaking the quest for honor (**25:6–7**). A person who does not know when to stop eating honey or to refrain from seeking accolades is a person who **lacks self-control**—not only troublesome to others but also dangerous to self, vulnerable like a city breached by attackers. **Self-discipline is self-defense**. This teaching on glory and folly continues into the next chapter.

Lindsay Wilson: The first half of this verse closes off the section beginning at **verse 16** with another reminder about **self-control**. While it is specifically about honey, it is meant to deal with issues of **gluttony** in general. The second half of the verse forms an inclusio with **verse 2** and its focus on God's glory. Here, the corollary of searching out God's glory is that **we should not try to seek our own glory** (so esv).

George Mylne: We must value our own reputation because it enables us to be useful to men, and to glorify God. But when we indulge an unbridled desire after honor from men we forget our chief end, we disqualify ourselves for the most important duties, and we expose ourselves to the worst temptations. If our fortune were equal to that of Caesar, our ambition might draw us to equal in crimes of that cut-throat of mankind.

The humble are sensible that they deserve shame rather than honor, and would be content that all their honor were taken from them, that it might be ascribed unto God to whom it truly belongs.

The vain and proud would rob God Almighty of his crown that they might set it upon their own heads. But God will not allow them to escape without a punishment suited to their crime.

B. (:28) Exposing the Vulnerability of Not Governing Self

"*Like a city that is broken into and without walls*
Is a man who has no control over his spirit."

Richard Clifford: Walls protect a city from the danger without and self-control protects a person from the danger within. Egyptian instructions and Proverbs hold up as a model the person who is not dominated by inner passions, who restrains it, who is "cool" in the Egyptian idiom.

Charles Bridges: Many examples of this moral weakness are less shameful and yet scarcely less harmful to the soul. Every sign of irritation, every spark of pride burning in the heart, long before it shows itself in the countenance or on the tongue, must be firmly resisted. A man may talk about self-control as if the reins are in his own hands. But he who has been born of the Spirit and who has been taught about the plague that is in his own heart knows that effective self-control is a divine grace, and not a natural power.

George Mylne: It is necessary for our happiness and peace, that we should have the government of our own spirits. He who possesses not himself, possesses nothing although he should possess all other things. As a city that is broken down, and without walls, is exposed to the invasion of every enemy so the man who has not a mastery over his own desires and affections, is a ready prey to every devil. His imagination is tainted, his corrupt desires are inflamed, and his active powers hurried into the most criminal excesses by every slight temptation.

A city in flames, or a ship seized by a drunken and mutinous crew, are not so terrible spectacles as a soul where the judgment and reason are laid desolate by intemperate passions and appetites. What harms have been wrought, and what oceans of blood have been poured out by the passion of anger alone, when it was unrestrained by the principle of conscience?

Bryce Morgan: the imagery of the city conveys the idea that the person who lacks self-control is **defeated** and **defenseless** when it comes to temptation. Self-control is the ability to say "no" to yourself whenever your desires are unhealthy.

If we think about the opposite of the imagery used in **verse 28**, then I think we can say that, in some way, having self-control, that practicing self-control, leads to **protection** and **preservation.**

But as it stands, the proverb seems to be saying that the man or woman who lacks self-control has been morally, has been spiritually, overrun by whatever was tempting them. Therefore if the self, if you, are not in control, something else is. The second half of **II Peter 2:19** puts it this way:

> *For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.*

https://www.wayofgracechurch.com/sermons/sermon/2019-11-24/the-thing-about-self-control-proverbs-25:28

TEXT: Proverbs 26:1-28

TITLE: PORTRAITS OF THE FOOL, THE SLUGGARD AND THE CONTENTIOUS MAN – WISE IN THEIR OWN EYES

Richard Clifford: According to its topics, the chapter falls into three parts, each marked by repetition of key words: **vv. 1–12, 13–16**, and **17–28**. In **vv. 1–12**, "*fool*" occurs eleven times, being found in every verse but **v. 2.** "*Sluggard*" occurs in every verse of **vv. 13–16**.

I. (:1-12) PORTRAIT OF THE FOOL

A. (:1-3) Fools Deserve Their Reproach

1. (:1) Honor Is Not Appropriate for Fools

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

Allen Ross: The sage warns against elevating and acclaiming those who are worthless.

Richard Clifford: Certain kinds of weather do not fit certain seasons, so also with honor and fools. Palestine has only two seasons, the dry summer (April to September) and the rainy winter (October to March). Rain and snow are virtually unknown in summer. Harvesttime can be barley harvest in April-May, or wheat harvest four weeks later, or the fruit harvest (including olives and grapes) in late summer and early fall as in **Isa. 16:9**. "*Honor*" is given those who live wisely; one cannot pin a medal on oneself. A fool has no more chance of seeing honor than summer has of seeing rain. The phrase "*not fitting/unseemly* [for a fool]" occurs also in **17:7** and **19:10**.

Tremper Longman: Fools have no honor, or at least no honor that they deserve. Indeed, the comparison may imply that on the off chance that snow came in the summer or rain at harvest, it would do great damage. After all, the only time in the Bible that rain came during harvest was through divine intervention, and when it came, it threatened great harm to the harvest (**1 Sam. 12:17–25**).

George Mylne: It belongs to God to determine our station in life, and to us to believe that he has determined it in his wisdom and goodness, and to fulfill the duties of it without aspiring to those honors that God has not been pleased to bestow upon us. Those that are in stations of honor ought not to trust for honor to their stations but to seek it by wisdom, without which, their exalted situation will only render their disgrace more visible.

2. (:2) Curses Only Land Where Deserved

"*Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying,*
So a curse without cause does not alight."

Lindsay Wilson: A curse (words designed to damage someone) that is undeserved (*ḥinnām* can mean either, as here, '*without cause*' or '*without success*') does not come to a(n impliedly innocent) person.

Charles Bridges: When you see a bird wandering about, or a swallow flying hither and thither, you are not afraid of any hurt from them. They will not touch you but fly back to their nests. You have no more reason to be afraid of hurt from unmerited curses, whoever the people are that pronounce them. They will fly back to the place from which they came, and light with dreadful vengeance on the heads of those who profaned their Maker's name, and gave scope to their own malice in uttering them. For as they delight in cursing they shall have cursing for their portion; and unless the pardoning mercy of God prevents, their curses will enter into their bones.

Matthew Henry: **The Safety of Innocency** -- He that is cursed without cause, whether by furious imprecations or solemn anathemas, the curse shall do him no more harm than the bird that flies over his head, than Goliath's curses did to David, **1 Sa. 17:43**. It will fly away like the sparrow or the wild dove, which go nobody knows where, till they return to their proper place, as the curse will at length return upon the head of him that uttered it.

3. (:3) A Rod Is the Best Instrument of Instruction for Stupid Fools

"*A whip is for the horse,*
a bridle for the donkey,
And a rod for the back of fools."

Richard Clifford: By implication a fool is a **stupid animal**. Other biblical passages make the same point: "*Do not be like a horse or mule; they do not understand. With bit and bridle their temper is curbed*" (**Ps. 32:9**) According to **Prov. 19:25**, fools do not learn from what they see or hear but only from the blows inflicted on them. In **10:13** blows come to the back of a fool.

Paul Koptak: Whips make horses move, halters lead donkeys, and rods punish fools (cf. **10:13**). If a rod is recommended, it is assumed that the fool is no smarter than these beasts of burden.

Tremper Longman: In comparison with a whip for the horse and a bridle for the donkey, the idea is surely that the only hope for getting fools to go in the right direction is the use of a rod. "By implication a fool is a stupid animal." Elsewhere, however, even the rod of discipline is seen to be fruitless when applied to fools. They just simply are **hell-bent on going in the wrong direction**.

Allen Ross: The point of here is that the "*fool*" (*kesîl*) is as difficult to manage as a donkey or horse. Neither the fool nor these animals respond to reason but must be driven by whip, halter, or rod.

Matthew Henry: Princes, instead of giving honour to a fool (**v. 1**), must put disgrace upon him -- instead of putting power into his hand, must exercise power over him. A horse unbroken needs a whip for correction, and an ass a bridle for direction and to check him when he would turn out of the way; so a vicious man, who will not be under the guidance and restraint of religion and reason, ought to be whipped and bridled, to be rebuked severely, and made to smart for what he has done amiss, and to be restrained from offending any more.

B. (:4-5) Fools Must Either Be Ignored or Addressed Appropriately

Lindsay Wilson: Few proverbs are designed to cover every situation. 'Too many cooks spoil the broth' and 'many hands make light work' both seem to be true, but they cannot both apply to the same situation at the same time. Similarly, Proverbs tells us that we need wisdom to know when not to answer fools according to their folly (**v. 4**) and when to answer (**v. 5**). Both are true and helpful as proverbs, but **we need to discern which is the best proverb for any specific circumstance**. So, if we try to reason with fools, we can get caught up with their pointless talk and so become foolish ourselves (**v. 4**). We are not to do that. However, sometimes we need to show that a fool's argument leads logically to undesirable conclusions, or to rebut it by reasoned argument. This will alert fools to the fact that their views are untenable. **The difficulty is knowing when to rebuke and when to ignore.**

1. (:4) Avoid Futile Debates – Dangerous to Respond to Fools

"*Do not answer a fool according to his folly,*
Lest you also be like him."

Allen Ross: One should not stoop to a fool's level of thought. To get into an argument with a fool in that way will only make one look like a fool as well.

Tremper Longman: Proverbs are not universally true laws but **circumstantially relevant principles**. In short, the answer depends on the nature of the fool with whom one is engaged in conversation. In other words, the wise person must assess whether this is a fool who will simply drain one's energy with no positive results or whether an answer will prove fruitful to the fool or perhaps to those who overhear. The wise not only know the proverb but also can read the circumstances and the people with whom they dialogue.

George Mylne: It does not befit the followers of Jesus to return railing for railing, or one angry word for another but in whatever manner others talk, our tongues ought still to be governed by the law of meekness and charity.

There are no cases in which this rule is more frequently transgressed than in religious disputes. Passion and railing, when they are employed in the support of truth, appear to many to be just expressions of Christian zeal; and that noble and necessary grace of humility has been brought into suspicion, and regarded with a very jealous eye, by

reason of those who have substituted passion in its place, and called it by a name to which it is as well entitled as the prince of darkness is to be called an angel of light.

2. (:5) Confront His Fatal Flaw – Necessary to Respond to Fools

"*Answer a fool as his folly deserves,*
Lest he be wise in his own eyes."

Richard Clifford: "*According to his folly*" refers to the fool's malicious and ignorant style. How easy it is to adapt that style through association! **Proverbs 23:9** advised, "*Do not speak in the ear of a fool, / for he will despise your wise words*." Granted the discomfort and even danger of such association, someone has to speak up for wisdom. One cannot simply allow fools to hold forth unreproved. The wise have a duty not to remain silent.

George Mylne: Let us seek wisdom from God, that we may know when we should speak, and when we should be silent; and that we may be preserved from speaking such things as are improper for the mouths of saints, and taught to give an answer with meekness and prudence to the words of wise men or fools, as occasion requires.

C. (:6-10) Fools Can't Be Trusted

1. (:6) Unfaithful Messengers

"*He cuts off his own feet, and drinks violence*
Who sends a message by the hand of a fool."

Richard Clifford: To send a fool as an emissary is to harm oneself and bear the consequences of garbled or deliberately misstated messages.

Tremper Longman: Perhaps this suggests that the message will never be delivered. In the second place, it is compared to "*drinking violence*," which may suggest that the one who sent the message will be harmed due to the incompetence of the one who carries his message. **Precisely how harm will come is not specified**, but it could come in a number of ways. Perhaps a lost message, the garbled nature of the message as delivered, or even the disrespectful way in which a fool might deliver a message—any of these may lead the intended recipient to seek revenge. Perhaps simply the fact that the message is not delivered or is delivered in a negative way will lead to some bad response or no response, which may harm the sender financially. One can compare this warning about the foolish messenger to **10:26**, which lampoons the lazy messenger, a type of foolish messenger.

Allen Ross: Sending a messenger is like having another pair of feet; but sending a fool on the mission is not only no help, it is like cutting off the pair of feet one has -- it is a setback! "*Violence*" (*ḥāmās*) is injustice or violent social wrongs and "*drinking violence*" is metaphorical for **suffering violence**; that is, sending a fool on a mission will only have **injurious consequences**. The verse gives the consequences in line one and the condition that causes them in line two. **It is better not to send a message in the first place than to use a fool to deliver it.**

2. (:7) Impotent Communicators of Truth

"*Like the legs which hang down from the lame,*
So is a proverb in the mouth of fools."

Richard Clifford: As the legs of a physically handicapped person are useless for movement, so a proverb in the mouth of fools is useless for discernment. A proverb is effective only when applied rightly to a situation (**25:11**), and fools do not know how to apply it.

Tremper Longman: Such a person may know the proverb, but since proverbs are only true or helpful if uttered in the right context to the right person, then its knowledge and use will prove as ineffective as the legs of a paralyzed person.

Allen Ross: The fool does not understand the "*proverb*" (*māšāl*), has not implemented it, and cannot use it or teach it correctly or profitably.

George Mylne: A lame man is very awkward in his manner of walking. But a fool appears with a still worse grace, when he presumes to talk of subjects beyond his reach, or to speak in praise of those virtues to which he is a total stranger in his practice. A clown would be laughed at, if he were to talk about wisdom and knowledge. It would fill a person with indignation, to hear a thief speak in praise of justice, a drunkard commend temperance, or a hypocrite talk in praise of holiness. Our tongues and our lives must be of a piece, otherwise all our professions will serve no other purpose but to condemn ourselves, and to procure us a portion in the eternal world with hypocrites. A grave and wise sentence befits the mouth of a wise and holy man. It is very unfitting in a Christian to be silent on occasions when he is called to glorify God or edify men. It is still more unfitting in a saint, to allow himself on any occasion in foolish and vain talking.

3. (:8) Dangerous to Give Honor to Fools

"*Like one who binds a stone in a sling,*
So is he who gives honor to a fool."

Richard Clifford: Another possibility is "*to tie a stone to a sling*," the point being that a sling that cannot release its stone is an example of what is out of place (NRSV, REB).

Paul Koptak: The point seems obvious; in contemporary terms, giving glory to a fool is like loading a gun. Giving honor is not only inappropriate for the fool (**26:1**), it is also **dangerous**. And there may be more here; tying the stone in the sling makes it ineffective, and the one who swings it could get hurt. Similarly, the fool who thinks he is wise is a danger to himself and others, but mostly to himself.

Allen Ross: "*Bind*" fits the idea the best. Whybray, 152, explains that only someone who does not know how a sling works would do such a stupid thing. So to honor a fool is absurd, because what is intended cannot be accomplished—he will remain a fool.

Charles Bridges: Like tying a stone in a sling is the giving of honor to a fool. The sling makes the stone tied in it an instrument of death. The honor given to a fool makes him a cure to his fellow creatures. The prime favorite of a despot, had not God restrained him, would have been the murderer of the chosen nation (**Esther 3:1-5**). It is dangerous indeed to place unqualified people in places of authority. "It is like putting a sword or a loaded pistol into a madman's hand" (Scott).

4. (:9) Oblivious to the Power of a Proverb

"*Like a thorn which falls into the hand of a drunkard,*
So is a proverb in the mouth of fools."

Richard Clifford: Proverbs are not simply for quoting but for **performance**, for applying to a situation. A proverb is "*a word spoken at the right moment*" (**25:11**). Fools cite them but cannot apply them aptly. Their proverbs are like thorns that attach themselves to clothing.

Lindsay Wilson: **Chapters 1-9** have insisted that the way of wisdom involves starting with the **right foundation**, the fear of the Lord; choosing to **follow** Lady Wisdom rather than Dame Folly; and **allowing wisdom to shape our character**. We cannot bypass any of these steps without slipping back into folly. Only when we have put these elements in place will we be able to use the proverbial sayings to convey wisdom and bring life. **Fools disqualify themselves from using proverbs rightly.**

Allen Ross: The picture is of a drunk who does not know how to handle the thornbush because he cannot control his movements and so gets hurt (see McKane, 599). A fool can read or speak a proverb but will be intellectually and spiritually unfit to handle it; he will misuse it and misapply it.

Matthew Henry: Some give this sense of it: The sharpest saying, by which a sinner, one would think, should be pricked to the heart, makes no more impression upon a fool, no, though it come out of his own mouth, than the scratch of a thorn does upon the hand of a man when he is drunk, who then feels it not nor complains of it, **ch. 23:35**.

5. (:10) Potential for Harm

"*Like an archer who wounds everyone,*
So is he who hires a fool or who hires those who pass by."

Paul Koptak: Sending a fool creates danger for all (**26:18**).

Tremper Longman: The comparison here has the same grammatical structure as the preceding verse, the two items simply being placed next to each other. In this case, the objects of the teaching are those who hire a fool or someone who is simply passing by. We are already well acquainted with the fool and understand why someone who hires such a person may be spreading harm (the point of the archer comparison). Fools will not do the job, or if they do, they will do it in an incorrect fashion. The problem with

hiring a passerby is that one does not know the nature of the person employed and thus also runs the great danger of causing havoc.

Allen Ross: Anyone who hires a fool or a stranger gives him ample opportunity to do great damage. The undisciplined hireling will have the same effect as an archer's shooting at random.

D. (:11) Fools Don't Learn from Their Folly

"*Like a dog that returns to its vomit*
Is a fool who repeats his folly."

Paul Koptak: Fools repeat their folly, and those who think themselves wise are even worse off.

Lindsay Wilson: The problem is not that fools need to be instructed; they need to have foundational and ongoing change as outlined in **chapters 1-9**. They need to embrace the way of wisdom and decisively turn away from folly.

Tremper Longman: One of the characteristics of fools is their **unwillingness to listen to correction.** They make mistakes, but since they will not listen to criticism, they are doomed to repeat those mistakes. For this reason, they are compared to a dog that throws up and then eats its vomit. The presumption is that the dog throws up because the food does not agree with it. In spite of that, it eats it again! **Second Peter 2:22** makes use of the first colon to refer to false teachers within the Christian community. They knew "*the right way to live*" (**2:21** NLT) but then rejected it, thus returning to their old lifestyle.

E. (:12) Fatal Flaw: Wise in His Own Eyes = Self Conceit

"*Do you see a man wise in his own eyes?*
There is more hope for a fool than for him."

Lindsay Wilson: This final verse avoids the imagery of **verses 6–11** and builds on the depiction of a fool in these verses. In the light of **verses 6–11**, **a fool has no prospect of a worthwhile and productive life.** Now **verse 12** adds that people who are wise in their own eyes are worse off than a fool (see also **29:20**). The phrase wise in his own eyes, used of a fool in **verse 5**, elsewhere describes a fool who will not listen to advice (**12:15**), a lazy person (**26:16**) and a rich person lacking understanding (**28:11**). It refers to those who are **self-sufficient** rather than grounding their lives in wisdom.

There is further ammunition here to discourage young people from taking the way of folly, and relying on those who have chosen that path. Folly is not only a pointless option; it is a **deadly one**. Life is too valuable to be wasted on folly. Yet **even the wisdom of proverbs needs to be used properly**. In the hands of a fool it can be useless or dangerous. The fundamental step of rejecting folly and embracing wisdom, grounded in the fear of the Lord used to shape our character, is absolutely essential.

Tremper Longman: Human beings are not inherently wise, so it is the ultimate hubris to think oneself wise (**3:5, 7; 27:1; 28:11, 26**). Humility, not pride, is a quality of the wise.

The sad nature of this self-wisdom is that there is less hope for such persons than for a fool. Now, one may well respond that those who are wise in their own eyes are fools, but here the proverb is saying they are **even worse than fools**.

Charles Bridges: He struts around in his own conceit. He is wise in his own eyes. The false persuasion that he has gained wisdom utterly precludes him from gaining it. He thinks himself to be wise because he does not know what it is to be wise.

George Mylne: Woe to those who are wise in their own conceit, and prudent in their eyes. They depend on wind and vanity. Or if they really possess some of that kind of wisdom which a fool may have, they lean on a broken reed, which will go into their arms and pierce them, and rend their souls with eternal remorse, because, in their vain opinion of their own understandings, they rejected the light of the world. "*For judgment*," says our Lord, "*am I come into this world, that those who do not see might see and that those who see might be made blind*." None are more blind than those who are readiest to say, with the Pharisees, "*Are we blind also*?" They say that they see, and take away all excuse from themselves, and shall have the mortification, at the great day, to find that God has revealed those things unto babes, which he has hidden from the wise and prudent.

II. (:13-16) PORTRAIT OF THE SLUGGARD

A. (:13) Always Makes Excuses for His Laziness

"*The sluggard says, 'There is a lion in the road!*
A lion is in the open square!'"

B. (:14) Always Lies Around Doing Nothing Productive

"*As the door turns on its hinges,*
So does the sluggard on his bed."

Richard Clifford: The sluggard will no more get up to act than a door will leave its hinges and walk.

Lindsay Wilson: It is someone who is taking advantage of any excuse not to go where useful work will be required.

McKane: The sluggard's turning in his bed is the greatest degree of movement to which he aspires.

C. (:15) Always Fails to Finish Any Task

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

Allen Ross: The sluggard is too lazy even to eat (see **19:24**).

D. (:16) Fatal Flaw: Wise in His Own Eyes = Self Conceit

"*The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes*
Than seven men who can give a discreet answer."

Paul Koptak: Although the proverbs have associated the sluggard's behavior with folly, he does not see it that way, and perhaps this is his greatest folly of all. He is "*wise in his own eyes*," the **hopeless status** described in **verses 5** and **12**. The "*seven*" may be a sign of collective strength or an allusion to the Mesopotamian myth of seven sages who brought culture and learning to the human race before the great flood.

Tremper Longman: The problem with lazy people, and probably the reason they perpetuate their self-destructive behavior, is that they are "*wise in their own eyes*" (see also **3:7; 26:12**). As such, they are unwilling to hear the criticism of other people. Indeed, here they claim a sevenfold wisdom, that they are wiser than even seven (the symbolic number for "never-ending" or "many") discerning people.

III. (:17-28) PORTRAIT OF THE CONTENTIOUS MAN

Lindsay Wilson: There is great concern about the **right use of words**. At the very least, this means not using them to fuel gossip or quarrels that destroy relationships and communities. Even nice-sounding words can be used to wound and destroy, so we need to be on the watch for those who speak deceptively. Speech that builds up will come from a godly heart and a transformed character. We need to be careful to **avoid speech that tears down and destroys.**

A. (:17) The Meddler

"Like one who takes a dog by the ears
Is he who passes by and meddles with strife not belonging to him."

Lindsay Wilson: Quarrels and gossip dominate this section. The first three verses are designed to show people the folly of joining in or, even worse, provoking a quarrel. One of the problematic aspects of quarrels is that they spread quickly. Joining in on a dispute simply escalates matters. **Verse 17** outlines the danger to ourselves of intervening, using a vivid analogy. It is like grabbing a stray dog by the ears. While the outcome of this action is not specified, it implies that the dog will turn to attack the one who has hold of its ears.

Tremper Longman: The comparison suggests that those who butt into a fight that they have no part in are asking for the same consequence. Both parties may well turn against the person who tries to step in to help or take one of the two sides. The comparison is an observation, but it certainly functions as a warning.

B. (:18-19) The Madman (Practical Joker)

"*Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows and death,*
So is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, 'Was I not joking?'"

Paul Koptak: Continuing the theme of **verse 17**, the extended saying of **verses 18–19** depicts one who does not take seriously the ruinous effects of his actions.

Richard Clifford: One who misuses words is like someone who misuses weapons. A misused word can be as powerful as a deadly weapon. There may be a play on the verb in **v. 19a**, *rimmāh*, "*beguile, deceive*," which has the same consonants as *rāmāh*, "*to shoot* [arrows]; *to cast*" (**Jer. 4:29** and **Ps. 78:9**, so Meinhold).

The excuse in **v. 19** (*śāḥaq*) is ambivalent. Is it "I was only having fun" or "I was taking delight"? In **10:23a** the wicked take delight in doing evil. In any case, misusing words is a perilous business.

Lindsay Wilson: An even more graphic image is used in **verses 18–19** to describe deceiving our neighbour then turning around and saying, '*I was only joking*.' Having provoked a person to anger by our deceit, we sometimes imagine that it will all go away by saying, 'Just kidding', but that only makes people angrier. It is like adding a match to petrol.

Allen Ross: The **practical joker** is immature and thinks only of his own laughs. Plaut, 270, advises that "the only worthwhile humor is that which laughs with, not at others." By comparing the joker to a madman, the sage describes him as irresponsible and dangerous -- he may hurt people while thinking it is all good fun.

George Mylne: A jest is not in every case unlawful but it is unwise and wicked, under pretense of jesting, to expose our friends and neighbors to scorn, or to say something that will inflame their passions, and kindle up strife and contention. It is still worse to deceive and flatter them into something that will prove hurtful to their interests, or harmful to their souls, and then to pretend that we were only amusing ourselves with a little harmless diversion! No diversion is harmless that puts an honest man to the blush, or wounds his spirit or his interests. He who sports himself in this rude and unchristian manner, is like a real or pretended madman, who amuses himself with casting about at random firebrands, and arrows, and other instruments of death. Let those who would be jokers at the expense of friendship and charity, consider in what class of men Solomon so justly places them, and be ashamed. He counts them not only fools but madmen, and ranks them with the worst kind of madmen, in the height of their rage.

C. (:20-22) The Gossip

Richard Clifford: The three proverbs have a common theme --**the destructive power of slanderous and angry words**. Certain words are repeated: "*wood*" and "*fire*" in **vv. 20a** and **21a**; "*slanderer*" in **vv. 20b** and **22a**; "*quarrel/quarreler*" in **vv. 20b** and **21b**.

Paul Koptak: Gossip is the wood for quarrel's fires, so remove the fuel and the fire goes out (**26:20**). But the potential for monetary gain in legal disputes ("*strife*" uses the term *rib*; cf. **26:17**) traces the problem to the real source, the "*man of quarrel*" who feeds the fire. Taken together, one can see the need to excise both the behavior and the person who stirs up quarrels, just as one takes away wood to put out a fire. If quarrels can be profitable, morsels of "*gossip*" can be tasty, going down to the inmost parts; the metaphor may indicate that they have a negative influence on one's mind and heart.

Matthew Henry: Those who by insinuating base characters, revealing secrets, and misrepresenting words and actions, do what they can to make relations, friends, and neighbours, jealous one of another, to alienate them one from another, and sow discord among them, are to be banished out of families and all societies, and then strife will as surely cease as the fire will go out when it has no fuel; the contenders will better understand one another and come to a better temper; old stories will soon be forgotten when there are no new ones told to keep up the remembrance of them, and both sides will see how they have been imposed upon by a common enemy. **Whisperers and backbiters are incendiaries not to be suffered.**

1. (:20-21) Fuels the Fire of Contention

> "*For lack of wood the fire goes out,*
> *And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down.*
> *Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire,*
> *So is a contentious man to kindle strife.*"

Lindsay Wilson: Just as wood keeps a fire burning, and without it the flames would die out, so **gossip acts as an accelerant to a quarrel.** The point is repeated in **verse 21**, with both charcoal and wood acting as fuel for the fire. A quarrelsome individual is a person of strife or contention (both the *qere* and *ketib* readings have a similar meaning), not a person of peace who builds up society, and is described as causing a dispute or quarrel to keep burning. The idea of gossip, introduced in **verse 20**, is explored in **verse 22** in another vivid image. **Gossip is peculiarly attractive and enticing** – making ourselves look better by putting others down. It is so seductive that it sometimes happens even as we 'share a prayer point' about a situation. Thus, gossip is compared to delicious bites of food that fill our body with delight (**18:8**). Of course, it is implied that this is self-deception, since **gossip worsens and sometimes creates disputes**.

Tremper Longman: Gossips create conflict because they are secretly telling negative stories about people. When those people or their friends discover that they are the brunt of people's negative talk, they will get mad.

Allen Ross: His quarreling is like piling fuel on the fire—strife flairs up again and again.

2. (:22) Feeds the Appetite of Internal Corruption

> "*The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels,*
> *And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.*"

D. (:23-28) The Hater and Deceiver

Lindsay Wilson: A **negative heart** is explicit in **verses 23–25**, and implied in **verses 26–28**. As elsewhere in Proverbs, the problem is not confined to what we do, but **who we are on the inside.**

1. (:23-26) Concealed Hate Cannot Deceive Forever

a. (:23) Glaze Attempts to Cover Internal Malice

"*Like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross*
Are burning lips and a wicked heart."

Richard Clifford: Glaze was applied to clay pottery to make it smooth and attractive, an apt metaphor for the smooth words coming from a hateful heart. Cf. **15:7**.

Lindsay Wilson: An earthenware pot covered by a silver glaze **looks so much more impressive than it actually is**. Similarly, speech on fire (for a cause? lit. lips 'burning/set ablaze' or perhaps 'pursuing'), but underneath this apparent zeal is an **evil heart**, describes a person whose core goal in life is not to promote good in the community.

Tremper Longman: The first proverb presents its teaching in an imaginative way. It begins by describing how silver can cover clay in order to produce a beautiful jar. However, the silver is only paper thin, and once one penetrates to the inside, one sees that the silver gives way to ordinary clay. The surface gives the illusion of a completely silver vessel, but that is not the reality. The same is true of the smooth speech of someone with evil intentions.

b. (:24-25) Deceivers Cannot Be Trusted

1) (:24) Hidden Hate

"*He who hates disguises it with his lips,*
But he lays up deceit in his heart."

Tremper Longman: It characterizes those who hate as often hiding their emotions. They dissimulate, probably by saying nice things, while inside their hatred burns. This kind of dissimulation is dangerous because one will find an attack coming out of nowhere, perhaps from someone thought to be an ally or friend.

Allen Ross: **Hypocritical words** may hide a wicked heart. This verse repeats the sentiment of **v.23** (and continues through **v.27**). Here the "*malicious man*" (*śônēʾ*) "*disguises*" (*yinnākēr*) the "*deceit*" (*mirmâ*) in his heart by what he says.

2) (:25) Lying Lips

"*When he speaks graciously, do not believe him,*
For there are seven abominations in his heart."

Tremper Longman: It is a call to be skeptical or critical of the speech of others. Always be looking for signs that others are not honestly reflecting their true feelings. This lack of trust is based on what they really are like on the inside. Here, the strong statement concerning "*seven abominations*" is used. In the first place, "*seven*" is a symbolic number representing "completion or abundance." Hence, they are totally abominable.

Allen Ross: This verse may have in mind a person who has already proven untrustworthy but who now is using speech to conceal and to put into action his evil plans.

c. (:26) Guile Will Eventually Be Publicly Exposed

"*Though his hatred covers itself with guile,*
His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly."

Richard Clifford: The Hebrew verbs "*to reveal*" and "*to cover*" are also contrasted in **Isa. 26:21** and **Prov. 11:13**. **Verses 23–25** show how hatred can be concealed; this verse states it cannot be fully concealed but will eventually out.

Allen Ross: **Retribution certain** -- Concealed malice will inevitably be made known. The proverb is concerned with how evil will be exposed. The lines are in antithetical parallelism, the first stating that "*malice*" (*śin'â*) may be concealed "*by deception*" and the second affirming that his evil will be exposed publicly. That righteousness will ultimately be victorious informs this saying.

2. (:27) What Goes Around Comes Around

"*He who digs a pit will fall into it,*
And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him."

Lindsay Wilson: There are many ways in which we can try to hurt others, but the two that are mentioned in this verse are digging a (hidden) pit or trap, and rolling a stone to cause damage. In both scenarios, **those who seek to harm others are caught in their own wrongdoing, receiving what they intended to inflict on others**.

3. (:28) Liars Are Destructive

"*A lying tongue hates those it crushes,*
And a flattering mouth works ruin.

Matthew Henry: There are two sorts of lies equally detestable:

1. A slandering lie, which avowedly hates those it is spoken of: A lying tongue hates those that are afflicted by it; it afflicts them by calumnies and reproaches because it hates them, and can thus smite them secretly where they are without defence; and it hates them because it has afflicted them and made them its enemies. The mischief of this is open and obvious; it afflicts, it hates, and owns it, and everybody sees it.

2. A flattering lie, which secretly works the ruin of those it is spoken to. In the former the mischief is plain, and men guard against it as well as they can, but in this it is little suspected, and men betray themselves by being credulous of their own praises and the compliments that are passed upon them. A wise man therefore will be more afraid of a flatterer that kisses and kills than of a slanderer that proclaims war.

Tremper Longman: **Flattery may be taken as a specific type of lying**. Without conviction, it exaggerates the positive points of another person. Flattery may be used to set a person up to be taken advantage of. Flattery may also cause those who are flattered to think too highly of themselves and so act in a way that is detrimental.

Allen Ross: Only pain and ruin can come from deception.

Charles Bridges: Rarely do we see a solitary sin. One sin breeds another. Lying and malice are linked together here. But again and again watch out for a flattering mouth. Alas, where is this type of man not welcomed as a friend? From some favorable position he presents an attractive face. But a closer view reveals him to be a subtle, murderous enemy who works ruin.

So how should we deal with a flatterer? Homer puts it into his hero's heart to regard hi as a fiend of hell. Our safety, then, is in flight, or at least in frowning resistance. We should be "as much troubled," said a godly man, "by unjust praises as by unjust slanderers" (Philip Henry). We must show clearly that those who praise us most please us least. Pray for wisdom to discover the snare, for gracious principles to raise us up above vain praises, for self-denial, for the capacity to be content and even thankful without such flatteries. This will be our security.

TEXT: Proverbs 27:1-27

TITLE: INSIGHTS REGARDING FRIENDSHIP, CHARACTER AND RELATIONSHIPS

Lindsay Wilson: While Van Leeuwen regards these verses as a loosely structured section, Waltke has shown that they divide into two parallel sections (**vv. 1–10** and **11–21**), with the **hinge verse 22** (or Janus) at the end. He suggests that each section begins with '*to whom to listen*', then defines 'impossible relationships', before outlining some 'positive teachings about friendship'. There are only two extended three-line verses (tricola), found in **verses 10** and **22**, again supporting a twofold division. **Verse 11** begins with a **resumptive address**, *Be wise, my son*, which is also an indication of a new start. The **theme of friendship** is already prominent in the book (usually in individual sayings or pairs about friends or neighbours, e.g. **14:20–21; 17:17–18; 18:24**), but is here developed at greater length. . .

While not everything in these verses relates to the **theme of friendship**, they give both positive and negative information about being a good friend, and what kind of friends we should seek or avoid. Virtues like honesty, faithfulness and loyalty loom large, while various forms of folly destroy friendships. In several verses we can see that what we are like on the inside (our hearts) will show forth in the way we treat others and develop friendships.

Paul Koptak: So These proverbs elevate praise over boasting and the near neighbor over the distant relative, valuing those face-to-face relationships that refine us like precious metal and hone us sharp like iron blades. The matters of character are inevitably communal, for our hearts are both proved and improved through interaction. Read in their literary "communities," these sayings teach us to assess and encourage good character in ourselves, but also in others. The pastoral poem reminds us that we demonstrate good character as we live in committed relationships with one another.

I. (:1-10) INSIGHTS REGARDING FRIENDSHIP –

- **WHAT SUSTAINS FRIENDSHIP**
- **WHAT WRECKS FRIENDSHIP**

Lindsay Wilson: Waltke suggests that **verses 1–2** set out the need for appropriate praise in friendship, while **verses 3–4** explain that foolish, angry and jealous people cannot make good friends. Each of the three pairs in **verses 5–10** offer positive insights into friendship:

- the need for rebuke (**vv. 5–6**);
- the causes of failed relationship (**vv. 7–8**; Waltke thinks it may refer to marriage – 'gratifying one's appetites in the right way, and . . . the loss of the most intimate of friendships, that of a husband and wife');
- and the need for a friend's counsel and help (**vv. 9–10**).

A. (:1-2) The Folly of Boasting

1. (:1) About the Future -- Don't Claim to Control the Future

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

Tremper Longman: Boasting in the future would entail a claim of one's control over the future, and as we already learned in Proverbs, though one can plan the future, the future is ultimately in the hands of God (**16:1, 3, 9, 33**).

Allen Ross: Presumption about the future is dangerous because **the future is uncertain**. Line one is the instruction and line two the reason. The warning is, "*Do not boast about tomorrow*" (i.e., a metonymy for what you will do in the future). The verse is not ruling out wise planning for the future, only one's overconfident sense of ability to control the future—and no one can presume on God's future.

Rather, **humility** is required; one "must live from day to day, grateful for the life one has from God, with the awareness that it may be withdrawn at any time and that he must not speak or plan as if he himself had full disposal of his destiny and power over the future" (McKane, 607). See the development of the idea in **James 4:13–16** and in **Matthew 6:34** with the instruction not to worry (see also **Lk 12:20**).

Matthew Henry: God has wisely kept us in the dark concerning future events, and reserved to himself the knowledge of them, as a flower of the crown, that he may train us up in a dependence upon himself and a continued readiness for every event, **Acts 1:7**.

Caleb Nelson: Now, the text does not say "Don't plan for tomorrow." It doesn't say "Just let tomorrow happen." It says not to brag about tomorrow. It says not to inflate expectations, your own and others', for what tomorrow might hold. James puts it more specifically; he tells us to say "*If the Lord wills, we will go here or there or do this and that*."

So keep your mouth shut; don't brag up how wonderful tomorrow will be. But furthermore, hold your plans loosely. Practice entrusting yourself to providence even as you prepare and work and plan as hard as you can. The wise son takes the uncertainty of life into account, but he is never overwhelmed by it.

2. (:2) About Yourself -- Don't Sing Your Own Praises

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

Richard Clifford: The triliteral root *hll* in the qal conjugation means "*to praise*," and the root contributes to a wordplay: Just as one cannot take tomorrow for granted (*hthll* in **v. 1**, hithpael conjugation) so one cannot praise oneself (*hll* in **v. 2**). **Honor is granted, not taken.**

Paul Koptak: In Proverbs, lips were made for building up one another with teaching and correction, not for building up ourselves.

Lindsay Wilson: Part of the godly character promoted by Proverbs is **humility** (e.g. **22:4**), and such boasting or self-praise is crossing over the line. **Verse 2** offers a better way forward in waiting for others to praise you. Here is where friends come in, for a friend can **affirm** (*hālal*, *praise*) your achievements and plans. This means that we should be proactive in affirming our friends, but we are also encouraged to wait patiently and humbly for this approval from others rather than congratulating ourselves. The views of others are more likely to be an accurate reflection than our own inflated views of ourselves.

Allen Ross: **Self-praise is a form of pride**, even if it begins with little things (such as whom you know, where you have been, etc.), and it does not establish a reputation. The reputation comes from what others think of you. "*Someone else*" in this proverb is literally "*stranger*" (*zār*)—a person who may speak more objectively about your accomplishments and abilities.

Charles Bridges: "Praise," says an old expositor, "is a comely garment. But though you wear it yourself, someone else must put it on you, or else it will never sit well on you. Praise is sweet music, but it never sounds well when it comes from our own mouth. If it comes from another person's mouth, it is a pleasant sound to everyone who hears it. Praise is a rich treasure, but it will never make you rich unless someone else says it" (Jermin).

B. (:3-4) Provocation and Jealousy Damage Relationships

1. (:3) Provocation (Vexation) Is Hard to Bear

"*A stone is heavy and the sand weighty,*
But the provocation of a fool is heavier than both of them."

Tremper Longman: Even today, we talk about a "heavy mood" when feeling oppressed. We even can talk about how a mood "weighs heavily" on people and those around them.

Lindsay Wilson: There are certain characteristics which, amongst other things, damage or prevent the wholesome relationships on which friendship is based. The taunting or provoking from a fool is like a heavy dead weight; it is unnecessary baggage that prevents us from living life (**v. 3**). Such provocation is distracting and causes us to slow down, even though there is no need to do so. Anger and fury/wrath too channel our energy away from building relationships, as does the suspicion that is an integral part of jealousy (**v. 4; 6:34**). All of these characteristics urge us to respond defensively, and so close down rather than open up relationships. Two implications emerge.

1. First, we should avoid these characteristics in our existing friendships.
2. Second, we should not seek to develop friendships with those dominated by anger, jealousy or foolish provocation.

Allen Ross: Stone and sand are heavy, and whoever carries them knows the work is exhausting and painful. But more tiring is the **fool's provocation**, for the mental effort it takes to deal with it is more wearying than physical work; the fool brings a spiritual malaise for others to endure (McKane, 609).

Caleb Nelson: Brothers and sisters, if you indulge in the folly of provoking people to anger by your words, actions, demeanor, etc., then you are foolishly attacking friendship. The wise son cultivates friends; the fool wrecks friendship by being hopelessly provoking. He makes people mad. In the worst case scenario, he makes people mad and enjoys it.

2. (:4) Jealousy Is Worse than Anger

"*Wrath is fierce and anger is a flood,*
But who can stand before jealousy?"

Paul Koptak: Just as boasting is a burdensome form of folly (**27:1, 3**), so the raging fires of anger and fury are small matters compared with the quiet burn of jealousy (**6:34; 14:30**; cf. the discussion of envy in **ch. 26**). We may think ourselves burdened by the folly of others, but who among us has not been knocked down by our own jealousy?

Tremper Longman: **Jealousy** is the angry desire to keep what we possess and are afraid someone else wants. The Hebrew word may also imply **envy**, which is the angry desire for what someone else possesses. . . The rhetorical question implies the answer "No one." Jealousy/envy creates a **destructive energy** decimating all who fall into its path.

Caleb Nelson: Perhaps the worst offender in this list of **anti-friendship activities** is jealousy. Who can stand before it? The text seems to imply that no friendship can stand up to jealousy. Now, one way to take this is by remembering what C.S. Lewis says, that friendship is the most inclusive of loves. A friendship is not harmed by including another friend; indeed, the more friends the stronger the friendship, in important ways. If you are jealous of the fact that your friends have other friends, you are not truly their friend. You have ulterior motives. The very desire for exclusivity is a sign that the relationship you're looking for is not one of friendship, but of something else. Let me put it this way: If you're my friend, and you get upset when I tell you about a good time with another friend, then our friendship is headed for the rocks. Jealousy is a good thing in our relationship with our spouse and with God. It is a great evil in friendship.

C. (:5-6) Genuine vs. Hypocritical Friendship

1. (:5) Value of Correction vs. Hypocrisy

"*Better is open rebuke*
Than love that is concealed."

Richard Clifford: Here, "*reproof*" (which can be discomforting) is better than affectionate words ("*love*" is abstract for concrete) in view of the fact that a reproof imparts wisdom. True love does not hide the truth that needs to be told. False love keeps silent from fear or indifference.

Lindsay Wilson: If friends are on our side, their words of correction will not be motivated by malice, but rather a concern for our well-being and improvement. As Lucas (2015: 173) points out, 'growth in wisdom requires openness to correction.' Friends will call us to account when we are self-indulgent, inconsiderate or rude. Of course, in doing so they risk the friendship (for not everyone likes to be rebuked), but they are genuinely seeking our best interests. Such bold and caring initiatives are better than hidden love, in other words, unexpressed care and friendship. Some people are afraid to voice their care for others, perhaps fearing that it will not be reciprocated. Yet this hidden love is of little value for others, and certainly of much less worth than a caring rebuke.

Allen Ross: "*Hidden love*" is a love that is too timid, too afraid, or not trusting enough to admit that reproof is a part of genuine love (McKane, 610). A love that manifests no rebuke is morally useless (Toy, 483). In fact, one might question whether or not it is sincere (see also **28:23; 29:3**).

George Mylne: There are two qualities very requisite in a friend -- love and faithfulness. The last is as necessary as the first, to make our friendships really beneficial to us. There are some who love us with sincerity and warmth and yet lack the courage that is necessary to make them faithful in reproving us when we deserve to be reproved. But reproof, although it should be severe and cutting, is better than love which does not reveal itself in needful rebukes.

2. (:6) Value of a Friend's Correction vs. an Enemy's Deceitful Kiss

"*Faithful are the wounds of a friend,*
But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy."

Tremper Longman: That the bruises are those of a friend and are declared trustworthy means that they are inflicted with the good purpose of correction. In other words, the bruises must be the result of **constructive criticism** brought to bear by a friend. On the other hand, this is contrasted with the pleasant speech and actions of someone who is really an enemy ("*the hater*") but acts as if they like others and want to affirm them. One must look behind the surface of actions to see what the motives are. **Kisses are not always what they seem to be.** The paradigmatic example of this is Judas's kiss of betrayal in **Matt. 26:48–50**.

Paul Koptak: We might say that hidden love is no love at all, for it does the loved one no good; reproof, even if it comes with anger (**27:4**), is painful but profitable. Hiddenness can be a sign of wisdom when one does not blurt out every thought, but it can also be a sign of **hatred**, as **verse 6** shows. The enemy who kisses is (lit.) "*one who hates*" (root *śn*ʾ; cf. **26:28**; "*malicious*" in **26:24, 26**); "*multiplies*" or "*excessive*" denotes some form of deception. Friendship sometimes brings praise (**27:2**) and sometimes wounds (**27:6**; cf. **20:30**), but those wounds are also faithful ("*trusted*," *ʾmn*).

Lindsay Wilson: The contrast in **verse 6** is between these helpful rebukes and those who pretend love and affection even though they are '*haters*' (the same word for enemies as in **26:24**). Both an enemy's 'pretend love' and an unexpressed real love are less useful to a friend than the open, caring rebuke by one who wants the best for us. So too in our relationships we need to express correction – although in appropriate ways – even at the risk of being misunderstood.

D. (:7-8) Value and Nurture the Marriage Relationship

1. (:7) Don't Take Marriage for Granted

"*A sated man loathes honey,*
But to a famished man any bitter thing is sweet."

Richard Clifford: Bitter can be more appetizing than sweet depending on one's appetite. If one is sated then even honey loses its appeal, but to a starving person, everything tastes good. Hunger is the best sauce. The play on throat and self (or soul) is common in Proverbs.

Allen Ross: Those who have great needs are more appreciative than those who are satisfied. The verse contrasts the one who is "*full*" (*nepeš śebē ʿâ*) with the one who is "*hungry*" (*nepeš reʿēbâ*); the former loathes honey, and the latter finds even bitter things sweet. The word *nepeš* in each half refers to the whole person with all one's appetites.

2. (:8) Don't Look Outside the Marriage for Intimacy

"*Like a bird that wanders from her nest,*
So is a man who wanders from his home."

Paul Koptak: The theme of reversed expectations continues into this pair of proverbs about rejection. One whose hunger is satisfied literally walks past or tramples honey (**5:3; 16:33; 24:13; 25:16, 27**), while someone who strays from home is like the bird that leaves the safety of the nest. However, if you are hungry, even the bitter tastes sweet, and so **we should be glad for the homes we have**. . . so here a young man leaves the nest of security and heads toward potential harm (cf. **27:12**). Together, the proverbs **warn against taking anything for granted**.

Lindsay Nelson: While these verses need not be confined to a marriage relationship, this does seem to be their primary referent in view of the language of straying from our home in **verse 8b**. The idea is reminiscent of **5:15** and its call to drink water from your own cistern, being delighted by your spouse's charms and intoxicated with her love (**5:19–20**). Here the image is of a honey pot, which is a genuine source of energy and refreshment. . . Our goal is not to be smothered in our marriage, nor is it to have a marriage that is distant and empty of intimacy. In such situations we may be tempted to '*stray from the nest*' (**v. 8a**) and seek sexual and relational 'honey' from people other than our spouse. We need instead to value and nurture our marriage and its exclusive relationship.

Allen Ross: To stray from home is to **lose security**. The parallelism compares a bird that "*strays*" (*nôdedet)* from a nest with the man who "*strays*" (*nôdēd*) from home. The reason for his straying is not given, but it could be because of exile, eviction, business, or irresponsible actions. Kidner, 165, thinks the sage condemns the one wandering because he has deserted his charge and forfeited his prospects; he is a rolling stone, but not a pilgrim or fugitive. The saying may be more general and simply asserts that those who wander lack the security of their home and can no longer contribute to their community life.

Matthew Henry: Those that thus desert the post assigned to them are like a bird that wanders from her nest. It is an instance of their folly; they are like a silly bird; they are always wavering, like the wandering bird that hops from bough to bough and rests nowhere. It is unsafe; the bird that wanders is exposed; a man's place is his castle; he that quits it makes himself an easy prey to the fowler. When the bird wanders from her nest the eggs and young ones there are neglected. Those that love to be abroad leave their work at home undone. Let every man therefore, in the calling wherein he is called, therein abide, therein abide with God.

E. (:9-10) Benefit from the Counsel and Help of Friends and Close Neighbors

1. (:9) Desire the Counsel of Close Friends

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

Lindsay Wilson: The real point of **verse 9** is to picture friendship as very sweet and desirable.

Allen Ross: Advice from a friend is pleasant. The emblem is the joy that perfume and incense bring to people, and the point is the value of the advice of a friend.

2. (:10) Value the Help of a Close Neighbor in Times of Crisis

"*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."

Lindsay Nelson: **Verse 10** makes an amazing claim . . . that **friendship is stronger than a blood relationship**. This is not to minimize fraternal responsibilities, but rather to lift up the value of a friend or neighbour. **Verse 10a–b** admonishes hearers not to turn away from ('*abandon/leave'*; Fox 2009: 808 suggests '*ignore*' here) their personal or family friend in order to go to a blood relative (brother) when disaster strikes. We will receive better care from a neighbour who is physically close than a brother who is distant. In other words, we need to value strongly the support and help of friends and neighbours, for they will be of greater value in times of crisis.

Richard Clifford: Cultivate old family friends and neighbors; do not automatically count on kin for help in time of trouble, for neighbors and friends are ready at hand.

This **tripartite verse ends a subsection** in the chapter. **Verses 22** and **27** are likewise tripartite and end subsections in the chapter (Meinhold).

Tremper Longman: The first colon advises the hearer not to burn any bridges with friends. Interestingly, this proverb mentions not only one's own friends but also those of one's father. The implication is that when trouble comes or help is needed, one can gain it not only from one's immediate circle of friends but also from one's family's friends, so all these relationships need to be maintained.

The second colon is more puzzling. It advises that one not go to, not appeal to, a brother when trouble comes. For some reason, a brother is seen as less likely to provide assistance in trouble. One can speculate about why friends are privileged over brothers in this proverb. Friends are associated with a person by choice and affection, whereas a brother has no say. However, one might still think that, particularly in an ancient society, relatives would help even if they did not like the person. Perhaps the key to understanding is the last colon, where the brother is thought to live at a distance. Maybe the friend is someone close and the brother far away. But again, ancient society was not as mobile as modern society, so one wonders how often brothers would be split by such great distance.

II. (:11-22) INSIGHTS REGARDING CHARACTER AND RELATIONSHIPS

A. (:11-12) Importance of Wisdom and Discernment

1. (:11) Importance of Wisdom

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

Lindsay Wilson: The student or son is addressed by the parent or teacher at the beginning of this new section, and called on to be wise and make the teacher's heart glad (**23:15, 25**). Of course, this is not the end goal. An imperative followed by an imperfect is a purpose construction, and the aim here is that the teacher should respond in words to (i.e. answer) the one who reproaches him. The teacher wants to defend the wise character of the pupil, probably so that others will see him as wise and listen to him.

Tremper Longman: If the son pursues wisdom rather than folly, then the father's enemies won't have any fodder for their verbal attacks on the family. That the wisdom of children positively affects their parents may be seen in **10:1**.

2. (:12) Importance of Discernment

"*A prudent man sees evil and hides himself,*
The naive proceed and pay the penalty."

Tremper Longman: It is easy to avoid problems if one sees them coming. The prudent have that sense, and this allows them to work around the problems. On the other hand, the naive just plunge ahead and suffer the consequences of their foolish actions. This

statement could serve as motivation for working at the acquisition of wisdom. See the identical proverb at **22:3**.

Caleb Nelson: How do you gain shrewdness, the ability to see moral, physical, and financial hazards coming and to evade them? You gain it by experiencing God's world — but only if you experience that world in the fear of God. . .

Brothers and sisters, are you constantly scanning for the outcome? Are you looking five minutes, five years, and five decades into the future, asking what the outcome of this decision will be? Do you make your decisions with an eye to preventing foreseeable evils? Do you ask yourself "What could possibly go wrong?" and then guard against those consequences? Are you in it for the long haul? Or do you prefer the simple-mindedness of going about your business until foreseeable disaster strikes?

B. (:13-14) Importance of Avoiding Negative Outcomes

1. (:13) Guard against Potential Loss

"*Take his garment when he becomes surety for a stranger;*
And for an adulterous woman hold him in pledge."

Allen Ross: People must be held to their obligations no matter how foolishly they were made. The verse is essentially the same as **20:16**.

2. (:14) Refrain from Inappropriate Speech

"*He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning,*
It will be reckoned a curse to him."

Allen Ross: On the surface it appears to be describing one who comes in early and loud with his blessing or greeting; he is considered a nuisance ("*it will be taken as a curse*"). But "*blesses*" and "*curse*" could mean more; they could refer to the loud adulation of a hypocrite, the person who goes to great length to create the impression of piety and friendship but is considered a curse by the one who hears him.

C. (:15-16) Contentious Wife Is Both Unbearable and Uncontrollable

1. (:15) Contentious Wife Is Unbearable

"*A constant dripping on a day of steady rain*
And a contentious woman are alike;"

Paul Koptak: If the loud neighbor is annoying, worse is the quarrelsome wife, here again compared to a leaky and potentially dangerous roof (cf. **19:13**); like the constant dripping, the arguments seem to have no end.

2. (:16) Contentious Wife Is Uncontrollable

"*He who would restrain her restrains the wind,*
And grasps oil with his right hand."

Tremper Longman: The metaphor highlights just how annoying and depressing a contentious wife can be. It seems clear that **27:15** is connected to **v. 16** in that the opening verb of **v. 16** has a third-person feminine object suffix that must refer to the **contentious woman**, although the proverb can apply to any contentious person. However, the meaning of the verse is difficult. In terms of **16a**, it may be making the point that a contentious woman is hard to hide. The wind cannot be controlled and, though invisible, has noticeable and sometimes chaotic effects. One may try to hide the fact that his wife is contentious, but it is her very contentiousness that will not allow him to control her.

However, if **v. 16a** is enigmatic, **v. 16b** is downright obscure. In its original historical setting, what oil on the hand signified was probably well known, but we have lost touch with what it means. Some suggestions include the following. Murphy translates, "And his right hand meets oil." He argues that, like the wind metaphor, it speaks of the inability to control the contentious woman. Trying to grab and control her is like trying to grab something when oil is on your hand. To get this interpretation, Murphy must emend the verb. Clifford translates, "The oil on her hand announces her presence," and suggests that the oil is her perfume, which gives her presence away. He does not address the fact that the possessive pronominal suffix on "*hand*" is masculine and not feminine. In the final analysis, we simply have to declare that the Hebrew is difficult.

Richard Clifford: The saying is completely obscure and any translation is guesswork. In the view of many commentators the verse continues **v. 15**; the feminine singular suffix of "*those who would hide her*" refers to the wife in **v. 15b**. If **v. 16** is a continuation of the previous verse, then v. 15 speaks of the effect of the wife within the house and **v. 16** of the effects outside. One can no more hide a quarrelsome wife from one's neighbors than one can hide a storm wind. Meinhold conjectures that in colon B the woman's perfume (oil) on her fingers gives her presence away, another illustration that **concealing her is futile**.

Paul Koptak: perhaps it is best to say that just as wind cannot be shut away, so the hand makes a poor container for oil. The point is clear that little can be done with a contentious person, female or male (cf. **26:21**).

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 16** adds the further point that such a woman cannot be restrained or kept in place. This is clarified by the rest of the verse, comparing any attempt to restrain her as being as ambitious as controlling (lit. '*restraining*' again) wind or grabbing hold of (lit. '*calling*', *qārā*') oil in our hands. Looking back over **verses 13–16**, it is clear that we should avoid friends like the fools of **verse 13**, the unaware neighbour of **verse 14** and the quarrelsome wife of **verse 15**.

D. (:17-18) Importance of Interaction and Faithful Service

Paul Koptak: Two proverbs speak about **good relations with neighbors and employers**. In **verse 17**, the point is clear enough; we all want friends who will keep us sharp through challenging conversation and personal feedback. The comparison with

striking iron points out the need for two to hone the edge (cf. **Ezek. 21:14–16**); one (lit.) "*sharpens the face* [cf. **Prov. 27:19**] *of his neighbor*" (*reaʿ*; cf. **27:9, 10, 14**).The imagery of **verse 18** is straightforward also, for it is common knowledge that those who tend a garden enjoy its produce. Bringing the two proverbs together and setting them in context, readers learn that it is by serving well and keeping the employer sharp that servants receive the "*honor*" (*kabed*, **27:18**; cf. **26:1, 8**, "*heavy*" in **27:3**) that so many seek (**27:1–2**).

1. (:17) Wisdom Requires Interaction with Others

"*Iron sharpens iron,*
So one man sharpens another."

Richard Clifford: The verse is a fresh way of saying that one learns by conversing with others. Conversation makes one wise, "*sharp*." **One cannot become wise by oneself.**

Lindsay Wilson: We need to have our rough edges knocked off, and we need to do the same to our friends. All of us are works in progress. Longman (2006: 481) comments, 'The wisdom enterprise is a community effort.' This is the beginning of a list of positive characteristics that promote friendship.

2. (:18) Faithful Service Has Its Own Rewards

"*He who tends the fig tree will eat its fruit;*
And he who cares for his master will be honored."

Richard Clifford: The fixed pair is used here to make an earthy comparison -- caring for a fig tree is like caring for a master. A dutiful farmer eats the fruits of the tree. A dutiful servant can expect to share in the honor and prestige of the master.

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 18** describes those who are faithful and loyal to their assigned task. The farmer who cares for the fig tree will be able to eat its fruit, while the person who guards or looks after *(šōmēr*) a master will be rewarded (lit. *honoured*). **Faithfully performing a duty of care to another is a valuable practice.**

Tremper Longman: The proverb encourages the wise to take good care of those who employ them for their professional services. The proverb pivots on the use of "*fruit*" for consequences or rewards. Just as those who "*protect*" (or perhaps simply "*take care of*") a fig tree will have the benefit of the fruit, so those who guard (again perhaps "*take care of*") their employer will have good reward, here "*honor*," but the word may also imply **beneficial material reward.**

E. (:19-20) Self Awareness Focuses on Our Inward Character and Desires

1. (:19) The Heart Reflects Inward Character

"*As in water face reflects face,*
So the heart of man reflects man."

Richard Clifford: The phrase "*face to face*" of colon A is found in **Deut. 34:10** and **Ezek. 20:35** in contexts of speaking directly and intimately to someone (though with the preposition *'el*, "*to*," rather than *l*, "*to*," as here). The heart is the faculty of reflection and deciding, and the mouth, lips, tongue, face (see **15:14**) give voice to the heart. When two people speak directly, "*face to face*," they ultimately speak "*heart to heart.*" The heart (the interior of a person) communicates to others through words and looks. Words are the route to the core of a person. **Verse 17** is somewhat similar.

Lindsay Wilson: it is what we are like on the inside (our heart) that really counts. As a reflection in water shows what we really look like (i.e. acts as a mirror), our heart shows what we are really like. The niv captures it well: '*one's life reflects the heart*.'

Tremper Longman: the heart tells the story of the person. The heart is a general reference to one's character. Thus, character defines who and what a person is.

On the other hand, perhaps the second line is saying that the heart reflects the person to another person. So it is not so much self-revelation, but rather revelation of another.

In any case, the idea, taught elsewhere in Proverbs, is that **the heart of a person is what counts.** Other proverbs mention that one's words reflect the heart of a person (**12:23; 16:23; 18:4**).

Matthew Henry: This shows us that there is a way,

1. Of knowing ourselves. As the water is a looking-glass in which we may see our faces by reflection, so there are mirrors by which the heart of a man is discovered to a man, that is, to himself. Let a man examine his own conscience, his thoughts, affections, and intentions. Let him behold his natural face in the glass of the divine law (**Jam. 1:23**), and he may discern what kind of man he is and what is his true character, which it will be of great use to every man rightly to know.

2. Of knowing one another by ourselves; for, as there is a similitude between the face of a man and the reflection of it in the water, so there is between one man's heart and another's for God has fashioned men's hearts alike; and in many cases we may judge of others by ourselves.

2. (:20) Insatiable Desires Rooted in Human Depravity

"*Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied,*
Nor are the eyes of man ever satisfied."

Paul Koptak: if kind hearts can reflect one another in friendship, it is also true that greedy eyes can devour another's life.

Lindsay Wilson: **Godly contentment** is a precious gift to share with others, and will promote healthy relationships, but it does not come naturally to us.

Tremper Longman: There is always room for one more dead person; they cannot get enough. Like death, human craving can never be satisfied. One can never have enough money, power, pleasure, relationship, love, and on and on. The proverb helps people become self-aware and also aware of what makes other people tick. If we know that desires are never truly satisfied, then perhaps this may help to slow our pursuit of needless things. **Ecclesiastes** is well aware of this endless cycle of desire, and it comes to a pessimistic conclusion concerning the meaning of life (**2:10–11; 5:10**; etc.). **Pursuing ultimate satisfaction is like chasing the wind**.

F. (:21-22) Your Inward Character = Your Essential DNA

1. (:21) Character Is Tested by Response to Public Praise

"*The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold,*
And a man is tested by the praise accorded him."

Richard Clifford: The refining of ore was done in a thick-walled smelting oven partially buried in the ground. Small openings in the oven let steam out and oxygen in. The fire was fueled by charcoal (**26:21**). The smelting process shows whether the ores are precious or worthless, true silver or gold. How does one assess the true worth of a human being? One is known by the quality of one's friends. What kind of people approve of what I do?

Paul Koptak: the way we react to the praise of others reveals our motives, honorable and dishonorable (cf. **17:3**).

Lindsay Wilson: Precious metals like silver and gold can be tested to show positively their level of purity (**17:3**a). A person being tested by praise can have either sense. How people receive praise can reveal whether they seek to be affirmed, or whether they seek what is right. Yet who or what a person praises, or what people praise about this person (depending on whether the suffix is subjective or objective), can also reveal what they are committed to. Praise in friendship is a vital way of nourishing relationships with others.

Tremper Longman: We speculate that receiving praise from another provides a tremendous temptation for self-boasting. Refusing to let that produce pride is not an easy task. However, if one resists, then the person will be better off for the effort.

George Mylne: The refining pot tries silver, and the furnace reveals whether gold be genuine and pure, so praise bestowed upon a man, reveals the reigning temper of his mind. If a wise and humble man is praised, he will not be thereby elevated in his own mind. If the criticism conferred upon him is not just, he will not think himself warranted to lay any stress upon it, for it is an evidence of pride when a man despises undeserved reproaches and yet prides himself on commendations which are equally groundless, and therefore equally vain. If it is a piece of baseness to be dejected by undeserved reproaches then it is a piece of vanity to be puffed up by praise.

2. (:22) Folly Cannot Be Eradicated

"*Though you pound a fool in a mortar*
with a pestle along with crushed grain,
Yet his folly will not depart from him."

Richard Clifford: Mortar and pestle were not the means for ridding grain of its useless husk, but were ordinarily used for grinding olives, resins, and spices. The point is that even if you used the extraordinary means of mortar and pestle, you could never rid a fool of perverse folly, so deeply ingrained is it.

Paul Koptak: **Verse 22** presents another metaphor of processing natural material. Unlike the crucible and furnace that separate, a mortar and pestle grind grain that has already been removed from its husk by the thresher. The point is that folly cannot be separated from the fool, for it is **too deeply ingrained**.

Lindsay Wilson: This final verse sits outside the section on friendship, but as a three-line verse it rounds it off. It uses a vivid image of grinding a fool with a pestle and mortar, but still not being able to remove his folly from him. For folly is not simply something that can be put on and taken off as we please (like a coat); rather, it is **ingrained in fools**, part of their DNA so that it affects all that they do and say.

(:23-27) APPENDIX POEM -- ADVANTAGES OF RENEWABLE NATURAL RESOURCES OVER FLEETING RICHES AND POWER

Richard Clifford: These verses constitute a five-line poem on the **advantages of field and flocks over other forms of wealth**. Natural assets are less subject to risk than hoarded treasure because they renew themselves. Vegetation comes up from the earth every year; sheep and goats are transformed into food and clothing. Field and flock produce "enough" (v. 27a) basic foodstuffs, in contrast perhaps to the excess that accumulated treasure can buy. The teaching is traditional but the wit and perspective of this poem are remarkable.

Tremper Longman: This proverb unit seems to advocate a fundamental dependence on **renewable resources**, such as letting fresh grass replace dried grass and gathering vegetation from the mountains as crops for food. Lambs and goats provide food, milk, and clothes. All that is really necessary for life are associated with the things that are part of a farmer's daily life. Dreaming of treasures and diadems may distract people from what is really important over the long haul.

Lindsay Wilson: **Advice to Leaders** -- The image of a leader as a **shepherd** is used in both the OT and NT (e.g. **Jer. 23:1–4; 1 Pet. 5:1–4**). The key admonition is given in **verse 23** (*look after your animals*); a reason for the advice (beginning with *for*, *kî*) follows in **verse 24**; while **verses 25–27** elaborate on what will happen when you do so, effectively operating as further motivation to take notice.

Caleb Nelson: The final portion of our passage highlights the creational goodness that God has built into the world, and teaches contentment with work and the produce of the earth and the animals that God has placed on it. The principle of sowing and reaping is at its best here, in working the earth that God has given. Pay attention to your flock, and it will take care of you.

A. (:23-24) Key Exhortation to Shepherd-Leader

1. (:23) Pay Attention to the Condition of Your Valuable Flock

"*Know well the condition of your flocks,*
And pay attention to your herds;"

Richard Clifford: "*Be aware*" and "*give attention*" have a double meaning: take care of your flocks, attend to the kind of wealth they provide. The antithesis to flocks as a form of wealth is *ḥōsen* ("*hoard, treasure*"), which is particularly vulnerable to theft or seizure (**Jer. 20:5** and **Ezek. 22:25**).

Matthew Henry: A command given us **to be diligent in our callings**. It is directed to husbandmen and shepherds, and those that deal in cattle, but it is to be extended to all other lawful callings; whatever our business is, within doors or without, we must apply our minds to it. This command intimates,

1. That we ought to have some business to do in this world and not to live in idleness.
2. We ought rightly and fully to understand our business, and know what we have to do, and not meddle with that which we do not understand.
3. We ought to have an eye to it ourselves, and not turn over all the care of it to others. We should, with our own eyes, inspect the state of our flocks, it is the master's eye that makes them fat.
4. We must be discreet and considerate in the management of our business, know the state of things, and look well to them, that nothing may be lost, no opportunity let slip, but every thing done in proper time and order, and so as to turn to the best advantage.
5. We must be diligent and take pains; not only sit down and contrive, but be up and doing: "*Set thy heart to thy herds, as one in care; lay thy hands, lay thy bones, to thy business*."

2. (:24) Reason: Riches and Power Are Fleeting

"*For riches are not forever,*
Nor does a crown endure to all generations."

Paul Koptak: Unlike a herd that will replenish itself if cared for, riches can be squandered and lost for good. So also a crown is not guaranteed from generation to generation if a healthy relationship with the subjects is ignored (cf. **14:28**). One never arrives at the place where work is not necessary. Images of harvest and plenty illustrate the rewards of proper attention to the farm, where gathering hay to feed the animals in turn provides homespun goods and fields in trade (**27:25–26**).

Lindsay Wilson: The clear thrust of the verse is that what we currently take for granted is not guaranteed to last. This is a good reason to look after those in our care in the present.

B. (:25-27) Value of Renewable Natural Assets

Richard Clifford: Unproductive wealth is contrasted with vegetable and animal abundance. Unlike stored-up treasure that is subject to theft or seizure, grassland renews itself and sustains herds. The ecosystem of animals and grassland provides sustenance for human beings. Year after year beast and field provide clothing, money to purchase more pastureland, and food for an entire household.

Lindsay Wilson: These verses describe the implied consequences of properly looking after our animals. The principles behind these observations (they will prosper when cared for, and provide benefits to us) have further implications for leaders in general. Time invested in those in our charge will benefit us as well as them.

1. (:25) Renewable Feature of Vegetation and Herbs

"*When the grass disappears, the new growth is seen,*
And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in,"

George Mylne: God has given us **great testimonies of his goodness**, in giving us rain from Heaven and fruitful seasons. By his kind providence the springing of the earth is blessed, and the hills are covered with herbage, which may be gathered for the use of those beasts which serve for the use of man. Does God stretch out his hand with blessings and shall man, ungratefully and foolishly despise the bounty, and lose the benefit of it by his own neglect and sloth? If God puts a price into our hands, to get either heavenly wisdom or the needful blessings of life then we are fools if we have not heart to employ it for the intended purpose. The valleys and the mountains, which rejoice and sing to God, cry out against sluggish men. The necessity and advantage of industry and care are very visible.

2. (:26-27) Resourceful Value of Lambs and Goats

a. (:26) Source of Clothing and Generational Wealth

"*The lambs will be for your clothing,*
And the goats will bring the price of a field,"

George Mylne: By industry you shall have clothing, and food, and rent for your fields, or money to buy new possessions. You shall not perhaps be able to procure the luxuries of life but these are not to be sought after. You shall have a comfortable maintenance for yourselves and your families; your maid servants shall have plenty of that food that is proper and convenient for them.

b. (:27) Source of Physical Sustenance

"*And there will be goats' milk enough for your food,*
For the food of your household,

And sustenance for your maidens."

Paul Koptak: **Verses 26–27** describe the **payoff for diligence**, the second line of each describing the **abundance** that buys fields and feeds family and servants. "*Plenty*" in **verse 27** translates the same word used for eating just "*enough*" honey in **25:16**; having "*enough*" is for **sharing, not gorging**, so the servants who look after their employers should be cared for in turn (**27:18**). While some interpreters think the message of the poem was directed to landed young men called into service at the court, the **metaphor for attentiveness and diligence** applies to many areas of life (cf. **2 Tim. 2:6**).

Lindsay Wilson: It is a **picture of fullness**, life as it should be. We care for the animals; the animals provide for us. Thinking more widely, as leaders provide for those for whom they are responsible, the community will prosper and all will be provided for. . .

Whenever we are entrusted with responsibilities of leadership, we ought to act for the flourishing of those in our care. This will prosper both them and us. Malchow (1985: 243–244) points out that this small unit leads neatly into (and he thinks, introduces) **chapters 28 – 29**, which he argues are **directed to future rulers**.

TEXT: Proverbs 28:1-12

TITLE: CONTRASTS BETWEEN THE WICKED AND THE RIGHTEOUS

Lindsay Wilson: These verses deal with both the righteous and the wicked, but there is a **greater emphasis on the wicked**. In most verses both are mentioned, but sometimes there is a focus only on the wicked (**vv. 3, 9**). The righteous are never the subject of an entire verse.

(:1) PROLOGUE – CONTRAST BETWEEN THE INWARD DISPOSITION OF THE WICKED AND THE RIGHTEOUS

A. Inward Disposition of the Wicked = Unrealistic Fear

"*The wicked flee when no one is pursuing,*"

Charles Bridges: When conscience is roused, guilt is the parent of Fear. Adam knew no rear until he became a guilty creature.

But if guilt brings fear, the removal of guilt gives confidence.

Lindsay Wilson: This preliminary verse introduces the two categories of the righteous (plural) and the wicked (singular adjective, *rāšʿā,* used as a collective noun; the verb is plural). There is a comic picture of the wicked fleeing for their lives even though no-one is pursuing them.

Richard Clifford: The phrase "*flees though none pursue*" occurs in **Lev. 26:17, 36** in a curse for disobedience to the covenant. In Leviticus the phrase means flight that continues even when the enemy has ceased pursuing; the terror is so profound that one cannot stop running. It is the opposite of the lion-like confidence mentioned in colon B. **Wicked behavior sets in motion a chain of ills that leads to a life of fear.**

B. Inward Disposition of the Righteous = Courageous Boldness

"*But the righteous are bold as a lion.*"

Allen Ross: The faith of the righteous builds confidence. This observation is presented in contrast to the fear of the wicked, who flee when "*no one pursues*." The proverb implies that the wicked, prompted by a guilty conscience or a fear of judgment, become fearful and suspicious of everyone. But the righteous, who seek favor with God and humankind, have a clear conscience and thus no need to look over their shoulders, as it were (Kidner, 168). The righteous can have the confidence (*yibṭāḥ*; "*are bold*," NIV) to live righteously under God's providence.

I. (:2-5) PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

A. (:2) Righteousness Leads to Stability in Government

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

Richard Clifford: The first colon states the paradox that rebellion, far from doing away with rulers, actually multiplies them by introducing new factions or ensuring a succession of leaders in unstable times (Ehrlich).

Paul Koptak: A land of deficient character is **cursed with a succession of rulers**, making the nation vulnerable to attack. Surprisingly, the second line does not contrast rebellion with a people's repentance (cf. the famous **2 Chron. 7:14**) but with a single person of "*understanding and knowledge*" (lit., "*one who knows*"; cf. *yadaʿ* in **Prov. 27:23**). Rulers like this maintain order (cf. **29:4**); the proverb assumes that a people will rebel unless led by a person of wisdom.

Tremper Longman: Basically, the point is that the offense of a land will lead to a proliferation of leaders, which is not a good thing. Long-lived benevolent rulers are the best circumstance for a nation, providing security. The offense may well be a rebellion, which itself could inject instability into a country. The many leaders may point to the fragmentation of a previously united land or perhaps to a succession of leaders as they violently jockey for power.

Lindsay Wilson: The idea is that when the people are rebellious, there are many vying for power, which unsettles the nation. Yet stability or order prevails when there is one person clearly in charge who is someone of character (understanding and knowledge). The Hebrew reads literally, '*so it will endure*', but the thrust is that the society will be characterized by **order** and **stability**.

B. (:3) Oppression Strips the Lowly of Their Sustenance

"*A poor man who oppresses the lowly*
Is like a driving rain which leaves no food."

Allen Ross: The Hebrew has "*a poor man*" (*geber rāš*) "*oppresses the poor*" (*weʿōšēq dallîm*). The problem is that the poor in the book of Proverbs are not oppressors and do not have the power to be such. So commentators assume *rāš* is incorrect. By slight changes the reading "*ruler*" can be obtained, and it seems to fit the verse and the book better. If the reading "*poor man*" is retained, then the oppression includes **betrayal**—one would expect a poor man to have sympathy for others who are impoverished, but in fact that is not the case.

Tremper Longman: Those who try to get something out of the poor are trying to get "blood out of a rock," as the modern saying goes. This proverb envisions a particularly pitiful scene as poor people oppress poor people, leading to devastating results. People who have nothing try to get something from people who have nothing, which leads to nothing. The rains that wash away food may refer to crop-destroying rains that ruin a harvest (see **26:1**).

Lindsay Wilson: While the poor may have expected help from their fellows who understood being needy, how much more burdensome it would be if they added to the oppression. Their actions are described as heavy rain that will destroy the crops (**26:1**), taking away even the last prospect of food from the grain that was planted.

Caleb Nelson: The poor man who oppresses the poor is a horrible thing. He is like a rain that crushes the grain before it can be harvested. Don't oppress the poor. How can you do that? Overcharging, voting for candidates and policies that do harm, ignoring poor people, failing to give to the poor — all of these are ways you and I can oppress the poor. Another way you can harm the poor is by charging interest, conceived of as a continuously increasing charge for the use of money. Usury is bad at all times, but interest exacted from the poor is downright evil. The one who makes money by usury is simply gathering a fortune that will be spent by someone who is kind to the poor.

C. (:4) Law Keepers Restrain the Wicked

"*Those who forsake the law praise the wicked,*
But those who keep the law strive with them."

Paul Koptak: **Verses 4–5** should be read together, since the first line of each describes the absence of wise guidance and the rise of evil. The second lines (like the contrasts of **28:1–2**) state that those who understand will also act to resist injustice. By implication, the righteous not only keep their ways straight but make sure others do the same, standing presumably with the strength of a lion (**28:1**).

D. (:5) The Godly Embrace Justice

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

Charles Bridges: Evil men do not understand justice. They do not know the true standard of right and wrong, the true way to God, or the end of God's dealings with them. Their ignorance is deliberate. The most distinguished scholar is a fool in understanding about justice. Unless he is humbled in the consciousness of his ignorance and seeks light from above, he will perish in gross darkness.

Richard Clifford: The phrase "*to understand justice*" means to be wise or act wisely as in **Job 32:9**. This verse plays on the phrase: People bent on evil are not wise, they do not know judgment in the sense that they do not see the divine justice that eventually will catch up with them. On the other hand, those seeking Yahweh understand "*all things*," including Yahweh's rewarding them and punishing the wicked.

Tremper Longman: *Understanding* involves more than mere awareness of a concept of justice. It implies that they **appreciate it.** Evil people don't want to understand justice because they live lives that are at odds with justice. On the other hand, those who desire to be in relationship with Yahweh do understand. One question we may ask is, What does the proverb mean by "*everything*"? It would seem a strange arrogance to claim complete understanding of anything in the universe. It probably is best to delimit the

"*everything*" to **matters of justice**. Those who seek Yahweh, after all, are wise, and they want to know what Yahweh's will is. Yahweh defines the nature of justice, so by pursuing Yahweh, they come to know what justice entails.

Allen Ross: Only people attuned to the divine will can fully perceive what justice is. Without that standard, legal activity easily becomes self-serving.

II. (:6-7) BENEFITS OF RIGHTEOUS BEHAVIOR

A. (:6) Integrity Valued over Wealth

"*Better is the poor who walks in his integrity,*
Than he who is crooked though he be rich."

Tremper Longman: Nothing is wrong with wealth in and of itself, but if a decision must be made, it is clear that **integrity is more important**, and riches should be sacrificed. The metaphor of **walking on a path**, so familiar from **chaps. 1-9**, underlies this proverb. There are two paths, one good (here described as "*blameless*") and one bad (here "*crooked/twisted*").

George Mylne: Gold and silver glitter in our eyes, and dazzle our sight to such a degree, that a rich sinner appears more respectable than a saint in rags. The fatal consequence is, that men labor rather to be rich than holy. To direct our practice aright, it is necessary to have our unreasonable judgements of things corrected, and to esteem the poorest saint above the most prosperous transgressor.

Uprightness is so valuable in itself, that it gives a luster to the possessors of it beyond what all the dignity and wealth of the world can do but double-mindedness and insincerity are so vile, that they stain the glory of the highest man on earth. Let us therefore choose the portion of God's people, however lowly they are, and pray that we may not have our portion with the men of the world, although their bellies should be filled with God's bounty.

B. (:7) Law Keepers Honor Their Parents

"*He who keeps the law is a discerning son,*
But he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father."

Tremper Longman: In the present proverb, even associating with gluttons is condemned, though association may presume participation.

George Mylne: Do you wish to give comfort to your parents, and to reflect honor upon them? Let religion be your great business, and choose for your companions, those who fear the Lord. But have no fellowship with dissipated youths. Let not their mirth and humor allure you into their company. For you may as soon touch pitch and not be defiled as have fellowship with wicked men, without being in a lesser or greater degree corrupted.

Matthew Henry: Wickedness is not only a reproach to the sinner himself, but to all that are akin to him. He that keeps rakish company, and spends his time and money with them, not only grieves his parents, but shames them; it turns to their disrepute, as if they had not done their duty to him. They are ashamed that a child of theirs should be scandalous and abusive to their neighbours.

III. (:8-11) CONSEQUENCES OF EVIL BEHAVIOR = POETIC JUSTICE

A. (:8) Gain Wealth Unethically and It Will Soon Be Redistributed

"*He who increases his wealth by interest and usury,*
Gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor."

Richard Clifford: The point here is that profit gained from gouging those in need will ultimately be redistributed to the needy from whom it was originally taken. The profit will find its way into the hands of a generous person who understands that Israelites are kin and not to be exploited.

Paul Koptak: Gouging on loans may be one of the forms of the oppression mentioned in **verse 3**. Israelites were to charge no interest at all to those in great need, for to the poor, any interest would be "exorbitant" (**Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:36; Deut. 23:19**). If one gets rich doing just that, the interest must be great indeed; it is poetic justice that the ill-gotten wealth goes to one who will give it back to the poor (cf. **Prov. 28:27**).

B. (:9) Ignore God's Law and Your Prayers Will Be an Abomination

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

Richard Clifford: In this example of poetic justice, those who turn a deaf ear to the instruction that ultimately comes from God (mediated through teachers or parents) will find their own words to God rejected.

Paul Koptak: If you won't listen to God, God will not listen to you. This proverb suggests that everything about this person is an "*abomination*" (*to'ebah*; NIV "*detestable*") to God, even the act of prayer, for it is **disingenuous**.

C. (:10) Lead the Righteous Astray and Inherit Evil

"*He who leads the upright astray in an evil way*
Will himself fall into his own pit,
But the blameless will inherit good."

Richard Clifford: In this example of poetic justice, those who turn a deaf ear to the instruction that ultimately comes from God (mediated through teachers or parents) will find their own words to God rejected.

Tremper Longman: It is bad enough being wicked, but it is doubly bad to make those who are walking on the straight path go astray. Those who might be tempted to

influence the righteous to act wickedly are warned that they are the ones who will suffer. Here and elsewhere in Proverbs, the wicked are told they will experience the pain that they want to inflict on others. On the other hand and in contrast, the blameless, those who do act with integrity and wisdom, will inherit good things.

Allen Ross: Destruction awaits those who corrupt others; rewards await those who have integrity. Judgment is certain for those who lead the upright into evil; they will fall into their own trap. The line shows that the wicked will be caught in their own devices; but it also shows that the righteous are corruptible—they can be led into morally bad conduct ("*an evil path*"; see **26:27; Mt 23:15**).

D. (:11) Puff Yourself Up and Everyone Will See You Lack Substance

"*The rich man is wise in his own eyes,*
But the poor who has understanding sees through him."

Richard Clifford: According to this observation on the effect of wealth and of poverty on wisdom, the social position of the wealthy can mislead them. To be wise in one's own eyes is a sign of folly (**3:7; 26:5, 12**). The irony is that a rich person's social inferior is actually superior, for wisdom is more valuable than pearls (**8:10–11**) and enables one to judge others accurately.

Tremper Longman: This proverb strikes out at pretense. The contrast between the wealthy and the poor is just to make the contrast between those who pretend and those who can see through the pretense all the more dramatic. In Proverbs, wealth is better than poverty, but as people use wealth to self-delude and delude others, then wealth is worse than poverty. The expression "*in their own eyes*" is used in a number of places in Proverbs (**3:7; 12:15; 26:5; 30:12**) to refer to **self-presumption**. Wealth can sometimes cloud the mind so that the rich think they have more resources than they do. It can breed conceit and a felling of self-reliance. On the other hand, a person of understanding, even if poor, can see through this pretense.

Charles Bridges: Although riches do not always bring wisdom, the rich man often pretends to have it and ascribes his success to his own sagacity, though he may be manifestly simple and foolish. Yet the universe does not possess a more dignified character than the poor man who has discernment.

(:12) EPILOGUE – CONTRAST BETWEEN RIGHTEOUS AND WICKED LEADERSHIP ON SOCIETY

A. Righteous Leadership Leads to Glory

"*When the righteous triumph, there is great glory,*"

Richard Clifford: When the righteous exult in the sense of triumphing over their foes and coming into power, oppression ceases and the city flourishes. But when the wicked rise in triumph, people go into hiding; there is no public celebration.

B. Wicked Leadership Leads to Terror

"*But when the wicked rise, men hide themselves.*"

Tremper Longman: Righteousness is the ethical side of wisdom, and wickedness the ethical side of folly. The proverb comments on community benefits of wisdom versus the disadvantage of folly. The righteous rejoice when wisdom prevails, and when wisdom prevails there is success, not just for the individual but also for the society as a whole. Much glory accrues to the community where wisdom makes its influence felt. This wisdom influence is probably gained by the presence of wise leaders. The second colon describes the reaction of the people when wicked fools "*rise up*" and take control. They hide for fear that bad consequences will fall on them, through either abuse or neglect.

Matthew Henry: The advancement of the wicked is the eclipsing of the beauty of a nation: When the wicked rise and get head they make head against all that is sacred, and then a man is hidden, a good man is thrust into obscurity, is necessitated to abscond for his own safety; corruptions prevail so generally that, as in Elijah's time, there seem to be no good men left, the wicked walk so thickly on every side.

Lindsay Wilson: The first refrain contrasts the **different outcomes** for the righteous and the wicked coming to prominence. When the righteous triumph (it can mean either 'exult/rejoice' or 'prevail/triumph'), the consequence is great glory or honour or reason for pride (perhaps even 'great elation', niv). This is highly desirable. However, when the wicked rise (to power), this is a great shame or dishonour, and so the people are hidden, or hide themselves. The prevailing of the righteous brings great benefit to the community, while the rise of the wicked leads to a society scattered in shame.

TEXT: Proverbs 28:13-28

TITLE: CONSEQUENCES FOR LIFE CHOICES

I. (:13-14) RIGHTEOUS VS. UNRIGHTEOUS RESPONSE TO SIN

A. (:13) Confessing and Forsaking vs. Concealing – Impenitent Sinner

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

Allen Ross: Repentance and renunciation of sin bring God's mercy and blessing. This verse is unique in Proverbs; it captures the theology of forgiveness found in passages such as **Psalm 32:1–5** and **1 John 1:6–9**. The contrast is between one who "*conceals*" his sins and one who "*confesses and renounces them*." The former will not prosper; the latter will find God's "*mercy*" (*yeruḥām*). Each part of this verse is essential to the truth: "confession must be coupled with true return in order to assure God's mercy" (Plaut, 285). Would that the people of God were half as faithful in showing mercy as God is!

Richard Clifford: The saying criticizes people's inclination to keep quiet about their faults. Colon B makes clear that the confession is done to God. Mercy will be shown to such people (divine passive). This is the only verse in Proverbs that refers to God's forgiveness of the penitent sinner (Whybray).

Tremper Longman: At bottom, this verse (like **28:11**) is against pretense and for **openness** and **mercy**.

George Mylne: But such is the folly of many sinners, that they would rather hide their sins from their own eyes, and, if possible, from the eyes of God, than receive mercy under the character of wicked sinners. They will allow themselves to be sinners but they will not confess their sins; or, if they cannot altogether deny them, they endeavor to save their honor, or rather their pride, to the ruin of their souls, by excusing and extenuating them, or by transferring, like our first parents, the blame of them to others. How foolish is it for those who pine away under a mortal disease to conceal it from the knowledge of the world, rather than seek a cure from the physician?

Those who cover their sins shall not prosper. For it is impossible to cover them from the eye of our Judge; and to endeavor to shelter ourselves under coverings, is an additional provocation to the eyes of his glory. If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But if we cover our sins with excuses, and will not allow ourselves to be sensible of our absolute need of sovereign mercy then how can we expect to share in that salvation, which is bestowed on men to the praise of the glory of the grace of God? If we will not acknowledge our disease then we refuse to the physician the praise of a cure.

B (:14) Fearing Sin vs. Hardening the Heart – Hardened Sinner

"*How blessed is the man who fears always,*
But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity."

Richard Clifford: The Hebrew word rendered by "*fears*" is a different verb than in the common phrase "*to fear (or revere) Yahweh*." The only other occurrence of the verb in this conjugation is **Isa. 51:13**, which refers to fear and dread of an **oppressor**. The meaning "*to harden the heart*" in colon B is illuminated by **Ezek. 3:7**: "*But the house of Israel is unwilling to listen to me, because the whole house of Israel has a hard forehead and a hard heart.*"

The saying states a paradox. Those who are fearful in the sense of **cautious** are declared happy, and those who are "*bold*" in the sense of "tough-hearted" as in **Ex. 7:3** will fall into traps they did not foresee or "fear." In short, there is a good fear and a bad fear.

Lindsay Wilson: While *pāḥad* (*fear, be in dread of*) is used instead of *yārē'* (*fear*), this is elsewhere used of the fear of God (**Ps. 36:1 [Heb. 2]; 2 Chr. 19:7**). In any event, the contrast in **verse 14b** makes it clear that those who have a wrong stance towards God (*hardening their heart*) will suffer calamitous consequences (lit. '*fall into disaster/evil*'). Waltke (2005: 417) sees the impenitent sinner of **verse 13a** balanced by the hardened sinner of **verse 14b**.

Paul Koptak: If the previous saying hinted at divine grace, here human fear of Yahweh leads to blessing or happiness (*'ašre*; cf**. 8:34; 20:7; Ps. 1:1**). Note the contrast between one who "*fears continually*" and one who "*hardens the heart*." A hard heart knows no correction and therefore no change; it will hide, not confess (**Prov. 28:13**), a sure path to "*trouble*."

Allen Ross: Perhaps the verse means **fear of sin**. In other words, the one who is always apprehensive about sin and its results will be more successful at avoiding it and finding God's blessing.

Tremper Longman: The sages here apparently are commending fear over insensitivity. . . Fear has a way of keeping people alert to potential problems. If one does not experience a certain level of stress, then it is likely that complacency will set in, and sooner or later negative consequences will result. . . On the other hand, those whose hearts are hard, in the sense of unfeeling, will suffer for the opposite reasons.

II. (:15-18) VALUE OF INTEGRITY VS. UNJUST RULE

A. (:15-16) Value of Integrity in Leadership

1. (:15) Wicked Rulers Intimidate and Ravage Their People

"*Like a roaring lion and a rushing bear*
Is a wicked ruler over a poor people."

Lindsay Wilson: These verses describe different kinds of people in authority. Wicked rulers – revealed as those who bring poverty to their people – are described in terms of the **senseless damage** they cause (**v. 15**), and are compared to a roaring, hungry lion, putting fear into everyone, or a charging bear on a destructive rampage. They boast about themselves, but do nothing to benefit the people over whom they rule. The ruler in **verse 16a** is just as bad. He has refused to choose the path of wisdom and so lacks understanding (**3:13**); he is described as an excessive extorter/oppressor (*cruel*, nrsv/esv, is an over-translation of *rab*, '*much*', '*greatly*'). The contrast, however, shows that an ideal ruler is one who hates unjust gain (used of a bribe in **Exod. 18:21**) and will receive the reward that wisdom offers – lasting days (**3:2**).

Paul Koptak: Two metaphors for a wicked ruler use the well-known behaviors of two fearsome animals. The lion roars and the bear charges (or, possibly, "*ranges*" or "*roves*" over a territory); whether the behaviors are linked to hunting or defending territory is not clear, but the first is most like a wicked ruler, who preys on the poor. In Proverbs, the king's wrath (presumably a just wrath) is like the lion's roar (**19:12, 20:2**); only here is the roar like a wicked person ruling over the helpless poor (*dal*; **28:8, 11**; cf. **v. 12**).

Allen Ross: Political tyrants are dangerous and destructive. The wicked man who rules over "*helpless people*" is compared to a "*roaring lion*" and a "*charging bear*"—subhuman, beastly, powerful, insensitive, in search of victims (prey). Because tyrants are like this, animal imagery (beast imagery?) is used in **Daniel 7:1–8** for the series of ruthless world rulers. The poor crumple under such tyrants because they cannot meet their demands.

George Mylne: The lion and the bear are two of the fiercest kinds of animals but they are doubly dreadful when the one is roaring, and the other charging the prey, seeking in the rage of hunger whom they may devour. No less dreadful is a tyrant who spreads desolation and terror through the country, by oppressing his helpless subjects. He is a general enemy but his cruelty is felt most by the poor, who have no means of resistance in their power, and who can least bear his exactions.

Tremper Longman: Tyrants in the past, even as today, were known to suck the lifeblood of their people, making themselves affluent while their people were impoverished.

2. (:16) Oppressor vs. Ruler with Integrity

"*A leader who is a great oppressor lacks understanding,*
But he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days."

Richard Clifford: The antithesis here is **lack** and **abundance**. Where there is lack of intelligence there is abundant violence; where there is lack of unjustly acquired wealth, there is abundant life.

Allen Ross: The second line describes the one who rules with integrity; he "*will enjoy a long life*" (*yaʾarîk yāmîm*, lit., "*extends days*"). A righteous administration pleases the

people and God, who preserves it.

B. (:17-18) Value of Integrity in Living Blamelessly

1. (:17) Burden of Guilt over Bloodshed

"*A man who is laden with the guilt of human blood*
Will be a fugitive until death; let no one support him."

Tremper Longman: This proverb upholds the **dignity of human life**. If people take a life, their own lives are forfeit (**Gen. 9:5-6**). Here the first colon describes someone who has taken the life of another person and feels oppressed or tormented by that act. Indeed, the second colon, admittedly difficult to understand with certainty, seems to suggest that the person is suicidal. That is likely what is suggested by the statement that such a person is on a flight to the pit, with "*pit*" standing for the underworld.

Allen Ross: the second line of the verse is either saying that it is futile to try to support a murderer on the run or that one should not interfere.

George Mylne: The land is defiled with blood, if the murderer (when he can be found, and the crime can be proven,) escapes unpunished; how deeply then must they be defiled, who support or conceal him! Justifying the wicked, is a crime of the same nature with condemning the righteous. Saving the life of a murderer, has the same relation to the guilt of slaying the innocent. Is God so severe in his laws and providence against murderers? Then let us give no indulgence to any of those passions or dispositions, that lead to such a black and atrocious crime. Hatred and malice do not always end in blood but blood commonly begins with hatred and malice. These malignant passions are viewed as murder by the holy eyes of God; and the man who indulges them has committed murder already in his heart.

2. (:18) Benefit of Integrity

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

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 18** commends those who **walk in integrity**, noting that they will be delivered ('*saved*', in the sense of '*kept safe*'; **10:9**). However, one whose ways are crooked or twisted will fall (lit. '*fall into one*', rendered as *suddenly fall*, esv, or '*fall into the pit*', niv/nrsv).

Allen Ross: **Integrity brings security; perversion brings insecurity**. A life of integrity (*hôlēk tāmîm*; "*walk is blameless*," NIV) is contrasted with the one "*whose ways* [dual; see **v.6**] *are perverse* [*neʿqaš*]"; the result of the righteous lifestyle is being "*kept safe*," whereas the wicked will fall. The last word, *beʾeḥāt* ("*at one* [once]"), may indicate a sudden fall (cf. NIV).

III. (:19-22) RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HARD WORK AND WEALTH

A. (:19-20) Importance of Diligence and Faithfulness in Obtaining Wealth

1. (:19) Diligence vs. Vanity

"*He who tills his land will have plenty of food,*
But he who follows empty pursuits will have poverty in plenty."

Richard Clifford: Doing one's duty faithfully means being sated with food (*yiśba' leḥem*), whereas frenetic pursuit of what is insubstantial (*rēqîm*) means being sated with poverty (*yiśba' rîš*).

Lindsay Wilson: Those who work their land will be satisfied with plenty of food, but if their energies are diverted elsewhere ('*fantasies*', niv; *worthless pursuits*, esv/nrsv; lit. '*empty things*'), they will be '*full*' of the emptiness of poverty (**12:11**).

Paul Koptak: Read together with **verse 20**, this proverb makes a **comparison of rewards**. Not only is the wordplay on (lit.) "*plenty of bread . . . plenty of poverty*" a wry **contrast in outcomes** (repeating *yiśbaʿ*, "*filled*"), the contrast of behaviors also sets staying home against riding off in pursuit of vanities. If the goals are empty at the start, the final outcome will be also. This saying is nearly identical to **12:11** (except for the last two words in that proverb, "*lacks sense*").

George Mylne: We must seek from God our daily bread but we must not expect to have it rained down like manna from the clouds without any labor of our own. Let us join industry to our dependence upon God and we shall have bread enough for ourselves and our families, and something to give to the poor.

But the man who chases fantasies and loves idle company has no relish for the business of his calling. He learns habits of idleness and dissipation, which will soon bring him to poverty. He behaves as if he were hungering and thirsting after poverty and he shall soon be filled with that which he is so eagerly seeking after!

2. (:20) Faithfulness vs. Get Rich Quick Mentality

"*A faithful man will abound with blessings,*
But he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished."

Richard Clifford: The righteous receive blessings (including wealth), whereas those who seek to get rich quick end up with trouble rather than wealth. The verb "*to hasten*" (*'ûṣ*) in Proverbs always means to **act precipitously** (**19:2; 21:6; 29:20**) and **without reflection**. The right way to become wealthy is to pursue virtue.

Lindsay Wilson: Similarly, in **verse 20** a faithful person will have many blessings (which probably includes material ones, **10:22**), but one who is in a hurry to be rich will be given a punishment of an unspecified kind (**13:11; 20:21**).

Paul Koptak: Like **verse 19**, this saying asks its hearer to **choose outcomes**. Do you want to be blessed richly, or are you only in a hurry (*'aṣ*; cf. **19:2; 20:21; 21:6; 29:20**) to get rich? The first requires faithfulness, the second abandons virtue to chase after material gains, cutting corners in work and ethics. Once again, it comes down to aims in

life; if one seeks the higher goal of virtue, other goods will come. But if one seeks the lower goal of possessions alone, even more will be lost, perhaps even one's integrity.

Allen Ross: **Faithfulness determines success**. The "*faithful man*" (*ʾîš ʾemûnôt*) is contrasted with the one who is "*eager to get rich*" (*ʾāṣ leha ʿašîr*). The first is faithful to his obligations to God and to other people, whereas the one who hastens to make riches is doing it without an honest day's work and perhaps even dishonestly. In a hurry to acquire wealth, he falls into dishonest schemes and bears the guilt for doing so; he will not go unpunished. The Targum adds the interpretation—probably a correct one—that he hastens through deceit and wrongdoing.

B. (:21-22) Warning against Wicked Approaches to Obtaining Wealth

1. (:21) Via Showing Partiality by Taking Bribes

"*To show partiality is not good,*
Because for a piece of bread a man will transgress."

Richard Clifford: Despite the strong prohibition of judicial partiality, the reality is that a judge may sell out for a pittance. The saying expresses contempt for the greed that would pervert the integrity of the court for a piece of bread.

Tremper Longman: The second colon provides the motivation for those who do show favoritism: personal gain. It parodies those who are willing to show favoritism by pointing out that they engage in such an unethical practice for the slightest kind of bribe.

2. (:22) Via Stingy Materialistic Motivation

"*A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth,*
And does not know that want will come upon him."

Lindsay Wilson: Related to **greed** is **stinginess**, with **verse 22** claiming that a person '*bad of eye*' (i.e. **miserly**, see **23:6**) makes wrongful haste to get wealthy, without knowing that poverty rather than money will come to him.

Paul Koptak: In God's economy, **hoarding** and **acquisitiveness** put riches in bags that are full of holes (**Hag. 1:6**), but that irony does not occur to this person who "*is unaware*" (lit., "*does not know*"; cf. **Prov. 7:23; 9:18**). Once again, a proverb makes clear that acquiring wealth just to hold onto it makes a poor goal for a life. What is condemned is not work or wealth but making them the center of one's life and everything else peripheral.

IV. (:23-27) INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

A. (:23) Gaining Friendship via Frank Rebuke

"*He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor*
Than he who flatters with the tongue."

Richard Clifford: The paradox is that frank and truthful speech wins more favor than flattery. People learn best through honest dialogue that includes the possibility of reproof and correction. Reproof leads to wisdom that wins favor.

Paul Koptak: The reversal of this saying is like the one just before; what one hopes to get eludes the grasp, whether it be riches or favor. Rebuke in teaching and personal feedback may be costly to those who give it and painful to those who receive it (cf. **9:7–9; 27:5–6**), but it pays back in time ("*at the end*"). However, flattery (cf. **6:24; 26:28**) earns little real favor, although it is not clear whether the flattery is given with that end in mind or to gain some other unscrupulous advantage. In any case, the reversal shows that it is the honest tongue that earns favor, not a "*smooth*" one.

Tremper Longman: Although it is true that initially people are likely to get a bad reaction from those whose faults they are highlighting, this proverb indicates that favor, gratitude for the advice, will come not immediately but "*afterward*." Proverbs is interested in cutting through pretense and getting to the truth of a matter. This proverb motivates honest assessment of others.

George Mylne: Flattery may gain us a transient flow of kindness, and faithful reproof may excite a temporary disgust. For the unbridled self-love of men makes them unwilling to hear any negative reflection on their own conduct, and disposes them to swallow down their own praise, without examining whether it is just or not. But the force of truth and reason will in time appear, and flattery will render the person who presented it odious, when the bad effects of it are found by bitter experience.

On the other side, the faithful reprover is still esteemed, and in time it will be found that his faithfulness will procure him a greater measure of that good-will and friendship which he seemed to forfeit.

If we wish to enjoy a permanent interest in any man's love, we should make it our first point to secure his esteem by deserving it. But, that we may experience the truth of this proverb, we ought to administer needful reproofs in a friendly manner. For if we behave like enemies in doing the office of a friend we must not think it strange if we are taken for enemies.

B. (:24) Dishonoring Parents

"*He who robs his father or his mother,*
And says, 'It is not a transgression,'
Is the companion of a man who destroys."

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 24** targets those who wrongly treat their parents by robbing them but claiming to be innocent (see **19:26; 20:20; 30:11, 17; Mark 7:10–13; 1 Tim. 5:4, 8)**. What is in view here is taking some of the family property and regarding it as their own, thus showing disrespect for their parents, with attitudes of greed and selfishness. All of this is destructive for the community by undermining one of its key institutions.

Paul Koptak: The robbery is not specified, but one can imagine scenarios of mooching or usurping property. To do such a thing and say (lit.) "*no transgression*" (*ʾen paša*ʿ; cf. **29:16, 22**) not only adds insult to injury, it betrays a **seared conscience** (cf. **30:20**). Parents who have given of their means and very selves to their children deserve care when it is their turn in their later years. There is a lesson here about returning thanks and service to those who have given much.

Allen Ross: Whoever robs his parents, no matter how he seeks to justify the act, is a **destroyer**. The point of *gôzēl ʾābîw* ("*he who robs his father*") seems to be that of prematurely trying to gain control of the family property through some form of pressure and in the process reduce the parents' possessions and standing in the community. He can say, "*It's not wrong*" (*ʾên-pāšaʿ*), because he can reason that it someday will be his anyway. The proverb classifies this type of greedy person as a companion to one "*who destroys*" (*mašḥît*).

Caleb Nelson: You also need to honor your father and mother — indeed, all superiors in place, age, or gifts. To steal from your parents is the opposite of honoring them. To take their stuff and act like it's your stuff is a sin against God.

C. (:25) Stirring Up Strife

"*An arrogant man stirs up strife,*
But he who trusts in the LORD will prosper."

Richard Clifford: The paradox is that a wide open throat, by metonymy an unbridled appetite, brings strife, whereas its opposite, calm trust in God's care, attains the very thing that the throat desires -- **satisfaction of appetite**. Elsewhere in Proverbs, anger stirs up quarrels (e.g., **15:18** and **29:22**).

Paul Koptak: Greed brings "*dissension*" (root *grh*; cf. **28:4**; also **15:18; 29:22**), trust brings prosperity.

Allen Ross: **One's object of faith determines the direction of one's life**. The antithetical parallelism pits the "*greedy man*" (*reḥab-nepeš*, "*large appetite*"; lit., "*wide of soul*") against the one "*who trusts*" (*bôṭēaḥ*) the Lord. The first one is completely selfish and usually ruthless. His attitudes and actions stir up strife because people do not long tolerate him. He pushes so hard for the things he wants that his zeal becomes a hindrance to obtaining them. Conversely, the true believer, who is blessed by God, "*will prosper*" (lit., "*will be made fat*," i.e., abundantly prosperous).

D. (:26) Self-Centered Independence

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

Richard Clifford: "*To trust in one's heart*" in colon A is not (as the English might suggest) to rely on one's intuition but on one's (unaided) judgment, for *"heart*" is the

organ of judgment. Such **self-centeredness** is dangerous. Genuine wisdom comes as a gift "*from above*," that is, from God and mediated by tradition (including parents and teachers). **To be virtuous is not to be autonomous but to be obedient and receptive**.

Paul Koptak: The punch of this saying comes from what is left out of the syllogism. Those who trust in themselves (lit., "*in his own heart*"; cf. **3:5**) are by definition "*fools*," headed for a destruction with no escape (cf. **28:18**). To trust in one's own heart is to believe that one's own thoughts and intentions are sufficient guides to life, that they will lead us to what is good for ourselves. The sages knew better. Although it seems logical that we know our needs and can look out for our own best interests, nothing is further from the truth. It is not specified whether the destruction is self-inflicted, imposed by Yahweh, or both.

Tremper Longman: The proverbs typically leave general the danger from which the wise are rescued, but they would at least include things like relational entanglements and early death.

Allen Ross: Security comes from a life of wisdom and not from self-sufficiency. . . As it stands, v.26 in the Hebrew is set in antithetical parallelism, contrasting the one who trusts in himself (*bôṭēaḥ belibbô*) with the one who "*walks in wisdom*." Toy says that trusting in one's own heart means following the untrained suggestions of the mind or relying on one's own mental resources. If he is correct, the idea forms a fitting contrast to walking in wisdom, i.e., the wisdom from above that this book has been teaching.

Matthew Henry: The character of a fool: He trusts to his own heart, to his own wisdom and counsels, his own strength and sufficiency, his own merit and righteousness, and the good opinion he has of himself; he that does so is a fool, for he trusts to that, not only which is deceitful above all things (**Jer. 17:9**), but which has often deceived him. This implies that it is the character of a wise man (as before, **v. 25**) to put his trust in the Lord, and in his power and promise, and to follow his guidance, **Prov. 3:5, 6**.

E. (:27) Compassion to the Poor

"*He who gives to the poor will never want,*
But he who shuts his eyes will have many curses."

Richard Clifford: What is given to the poor comes back in blessing. What is kept from them gives one no benefit.

Paul Koptak: If the greedy one defrauds, hoards, and comes to poverty (see **28:22, 25**), one who gives to and cares for the needy suffers no want. The key is to be able to see need, but many prove unwilling to try, shutting their eyes. Here is no blessing (**28:20**) but curse (cf. **3:33; Deut. 28:20–27**), perhaps a way of stating that one will be poor of health, status, and provisions.

Tremper Longman: Proverbs consistently teaches that those with means must be generous toward the poor. This proverb motivates such generosity with the promise

that the giver will lack nothing. This would imply that God would take care of such a person and would undercut the primary fear behind not giving. Not to give is a form of control and a human attempt to grasp at security. To give requires the giver to trust more. Those who don't give, according to the second colon, will only increase their troubles.

(:28) CLOSING REFRAIN

"*When the wicked rise, men hide themselves;*
But when they perish, the righteous increase."

Tremper Longman: This proverb, among many others, points out that wisdom benefits not just the individual but also the community.

Lindsay Wilson: When the wicked rise to positions of power, ordinary people in the community steer clear of them, withdrawing from public involvement. However, when the wicked perish, the righteous will grow ('*thrive*', niv). There will then be opportunity to prosper and to build up the community without having to fight with those in power.

Richard Clifford: Wicked rulers mean the disappearance of people in community, probably in the sense of people being afraid of appearing in public and enjoying others' company. It is the end of a flourishing and happy community (Meinhold). When the wicked rulers disappear, presumably as a result of their wickedness (see **10:25**), the righteous increase -- again the contrast between disappearance and appearance. The rule of the wicked destroys social life. **Verse 12** is similar in sentiment.

Paul Koptak: Certainly other issues come under the umbrella of righteousness and wickedness, but for these proverbs, the central issue is that greed and grasping exemplify wickedness, and when it is characteristic of political leadership, the results are devastating. Wickedness or righteousness alike can thrive and wane, but the final outcome is that the wicked will "*perish*" (**28:28**). While the responsibility for these outcomes clearly belongs to Yahweh, people and their leaders are both responsible for establishing the environment in which righteousness gets the upper hand. This chapter is a challenge to develop wisdom's character, both as individuals and as a people.

TEXT: Proverbs 29:1-16

TITLE: SIN NEGATIVELY IMPACTS BOTH THE FAMILY AND SOCIETY

Paul Koptak: While **chapter 29** does not fall into an obvious outline, the repetition of "*thrive*" (root *rbh*, "*increase*") in **29:2** and **16** and the recurrence of "*wise/wisdom*" in between (**29:3, 8, 9, 11, 15**) ties the first half together.

(:1) TRANSITIONAL WARNING – CONSEQUENCES OF REJECTING REPEATED REPROOFS

"*A man who hardens his neck after much reproof*
Will suddenly be broken beyond remedy."

Paul Koptak: The ox that would not bend its neck for a yoke became a symbol for **recalcitrant Israel** (**Ex. 32:9; Deut. 9:6; 2 Kings 17:14; Isa. 48:4**). We would expect "*stiff-necked*" (lit., "*make the neck hard*") to be in contrast with "*broken*," but like a clay jar that shatters (*šaber*), such a person is "*destroyed*," broken beyond repair. A rebuke is a wound (**Prov. 27:5–8**), but it is given to prevent something much worse. Those who refuse this means of prevention will be denied any means of restoration (cf. **6:15b**, which repeats the second line of this verse).

Lindsay Wilson: Proverbs suggests that the way we respond to being rebuked or corrected reveals whether we are a person of wisdom or folly (e.g. **9:8**, using the verb related to the noun here). Here '*a man of rebuke*', a Hebrew way of describing one who has often been corrected, shows his folly in that he responds by hardening his neck, a phrase used in **Exodus 32-34** for those who refuse to be shaped by God (**Exod. 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9**). The consequence of resisting this reproof is that we will be broken or fractured (to continue the imagery of bones) in such a way that there will be no healing or fixing. This verse fits outside the four subsections of **chapters 28-29**, and so functions as a key warning: do not refuse the shaping of wisdom, for the consequences of doing so are disastrous. Waltke (2005: 429) proposes that this verse is deliberately placed in the structural centre of **Proverbs 28-29** in order to emphasize the danger of resisting the reproof of these chapters.

Tremper Longman: The proverb addresses the danger of not listening to those who constructively criticize. Those who are repeatedly warned about behavior that has potentially dangerous consequences but do no listen (are stiff-necked) will find all of a sudden that the consequences have caught up with them, and they will have moved beyond the point where an easy fix is possible. The purpose of the proverb is not just to explain why some people reach a bad end but also to encourage the wise not to reject criticism.

George Mylne: Asa, king of Judah, was a godly man and yet when he was reproved by a prophet, he stormed instead of repenting. This piece of history shows us that we must

not despair of reforming those who depart from the path of duty, although they are not reclaimed by the first admonition. Perhaps they may relent at the second or third admonition, and then we are richly recompensed for our trouble. But **woe to that man who is stubborn and obstinate after many reproofs**. He despises a merciful appointment of God for his recovery, and tramples upon precious pearls. He refuses to bow before the Lord and he shall be dashed in pieces like a potter's vessel! He perhaps designs to reform at some other time but he is hardened in sin, and puts off his intended repentance until judgment comes upon him unexpectedly, and he is ruined forever! The reproofs which he received will then be like hot thunderbolts to him, and the remembrance of them will feed the worm that never dies.

Matthew Henry: The issue of this obstinacy is to be greatly dreaded: Those that go on in sin, in spite of admonition, shall be destroyed; those that will not be reformed must expect to be ruined; if the rods answer not the end, expect the axes. They shall be suddenly destroyed, in the midst of their security, and without remedy; they have sinned against the preventing remedy, and therefore let them not expect any recovering remedy. Hell is remediless destruction. They shall be destroyed, and no healing, so the word is. If God wounds, who can heal?

I. (:2-3) IMPACT OF MORALITY ON THE INSTITUTIONS OF SOCIETY

A. (:2) Morality of the Leader Impacts the Nation

"*When the righteous increase, the people rejoice,*
But when a wicked man rules, people groan."

Richard Clifford: People's response to a righteous or a wicked ruler is expressed in sound—shouts of joy or groans of pain.

Paul Koptak: Clearly, one bad ruler can do great harm and cause many to groan. Wisdom and folly are never experienced in isolation, but their effects are especially pronounced when practiced by someone in authority.

B. (:3) Morality of Children Impact Their Parents

"*A man who loves wisdom makes his father glad,*
But he who keeps company with harlots wastes his wealth."

Tremper Longman: Here the trouble caused by sleeping with prostitutes is financial. That does not mean that this is the only problem with associating with prostitutes; after all, proverbs are not nuanced or exhaustive statements. And it is true that prostitutes are expensive women.

Allen Ross: Wisdom ensures joy and prosperity for the family. Here again the lines are antithetical: in contrast to the wise person, who brings "joy" to his father, is the son who brings grief by squandering his wealth on "*prostitutes*" (*zônôt*). Whybray, 168, notes that since wealth was a sign of God's blessing, it was essential for an honorable standing in the community; to waste it was a shameful betrayal of the family. Moreover,

it would break a father's heart to see his son become a pauper through vice (McKane, 653). For the **financial consequences of vice**, see **chs. 1–9** (esp. **5:10; 6:31**).

II. (:4-7) IMPACT OF JUSTICE ON THE INSTITUTIONS OF SOCIETY

A. (:4) Impact of a Just Ruler on the Stability of Society

"*The king gives stability to the land by justice,*
But a man who takes bribes overthrows it."

Paul Koptak: The phrase reads a "*man of that which is lifted up*" (*terumot*, NIV "*bribes*"), an allusion to sacrifices of worship (**Ex. 25:2–3**). It is used here as a metaphor for rulers who help themselves to the "*offering*"—perhaps through taxes or by fraud (TNK). "*Justice*" (root *špṭ*; cf. **Prov. 29:14, 26**) is the highest responsibility of the king.

Allen Ross: The idea of "*bribes*" is not the point; this king breaks the backs of the people with **demands for monetary gifts** (see **1Sa 8:11–18**), thus causing divisions and strife.

George Mylne: But the fountains of justice are poisoned, and the pillars of it subverted by a prince that is too fond of money. He perverts law into oppression, and makes his subjects unhappy. He destroys the foundations of his own throne, and plunges himself and his people into inexpressible miseries. He brings down the judgments of God upon a land, and is himself one of the greatest judgments that an angry God can inflict upon a nation.

Matthew Henry:
1. The happiness of a people under a good government. The care and business of a prince should be to establish the land, to maintain its fundamental laws, to settle the minds of his subjects and make them easy, to secure their liberties and properties from hostilities and for posterity, and to set in order the things that are wanting; this he must do by judgment, by wise counsels, and by the steady administration of justice, without respect of persons, which will have these good effects.

2. The misery of a people under a bad government: A man of oblations (so it is in the margin) overthrows the land; a man that is either sacrilegious or superstitious, or that invades the priest's office, as Saul and Uzziah—or a man that aims at nothing but getting money, and will, for a good bribe, connive at the most guilty, and, in hope of one, persecute the innocent—such governors as these will ruin a country.

B. (:5) Treachery of Flattery

"*A man who flatters his neighbor*
Is spreading a net for his steps."

Richard Clifford: This saying states the lethal effect of seductive words through a striking image: to address seductive words to another's face is to cast a net at the

person's feet.

Tremper Longman: Flattery is different from encouragement because the latter is based on the truth. As the proverb indicates, flattery hypes people but does not help them; rather, it harms them. The harm is communicated here by the image of the net that is spread out. Just as a net is set out in secret and camouflaged from the prey, so flattery sets up people for a fall. . . the flatterer is buttering up the recipients in order to gain an advantage over them or a favor from them.

Allen Ross: This *flattering* (*maḥalîq*) works by deception and guile, for the word literally means "*deals smoothly*." McKane, 636, says, "The sycophant is not to be trusted, for words which are too smooth and too obviously designed to gratify are a form of premeditated malice and a cloak for evil conduct."

Charles Bridges: The doctrine of man's goodness, strength, or freedom; innocent infirmities; venial offenses; softening down the statements of man's total corruption; a general gospel without application; its promises and privileges without the balance of its trials and obligations – all this is frightful flattery. Unwary souls are misled.

George Mylne: But although the flatterer has no other design but to selfishly insinuate himself into the friendship of the person whom he caresses he may be justly said to spread a net for his feet, by betraying him into the hands of his worst enemy.

We all flatter ourselves; and our self-flattery makes the praises of other flatterers welcome, and these gratify and feed our pride, so that we are in double danger of falling into the condemnation of the devil. If flattery is a net then we ought to be on our guard against it, and to keep a suspicious eye upon those who praise us to our faces.

Birds are silly animals, and there is no wonder that they allow themselves to be caught in the snare of the fowler; and yet when they find themselves fast in the snare, they flutter, and use every possible effort to escape. Men are like silly birds when they are caught in this net and they are sillier than birds, when, after all, they make the flatterer welcome to their houses, and his fair words welcome to their ears!

C. (:6) Snare of Sin and Its Downward Spiral

"*By transgression an evil man is ensnared,*
But the righteous sings and rejoices."

Tremper Longman: Sin complicates life, setting traps for the sinner. On the other hand, righteous behavior leads to rejoicing. The Christian takes the long view on retribution. Although in the short run the righteous may suffer for their righteousness, the future brings rejoicing.

George Mylne: Wicked men are ensnared, either when they are seduced to sin, or when they are involved in miseries from which they cannot deliver themselves and in both these senses, they find a snare in their transgression. One act of sin makes way for

another act, and the second for a third. The repetition of many sinful acts produces a settled habit, which gains an irresistible power over the soul, so that the sinner who meant to repent after he had indulged himself for a time in the pleasures of sin, finds himself quite indisposed to put his resolutions in practice, and walks on in his trespasses until destruction comes upon him without remedy! Besides this, one kind of sin prepares the way for another that is worse, because the natural effect of sin is to stupefy the understanding, and harden the heart. He who has entered into the way of the ungodly, proceeds, in the next place, to stand in the counsel of the wicked, and then sits down in the seat of the scorner.

D. (:7) Concern for Justice for the Poor

"*The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor,*
The wicked does not understand such concern."

Charles Bridges: Selfishness, however, not truth, justice, or mercy, is the standard of the wicked. But fearful is it to sit in the place of God as his representative, only to pervert his judgment for selfish aggrandizement. For "he who rejects the complaint of the poor and beats them off with big words and terror in his looks, either out of the hardness of his heart or the love of ease, when he might have leisure to give them audience if he were so minded and to take notice of their grievances cannot justly excuse himself by pleading, 'Behold, we knew it not'" (Bishop Sanderson).

III. (:8-11) CHARACTER SKETCHES OF UNRIGHTEOUS CONDUCT AND THE RIGHTEOUS CONTRAST

Paul Koptak: A series of **character sketches** in **verses 8–10** is marked by the Hebrew word for "*man*" at the start of each verse (*ʾiš*; plural, *ʾanše*), pitting the "*mockers*" and "*bloodthirsty men*" against a single "*wise man*."

A. (:8) Mockers Inflame Society

"*Scorners set a city aflame,*
But wise men turn away anger."

Tremper Longman: **Mockers are radical fools**. They not only lack wisdom; they also ridicule those who do. When they have influence over a city, whether officially or by their own assertions, they rock it in negative ways. They are those who would take a bad situation and intensify it into a riot. On the other hand, the wise are coolheaded. In a bad situation, they would calm tempers for the good of the community.

Allen Ross: The wise maintain peace and harmony in society. This contrast tells how the wise "*turn away anger*" rather than "*stir up*" strife. The "*men of scoffing*" or "*mockers*" are "men who laugh at moral obligations and stir up the baser passions of their fellow citizens (**Isa. 28:14**)" (Toy, 508–9). The idea of "*stir up*" is from the Hebrew *yāpîḥû* ("*blow*," as in "*blow up a flame*," i.e., kindle a fire; see also its use in **6:19; 12:17**, where it suggests to "*puff out*" words). Such scoffers make dangerous

situations worse, whereas the wise calm things down and ensure peace in the community.

Charles Bridges: The man who scorns being bound by common restraint will stir up a city by his presumption or set it on fire by bringing the fire of divine anger upon it. Happily, wise men are scattered through the land, and their energy and prudence turns away divine wrath. "Proud and foolish men kindle the fire that wise and good men must extinguish" (Henry).

B. (:9) Foolish Men Respond Emotionally in Disputes

"*When a wise man has a controversy with a foolish man,*
The foolish man either rages or laughs, and there is no rest."

George Mylne: Those who keep the law contend with the wicked; and prudence must direct us in what manner we should contend with them. Men have very different dispositions; some must be addressed with severe and sharp reproofs, that they may feel the iniquity of their conduct. But others are to be addressed in the language of mildness and gentleness, and will be won to goodness, although they could not be driven to it. We find that the prophets sometimes thundered, and sometimes wept, and sometimes allured men by the language of love, to repentance. God, who is well acquainted with all the springs of conduct in human nature, taught them to deal with men in these various ways but experience proved how generally this proverb agreed with the temper of foolish men. For the prophets seldom had much success in their exhortations, though diversified with all that wisdom and prudence in which God abounded towards men. The forerunner of our Lord, who was greater than the former prophets, lamented unto the people of his generation and yet they did not mourn. Our Lord himself preached unto them, and the people wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. But they only wondered and did not generally repent.

Let us endeavor to turn the wicked to the wisdom of the just by all the prudent methods competent to our station. If we do not succeed in our charitable endeavors, our reward is with the Lord and obstinate sinners must give an account to the Judge of the living and the dead.

C. (:10) Bloodthirsty Men Threaten Men of Integrity

"*Men of bloodshed hate the blameless,*
But the upright are concerned for his life."

Richard Clifford: Murderous people hate a blameless person but the upright seek his life in a positive sense. "*To seek the life of*" is here turned on its head.

Allen Ross: Bloodthirsty men loathe the integrity of the upright. Because the wicked despise all sense of decency or "*integrity*" (*tām*), they seek to destroy it. The second line forms a contrast; literally it reads, "*as for the upright, they seek his life* [*napšó*]." "*Seeking a life*" was usually a hostile act, but here the contrast requires the idea of "*seek to preserve a life*" (interpreted differently by the NIV). McKane, 637, is satisfied that

here "*seek*" means to seek the welfare of someone; thus it means that the upright "*have regard for*" men of integrity.

D. (:11) Hot-tempered Fools Show No Restraint

"*A fool always loses his temper,*
But a wise man holds it back."

Tremper Longman: Fools may not listen well, but they certainly talk a lot. Their talk gets them into trouble and also agitates others. They are not emotionally intelligent, and their talk will often inappropriately express emotions that will only inflame a situation.

On the other hand, the wise, who are coolheaded, speak only when necessary and helpful. They also can cleanup the mess started by the speech of fools.

George Mylne: The wise man is sensible that it is as much his duty to practice the wisdom of the serpent, as the harmlessness of the dove. He will take care what he says, when he finds himself or sees others under the influence of passion, and will abstain from talking with which he can do no good.

Matthew Henry:
1. It is a piece of weakness to be very open: He is a fool who utters all his mind,—who tells every thing he knows, and has in his mouth instantly whatever he has in his thoughts, and can keep no counsel,—who, whatever is started in discourse, quickly shoots his bolt,—who, when he is provoked, will say any thing that comes uppermost, whoever is reflected upon by it,—who, when he is to speak of any business, will say all he thinks, and yet never thinks he says enough, whether choice or refuse, corn or chaff, pertinent or impertinent, you shall have it all.

2. It is a piece of wisdom to be upon the reserve: A wise man will not utter all his mind at once, but will take time for a second thought, or reserve the present thought for a fitter time, when it will be more pertinent and likely to answer his intention; he will not deliver himself in a continued speech, or starched discourse, but with pauses, that he may hear what is to be objected and answer it.

IV. (:12-14) CHARACTER OF LEADERSHIP IMPACTS THE KINGDOM

Lindsay Wilson: These verses are clearly addressed to **those aspiring to rule**. The ruler is mentioned in **verse 12**, the king in **verse 14**, and **verse 13** refers to one who has the power to oppress others. There is great power in modelling. This is especially evident in **verse 12**, where the negative example of a king's behaviour (listening to false matters/words) results in all the lower officials becoming wicked. They put into practice what they see in the actions of those in authority. **With power comes responsibility**.

A. (:12) Cancer of Corruption in Leadership

"*If a ruler pays attention to falsehood,*
All his ministers become wicked."

B. (:13) Common Life and Grace to All Classes of Society

"*The poor man and the oppressor have this in common:*
The LORD gives light to the eyes of both."

C. (:14) Concern for Justice for the Poor Prospers a Kingdom

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

Paul Koptak: This saying links with the one before on the theme of the poor; set in contrast to the person who oppresses them is the king who judges with fairness (or "*faithfulness*," *ʾemet*). Kidner catches the sense well: "The test of a man in power, and his hidden strength, is the extent to which he keeps faith with those who can put least pressure on him." Association with Yahweh who judges the poor faithfully is strong, as is the theme of stability (**29:4**; cf. **20:28; Ps. 72:4–7, 12–14**).

Tremper Longman: This proverb bolsters the teaching that the righteous wise are characterized by compassion for the poor. This is particularly the case for the king, who is charged by Yahweh to care for all the socially vulnerable. Those in power are not to exploit those who are weak, but rather to take care of them. Here the king who does so is encouraged by the possibility of a strong reign.

Allen Ross: The duration of an administration depends on its moral character. This verse shows the importance of guaranteeing that fair and just treatment is given to all (judging with "*fairness*" [*ʾemet*, lit., "*truth*"]), especially the poor. To fail to do so is immoral (see **16:12; 20:28; 25:5; 31:5**).

V. (:15) STRONG DISCIPLINE NURTURES WISDOM IN CHILDREN

"*The rod and reproof give wisdom,*
But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother."

Lindsay Wilson: This subsection ends where it began in **verse 3** with a family setting. The value of parental discipline and correction is again affirmed (**13:1; 15:5; 22:6; 23:13–14**), with a reminder that leaving children to their own devices is not the path to freedom but to folly and shame. The apparent kindness of indulging children makes it more difficult for them to grow into the people God wants them to be. The language of shame reminds us that the OT culture was a community one where people were expected to promote honour and to avoid bringing shame on their family or community.

Matthew Henry: Parents, in educating their children, must consider,
1. The benefit of due correction. They must not only tell their children what is good and evil, but they must chide them, and correct them too, if need be, when they either

neglect that which is good or do that which is evil. If a reproof will serve without the rod, it is well, but the rod must never be used without a rational and grave reproof; and then, though it may be a present uneasiness both to the father and to the child, yet it will give wisdom. *Vexatio dat intellectum*—Vexation sharpens the intellect. The child will take warning, and so will get wisdom.

2. The mischief of undue indulgence: A child that is not restrained or reproved, but is left to himself, as Adonijah was, to follow his own inclinations, may do well if he will, but, if he take to ill courses, nobody will hinder him; it is a thousand to one but he proves a disgrace to his family, and brings his mother, who fondled him and humoured him in his licentiousness, to shame, to poverty, to reproach, and perhaps will himself be abusive to her and give her ill language.

(:16) TRANSITIONAL REFRAIN – WICKEDNESS TENDS TO MULTIPLY BUT THE RIGHTEOUS ULTIMATELY PREVAIL

"*When the wicked increase, transgression increases;*
But the righteous will see their fall."

Charles Bridges: The faithful Christian minister, conscious of his inability to stem the ever-flowing torrent of iniquity, would sink in despair but for the assured confidence that he is on the conquering side, that his cause, being the cause of his Lord, must eventually prevail.

TEXT: Proverbs 29:17-27

TITLE: TRAINING REGIMENS, BEHAVIORS TO AVOID AND FOCUSING ON GOD

I. (:17-19) BENEFITS AND DIFFICULTIES OF TRAINING REGIMENS

A. (:17) Benefits of Parental Discipline

"*Correct your son, and he will give you comfort;*
He will also delight your soul."

Paul Koptak: this hopeful proverb stresses the positive aspect of "*discipline*"; if a son left to himself brings shame, the son who receives "*discipline*" ("*instruction*," root *ysr*; cf. **29:19; 19:18; 22:6; 31:1**) gives peace and delight. Again, what is given is returned in kind.

Richard Clifford: To discipline a child is to offer guidance, reproving when necessary, but always in a context of love and of confidence in the child. A good example of loving discipline is **23:15-16**. This saying is about the **goal of the process** – the formation of a loving and responsible adult. The outlook is very pragmatic; it is in the self-interest of a parent to educate a child well, for wise offspring will care for their elderly parents.

Allen Ross: A disciplined child brings contentment to parents.

B. (:18) Benefits of Revelatory Vision Coupled with Obedience

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

Richard Clifford: The basic contrast in the saying is between nation and individual. A people may be demoralized from poor leadership, but an individual can still find happiness by heeding inspired wisdom.

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 18** extrapolates from family upbringing to the society as a whole. The community of God's people is meant to be shaped by (prophetic) vision, and by 'i*nstruction*'/law. *Vision* (*ḥāzôn*) is often associated with prophets (e.g**. 1 Sam. 3:1**), and can be used to describe an entire book of prophetic words (**Isa. 1:1**). Thus it can mean *revelation* (so niv) or, perhaps in a wisdom context, **authoritative words designed to shape us**. Van Leeuwen (1997: 244) suggests it might refer to **political guidance**, as in **11:14**. The parallel term in **verse 18b** is *tôrâ*, which commonly means '*law*', but in Proverbs can mean the '*instruction*' given by the sages or parents (**1:8**). So **verse 18** at least refers to being transformed by authoritative words and instruction, but may also allude to the prophetic word and the law. In any event, those who accept this shaping are described as *blessed* (= '*happy in God's sight'*, **Ps. 1:1**), while those who reject this teaching have cast off restraint (lit. '*let themselves loose, go out of control'*).

Tremper Longman: The meaning of the colon seems to warn that those who don't have a goal and/or a plan for the future have nothing to guide them onward, so they go every which way. The "*vision*" restrains them because it suggests a strategy to achieve that goal.

Allen Ross: The TEV has "*guidance*"; the NIV has "*revelation*." It should be stated, however, that the prophetic ministry usually came in response to periods of calamity to call the people back to God, so that *ḥāzôn* meaning **revelatory vision** should be retained. If there is no revelation from God, people can expect spiritual and political anarchy (Alden, 202). The meaning "*cast off restraint*" is assumed for *yippāraʿ* based on **Exodus 32:25**. In contrast to the first line, the second provides the positive wording: there is a blessing for those who keep the law.

C. (:19) Difficulties of Training Servants

"*A slave will not be instructed by words alone;*
For though he understands, there will be no response."

Tremper Longman: Here we see that "*servants*" were thought by the wise to be particularly difficult to train. Words alone won't do it. It is not that they are not intelligent enough to understand intellectually what they are being told. The second colon affirms that they do understand but that **there is no response**. This likely indicates a **lack of desire** to carry out the command of the master. It appears that they need something more to motivate them.

George Mylne: The proverb teaches us that masters ought to keep up their authority in their families. Without this everything must be in a state of confusion, and go to ruin. If they have servant that will not yield obedience, they must either be compelled to do it, or dismissed from the house.

But it teaches us likewise, that methods of severity are not to be used by heads of families, when milder means are sufficient to answer the end. It is only when servants, though they understand the wishes of their masters, will not answer by respectful words and due obedience, that masters are warranted to use harsh methods of dealing with them.

II. (:20-24) CHARACTER SKETCHES OF 5 BEHAVIORS TO AVOID

A. (:20) The Hasty Speaker

"*Do you see a man who is hasty in his words?*
There is more hope for a fool than for him."

Paul Koptak: Certainly speaking without thinking is in view (**10:19; 19:2**), but in this context, the repetition of *ḥzh* (see, "*revelation*," **29:18**) suggests that hasty speech ignores the constraints of the "*law*" (torah) as well as the practices of discernment that see and learn (**22:29; 24:32**).

Richard Clifford: One becomes a moral agent in Proverbs by taking in data through the eyes and ears, memorizing and reflecting on it in the heart, and then speaking and acting "*from the heart*" (= mind). Haste impairs this sequence of perception, reflection, and response.

Charles Bridges: We have just been warned against sullen silence. This next warning is directed against hasty words. When a person flows on in his words, evidently without time for consideration, when he gives his opinion as if there were no time to take counsel or to take notice of the judgment of others, this is the fool speaking. It is very difficult to deal effectively with him. Until the stronghold of his own conceit is shaken, argument and instruction are lost on him.

B. (:21) The Slave Pamperer

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

Paul Koptak: The proverb implies that discipline provided early on will lead to a happier ending.

Tremper Longman: What is clear is that pampering a servant (thus, not heeding the warning of **29:19**) is a mistake and will lead to unfortunate consequences.

C. (:22) The Angry Man

"*An angry man stirs up strife,*
And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression."

Paul Koptak: As wrath goes uncontrolled, so does its damage. Perhaps some wordplay was intended by following "*grief*" (*manon*, **29:21**) with "*dissension*" (*madon*).

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 22** might also in part refer to the wrong use of words (those spoken in anger), but most likely refers to both actions and words displayed by people who are controlled by their anger or hot temper (lit. "*a person of anger*" and "*a lord/master of wrath*"). When people have little self-control, their angry outbursts and responses promote conflict and many transgressions (**15:18; 22:24-25**; cf. **19:11**). This focus on the whole person (not just one's words) is seen in the reference to underlying attitudes and issues of character in **verse 23**.

Allen Ross: Not only does such a one stir up "*dissention*" (*mādôn*), but in so doing he also causes sin in himself and in others (see also **14:17, 29; 15:18; 16:32; 22:24**).

George Mylne: Railing, and reviling, and backbiting, and evil speaking, and lies, and wars, and duels, and murders are only a few of the transgressions to which men have been a thousand times tempted by their unbridled anger. He who indulges anger, gives place to the devil. He puts that malignant spirit in possession of the throne of his heart, and commits to him the direction of his heart, and tongue, and hands. The wrath of man

never works the righteousness of God; it utterly disqualifies him for praying, or doing any other holy action but it works the will of the devil with both hands earnestly.

D. (:23) The Arrogant Man

"*A man's pride will bring him low,*
But a humble spirit will obtain honor."

Paul Koptak: The contrast between high and low is enhanced by the repetition of the root *špl* ("*low*") at the center of the proverb. The word "*pride*" is used elsewhere for swelling waves (**Ps. 46:4**) that will eventually fall. "*Honor*" (*kabod*; cf. **Prov. 3:35; 15:33; 18:12; 26:1, 8**) must come from another or someone else (**25:27; 27:1–2**); yet a "*lowly spirit*" does hold it fast (cf. **4:4; 5:22**). Better to be called up higher than put lower (cf. **25:6–7**).

Tremper Longman: Folly is natural; wisdom must be inculcated. To do so, people need to be open to criticism of their words and behavior. They hear and change. On the other hand, because of pride fools will resist criticism, even mocking those who try to help them in this way. The results are clear. The proud are doomed to repeat their mistakes and end up falling, while the humble will gain glory. The paradox of the teaching is that a "*high*" spirit will come crashing down, while a "*low*" spirit will be lifted up.

E. (:24) The Accomplice to Thieves

"*He who is a partner with a thief hates his own life;*
He hears the oath but tells nothing."

Paul Koptak: The second line can read "*he hears an imprecation and does not tell*," most likely an allusion to **Leviticus 5:1**: "*If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will be held responsible*." To hold back testimony when it is called for is a **crime of complicity**, one that injures the community and, because it angers Yahweh, oneself.

George Mylne: There are some who would be afraid to steal and yet they venture to partake with thieves in their crime, by receiving a part of what is stolen as the price of concealment, or by buying commodities which they have reason to suspect for stolen goods, because they can have them at a low price. The Scripture assures us, that men may bring such guilt upon themselves by partaking of other men's sins; and that he who is a partner with a thief, is a hater of his own life and soul, as well as the principal thief. The devil is not content with drawing men to single acts of sin but he makes one evil thing the preface to another.

The devil makes one transgression a snare for leading the sinner into another; and he who joins with a thief, is prepared for lying and perjury. In court he is put under oath and dare not testify and thus he adds to the guilt of stealing the greater guilt of falsehood and concealment, when he is upon his oath. Those who are under

examination upon oath, should consider this text. If they swear that they will tell everything they know about the affair before the judge, or if they are required, by proper authority, to bear witness about a crime which ought to be punished they are enemies to justice, and haters of their own souls, if they do not give a faithful and honest declaration of the truth. Men may partake of other men's sins, not only by countenancing them but by refusing to concur in proper endeavors to have them punished, for a warning to others.

III. (:25-26) FOCUS ON GOD RATHER THAN MAN

Lindsay Wilson: These two verses (:**25-26**) differ from the previous ones in that they both explicitly refer to the Lord, commending trust in the Lord and seeing him as the source of justice. Both also view looking for human approval as an alternative to looking to the Lord.

A. (:25) Fear God Not Man

"*The fear of man brings a snare,*
But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted."

Richard Clifford: A time will come when fear of others will override fear of Yahweh and the counsels of wisdom, leading one to sins that will come back on one's head. Trust in Yahweh, on the other hand, keeps one safe, for there is nothing more powerful than God. The verse has a double antithesis: anxious fear of human beings and trust in God; trap and protection.

B. (:26) Seek Justice from God Not the Ruler

"*Many seek the ruler's favor,*
But justice for man comes from the LORD."

Richard Clifford: The idiom "*to seek the face of*" means **to seek the favor** of someone more powerful than oneself. God is the object of the verb "*to seek*" except in this verse and **1 Kings 10:24** (= **2 Chron. 9:23**). Though people flock to human rulers, ultimate decisions are not in their hands but in God's. Human rulers do not have it in their power to rectify every situation. Only God can establish justice definitively.

Lindsay Wilson: The contrast in **verse 26** is between those who try to gain a favourable judgment from a human authority (ESV*, seek the face of a ruler*) and those who recognize that ultimately justice for human beings comes from the Lord.

(:27) EPILOGUE – 2 CONTRASTING WAYS OF LIFE

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

Paul Koptak: the two ways of life are totally incompatible.

Richard Clifford: Both cola of the final verse of the chapter begin with the final letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *taw*, matching **v. 1**, which began with the *'alep*, the first letter of the alphabet. . . The saying is an example of ethical dualism. . ."

Allen Ross: The righteous and the wicked detest the lifestyles of each other. The righteous detest the dishonest, and the wicked detest those who try to live uprightly.

TEXT: Proverbs 30:1-14

TITLE: THE ORACLE OF AGUR

Paul Koptak: The introduction to the "*sayings of Agur*" asks a series of four rhetorical questions, followed by one person's despair at finding wisdom and God. In a sense, the "*oracle*" is actually a prayer in two parts, first for knowledge of God and second for a life lived before him in wisdom. The importance of **proper speaking** runs throughout this section.

George Mylne: In this oracle, Agur expresses his humble sense of his own ignorance, and tells us what need we have of a divine teacher to explain the glories of God to us. He recommends the Word of God to us, and calls us to the exercise of that faith for which we have a foundation in the Word of God. He directs us by his own example how to pray. He warns us against several dangerous sins, and makes several instructive observations on the characters of men, and the nature and qualities of many of God's creatures.

I. (:1-6) INTRODUCTION – SELF DEPRECATION OF AGUR AND EXALTATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

Richard Clifford: The speech of Agur begins in **v. 1** and ends in **v. 5.** He confesses he is exhausted, a beast, subhuman, without heavenly wisdom, and unable to attain it because no human being can go to heaven and bring it down. The self-abasement of **vv. 1–3** is Semitic hyperbole, like **Ps. 73:21–22**. . . These are examples of "low anthropology," self-abasement as an expression of reverence.

A. (:1) Characterization of the Author

1. Identification = Agur

"*The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle.*"

Tremper Longman: We simply have no real idea of who this individual is. He is not mentioned in biblical or extrabiblical texts. We also do not know the identity of his father, Yaqeh. We are perhaps on a bit more solid ground with the phrase "*Massaite*," because this seems related to the name of a tribe in Arabia related to the Ishmaelites mentioned in **Gen. 25:14** and **1 Chron. 1:30**.

2. Mindset = Exhausted in Search of Wisdom

"*The man declares to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal:*"

Tremper Longman: Suggested translations of this difficult phrase:
1. *Prophecy of this man for Ithiel, for Ithiel and for Ucal* (traditional, NJB, NIV).
2. *I am not God; I am not God, that I should prevail* (NAB, Murphy).

3. *I am weary, O God, I am weary, O God, and I am exhausted* (NLT, NRSV, REB, Clifford, Longman).

Though it too has its criticisms, the third interpretation requires the least emendation and seems to fit into the context. . . The resultant translation fits in well with the rather depressing continuance of the speech.

Caleb Nelson: The translation here is very murky. Literally, it appears to say "*to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal*." But why would Ithiel be named twice if the word is supposed to be a proper name? It could also be the phrase "*I am weary*," as many modern translations render it. I believe that this is likely the correct translation: Agur testifies to the **weariness induced by the search for truth**.

Alternative View:
Charles Bridges: The two concluding chapters of this book are an appendix to the proverbs of Solomon. Nothing definite is known about the writers, and it is vain to speculate where God is silent. . .

Agur was doubtless one of the wise men found in many ages of the Old Testament church. His words were an oracle – that is, divine instruction. This teaching was given to Ithiel and to Ucal, but especially to Ithiel. These were probably two pupils of Agur. We know nothing further about them.

B. (:2-4) Self Deprecation

1. (:2-3) Devoid of Wisdom

"*Surely I am more stupid than any man,*
And I do not have the understanding of a man.
3 Neither have I learned wisdom,
Nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One."

Charles Bridges: The nearer our contemplation of God, the closer our communion with him, the deeper will be our self-abasement before him. Unless a man stoops, he can never enter the door. He must become a fool, that he may be wise. There is a fine ray of wisdom in that consciousness of ignorance that led Socrates to confess, "I only know one thing, that I know nothing." And when a person is humbled in his shame, then he can see the house of his God in its breadth and length (**Ezekiel 44:5**), enjoying clearer and panting still for clearer manifestations of the incomprehensible God.

Lindsay Wilson: He considers himself foolish, more like a brute beast than a person, and limited in his understanding (**v. 2**). In particular, he has not learned wisdom, a key goal of the book (**1:2**), nor does he have knowledge of the "*holy ones*".

Tremper Longman: I believe we are to understand the language of these two verses as hyperbolic. The truly wise know just how ignorant they are. Those who think they are wise do not think they have to put any further effort into the acquisition of insight.

Allen Ross: The "*Holy One*" in this section is in the plural (*qedōšîm*), as in **9:10**.

Matthew Henry: Before he makes confession of his faith he makes confession of his folly and the weakness and deficiency of reason, which make it so necessary that we be guided and governed by faith. Before he speaks concerning the Saviour he speaks of himself as needing a Saviour, and as nothing without him.

2. (:4) Rhetorical Questions Highlighting the Unique Supremacy of God

"*Who has ascended into heaven and descended?*
Who has gathered the wind in His fists?
Who has wrapped the waters in His garment?
Who has established all the ends of the earth?
What is His name or His son's name? Surely you know!"

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 4** indicates that his lack of knowledge is particularly about God's running of the world, in terms reminiscent of **Job 38** (e.g. "*surely you know*", **Job 38:5**). These are a series of impossible questions, with the implied answer: "Only God. He alone knows and has done all this."

Caleb Nelson: We have this saying: "**God only knows**." You have to say it just a certain way, with a puff of disgusted air, to indicate that no human being knows and you most certainly don't know. And brothers and sisters, that is the obvious answer to the questions of **v. 4**. As at the end of the book of Job, the questions are designed to highlight the reality that human beings could not possibly do any of the things mentioned. No one has ascended into Heaven and come down. No one can hold the wind, wrap the water, spin the earth — at least, in Agur's day, no human being had done so. God only knows who could do these things. No normal human being could! And of course, that is the point. You and I have not gone up to heaven and come down. We don't know what God knows, for He alone is the one who is in heaven yet spins the earth.

Most of us have accepted our human limitations. We think we can get along just fine without the ability to gather the wind in the hollows of our hands. But read in light of Agur's previous claims to be subhuman in his stupidity and ignorance, v. 4 takes on a sinister cast. If you don't know the Holy One, and failing to know Him makes you subhuman, and yet one can't know him because He's so exalted, what's the point? This admission of failing to know God would seem to also be an accusation leveled against the rest of us, who thought we were content with mere human knowledge of earthly things. Agur seems to suggest that in actual fact, to fail to know God is tantamount to failure to know anything worthwhile. If you don't know who has gone to Heaven and come back down, if you don't know who controls the winds and waters and spins the earth, then you don't know what a human being needs to know.

George Mylne: The God, whose name is beyond our comprehension, and whose Son's name is Wonderful, does all these things. Heaven is his throne, and the clouds are his chariots, and the earth has often felt his solemn presence. "God alone understands the

way to wisdom; he knows where it can be found, for he looks throughout the whole earth and sees everything under the heavens. He decided how hard the winds should blow and how much rain should fall. He made the laws for the rain and laid out a path for the lightning. With him is wisdom and strength; he has counsel and understanding!" And from him, the Father of lights, every ray of useful knowledge comes.

C. (:5-6) Exaltation of the Word of God

1. (:5) Value of God's Word

"*Every word of God is tested;*
He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him."

Richard Clifford: The reference to "*word*" in **Prov. 30:5** brings the movement full circle from Agur's opening statement of exhaustion and ignorance to the word of God. Agur dramatically states that only God can give him heavenly knowledge, and that knowledge is contained in reliable words from God.

Paul Koptak: The questions imply that God acts to create and maintain a world, but God also speaks (**30:5**). "*Every word of God is flawless*." "*Flawless*" or fire-tested (*ṣerupah*; cf. **27:1**) here does not mean hardened like steel but rather that the quality of the metal has been "*proved*," so that all dross is removed. That pure word shows that God is a "*shield*" to those who take refuge (**30:5**), the phrase a near verbatim citation of David's song of praise (**2 Sam. 22:31; Ps. 18:30**).

The next verse in David's song answers the question, "*For who is God besides the LORD? And who is the Rock except our God*?" (**2 Sam. 22:32; Ps. 18:31**). The theme of that song is **deliverance from his enemies**. So also in **Proverbs 2:1–7**, Yahweh, who gives wisdom, knowledge, and understanding from his mouth, is also a shield; thus, perhaps here is an encouragement to keep these promises in mind as an answer to Agur's despair.

Caleb Nelson: What does it mean **to take refuge in God**? It is a spiritual metaphor taken from the physical practice of hiding inside some kind of fortified building. David hid from Saul in a cave. Cities in the ancient world hid themselves behind walls that would keep would-be attackers out. The Christian, similarly, takes refuge in God. We do this not by going to a physical location and locking ourselves in, but by committing ourselves into the hand of God and His providence. We exercise faith in Him, trusting that He will care for us, provide for our needs, and protect us from our enemies so far as it serves His glory and our own good.

2. (:6) Sufficiency of God's Word

"*Do not add to His words*
Lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar."

Lindsay Wilson: His words are not to be swamped and distorted by adding other wors that lead away from truth and towards lies. Adding half-truths to what God has said

undermines the solid foundation that God's words provide for those who take refuge in him.

Charles Bridges: The Word of God is not only pure and unable to deceive. It is also **sufficient**, and therefore, like tried gold, it needs no addition for its perfection. Hence to add to his words, stamped as they are with his divine authority, will expose us to his tremendous rebuke and cover us with shame. The Jewish church virtually added their oral law and written traditions (**Mark 7:7-13**). The attempt in our own day to bring tradition to a near, if not to an equal, level with the sacred testimony is a fearful approach to this sinful presumption. A new rule of faith is thus introduced, adding to the divine rule and creating coordinate authority. Never indeed was it so important to clear from all question the momentous controversy of what is and what is not the Word of God.

II. (:7-9) PRAYER OF AGUR

A. (:7) Preface to Agur's Prayer

"*Two things I asked of Thee,*
Do not refuse me before I die:"

Richard Clifford: The prayer prays against **two great dangers to fidelity**: unjust conduct in the law court (*šāw*', "*falsehood*," can refer to false oaths sworn before Yahweh) and extremes of wealth or poverty that could lead to infidelity. It asks for only the necessities of life. The prayer expresses a dread of offending God and a desire to remove all incentives to evil behavior.

B. (:8-9) Two Prayer Requests

1. (:8a) Protection from Unjustice

"*Keep deception and lies far from me,*"

Charles Bridges: Is not this the atmosphere of the world? Falsehood is its character, lies its delusion, promising happiness, only to disappoint its weary and restless victims. Everything deadens the heart and eclipses the glory of the Savior. A soul that knows its dangers and its besetting temptations will live in the spirit of this prayer of the godly Agur.

George Mylne: **All kinds of sin** may be justly called vanities and lies, because all sin is empty and unprofitable, and imposes the most mischievous falsehoods upon men, promising them pleasure and gain and giving them nothing but disappointment and damnation. An impression of the unprofitableness and danger of sin would make us very earnest in our prayers for the removal of it from us. "O Lord, the Gentiles shall come unto you from the ends of the earth, and shall say: Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit."

The removal of sin includes in it both pardon and sanctification, and therefore the petition may include both the fifth and sixth petition of the Lord's prayer.

2. (:8b-9) Provision of Just the Necessities of Life

"*Give me neither poverty nor riches;*:
Feed me with the food that is my portion,
9 Lest I be full and deny Thee and say, 'Who is the LORD?'
Or lest I be in want and steal, And profane the name of my God."

Lindsay Wilson: Being satisfied to have only our bread for the day will lead to **contentment**, making us responsible and generous with any excess, and patient and trusting when we experience a shortfall. *Godliness with contentment* is great gain (**1 Tim. 6:6, 8-10**; some also see echoes in **Matt. 6:9-13**).

(:10) TRANSITION – DON'T OPPRESS YOUR SOCIAL INFERIORS

"*Do not slander a slave to his master,*
Lest he curse you and you be found guilty."

Lindsay Wilson: Behind this proverb is the idea found elsewhere that even the poor are valuable because God has made them (**14:31; 17:5; 22:2**), and the way we treat the poor matters to God (e.g. **19:17; 22:22-23**). Servants would have no means of defending themselves from a false accusation, and would be easily dismissed by a master (see **Gen. 39:6b-23**). A servant who was forced into poverty in such a way would easily meet a tragic end (hence the slanderer is held guilty) and could curse the wrongdoer. The fundamental mistake was to treat others – even if "*only a servant*" – as if they do not count. That is a failure of character.

Caleb Nelson: It's important to note that the verse is particularly talking about untrue accusations, though I think it applies with almost equal force to true ones. Don't exploit the power differential to get what you want! If you do, you're not humble. You're arrogant. Failure to honor your social inferiors by using your influence with their master or boss to get them disgraced is the kind of behavior that invites a curse on your head. And this is a curse that God will honor. He will hear their curse, which is a kind of prayer, and He will exact the consequences from you for your despicable behavior.

Do you honor your social inferiors? Are you afraid to use your power to harm those beneath you on the social scale? Or do you casually deploy that power whenever it suits you? Brothers and sisters, how you treat the flunky who's talking to you from a call center in India matters. How you interact with the cashier and the janitor matters. How you speak to and about your children and your employees matters. Arrogant fools will suffer their inferiors' curse if they don't pay attention to this, the first commandment of humility.

Charles Bridges: Cruel, therefore, would it be without good reason to heap degradation on a lowly fellow creature, for whom the Mosaic law prescribed kindness and protection (**Deuteronomy 23:15**).

III. (:11-14) CRITIQUE OF 4 FOOLISH BEHAVIORS

Richard Clifford: A literary unit is formed by **anaphora**, the repetition of words at the beginning of successive phrases or sentences. Each line begins with the Hebrew word *dôr*, "circle, generation, breed (so JPSV), sort, type." It is linked to the preceding verses by "*curse*" in **v. 10**. . .

The portrait of **vv. 11–14** moves outward from the home (parents) to the public arena (attack on the poor). It is a story of cruel persons, the sort who disdain their parents' advice, overprize their own state (**v. 12**), display arrogance (**v. 13**), and treat the lowly with viciousness.

Lindsay Wilson: The strong negative or mocking tone of each verse, and the cumulative effect of all four juxtaposed, make this a strong description of the wicked. We are meant to evaluate them in the light of the previous critiques of the ungodly and fools.

Charles Bridges: Adored indeed be the **grace of God** if we are not among these groups of people! However, let us remember that we used to be like them, but we have been washed from our filthiness. So it is most profitable to reflect from what we have been raised, and to whom we owe all that we have and are for God's service.

A. (:11) Disrespect for Parents

"*There is a kind of man who curses his father,*
And does not bless his mother."

Richard Clifford: Honoring parents is commanded in the Decalogue (**Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5.16**), and cursing them carries the death penalty (**Ex. 21:17; Deut. 27:16**) and draws a curse upon the curser (**Prov. 20:20**).

B. (:12) Self-Delusion / Self-Righteousness

"*There is a kind who is pure in his own eyes,*
Yet is not washed from his filthiness."

Allen Ross: There is a group of people who may observe all outer ritual but pay no attention to inner cleansing (see **Isa 1:16; Mt 23:27**). Such hypocrisy is harmful in every walk of life.

C. (:13) Arrogance

"*There is a kind-- oh how lofty are his eyes!*
And his eyelids are raised in arrogance."

Allen Ross: The eyes of the proud are "*high*" (*rāmû*; "*haughty*," NIV) and their eyelids "*disdainful*." These expressions refer to their **arrogant attitude**—the lofty view of themselves and the corresponding contempt for others (see also **6:17; Ps 131:1**).

D. (:14) Vicious Oppression of the Poor

"*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."

Paul Koptak: **Verse 14** is twice as long as the others, four lines illustrating **arrogance that oppresses**. These mouths not only speak evil, they eat unjustly. They devour the poor, a motif used often by the prophets but also by the psalmist, speaking of fools who devour the people like bread (**Ps. 14:1–4**).

Allen Ross: The imagery of the first half of the verse captures the rapacity of the power of this group of people—their teeth and their jaws are swords and knives. The second part explains that they devour, like a ravenous and insensitive beast, the poor and the needy (see **31:8–9**). Those who exploit and destroy other people are beasts.

TEXT: Proverbs 30:15-33

TITLE: FIVE GROUPS OF NUMERICAL SAYINGS

Paul Koptak: There are five numerical sayings in this section, all list "*four*" items. Four use a "three plus one" pattern. The numerical sayings are early examples of reflections on nature and society, distinct from the numerical lists in **chapter 6** and elsewhere. The sayings draw together observations on life and nature to illustrate various aspects of wisdom. The point of the comparison is not always easy to discern, and so each numerical saying works like a riddle. There is an alternating pattern between numerical sayings and **seemingly unrelated single sayings** (**30:15, 17, 20**).

I. (:15-16) 4 INSATIABLE ENTITIES

A. (:15a) Prologue -- Demanding Parasite

"*The leech has two daughters, 'Give,' 'Give.'*"

Richard Clifford: The leech is a bloodsucking worm (of the hirudinea class) that typically has a sucker at each end. The theme of **nonsatiety** links this verse to the next verse just as **v. 20** is linked to **vv. 18–19** by the theme of "*way*."

Paul Koptak: Coming on the heels of the "*generation*" sayings in **30:11–14**, the leech's twin daughters, "*Give! Give*!" (perhaps inspired by the two mouths, one at each end of the leech), are repulsive and sobering metaphors for a greedy generation.

Tremper Longman: The first numerical proverb in the series starts with a rather interesting monocolon before the proverb itself actually begins. It describes the two daughters of the leech.

- Why a leech? In the first place, the leech is something that sucks the blood of its host and does so until it appears overfull. The leech does not seem to become satisfied. Even today, we use the term "leech" to refer to people who attach themselves to others in order to drain them of their resources.
- Why daughters? Perhaps daughters, even more than sons, were known to be consumers, so the daughter of a leech would be particularly demanding.
- Why two daughters? The answer here might be found in the introduction to the numerical proverb, which will begin with three and go to four. Thus we see the "two" leech daughters, resulting in a two, three, four sequence.

Allen Ross: one point that could be made is that **greed**, symbolized by the leech, is as insatiable as these other things.

George Mylne: Agur had been speaking of the dreadful effects of the lust of **covetousness**, which still cries, "*Give, give*!" Some think that he intends, in the two following verses, to represent the insatiable nature of this lust, by comparing it with the most craving and unsatisfied things which men are acquainted with.

B. (:15b-16) 4 Insatiable Entities

1. (:15b) Introduction

"*There are three things that will not be satisfied,*
Four that will not say, 'Enough':"

2. (:16) List

a. The Grave

"*Sheol,*"

Richard Clifford: In this saying, the underworld (Sheol) is not so much the place where the dead live a shadowy existence but a force that eventually draws all the living into it, which is the meaning it has in **27:20; Isa. 5:14**; and **Hab. 2:5**. The underworld in this sense is always at work.

Tremper Longman: Sheol is here personified as an entity that is never satisfied. There is always room for one more dead person. Death never stops, and its insatiability means that everyone inevitably will be found in the grave.

b. The Barren Womb

"*and the barren womb,*"

Richard Clifford: Another example of **insatiable power** is the unfruitful womb. By metonymy, it stands for a woman unable to bear children. Such a woman will never be fully satisfied as long as she is in that state, like Hannah in **1 Samuel 1** and Rachel in **Genesis 29–30.**

c. Land Demanding More Water

"*Earth that is never satisfied with water,*"

Tremper Longman: Palestine is a land where rainfall is minimal, and large areas are wilderness. Rain on parched ground soaks up the available water and never seems to get enough.

d. Fire Demanding More Fuel

"*And fire that never says, 'Enough.'*"

George Mylne: The fire is more greedy than any of these things. Lay on fuel as long as you please, it will soon make an end of it, and seek for more. There is a fiercer flame in the corrupt hearts and tongues of men, kindled from Hell, and sufficient to set on fire the course of nature!

(:17) ASIDE – CONSEQUENCES OF DISRESPECT AND PRIDE

"*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."

Richard Clifford: A nonnumerical saying in which contempt for one's parents is depicted as so unnatural that nature itself carries out the punishment—death at the hands of wild beasts.

Lindsay Wilson: Since part of the role of parents is to instruct their children in wisdom (**1:8**), this includes rejection of the wisdom shaping ("*obedience of a mother*" = *to obey a mother*, ESV/NRSV) that they were seeking to impart. This failure to honour parents has real consequences, described (hyperbolically) as having their eye gouged out ("*pecked out*", NIV/NRSV; *picked out*, ESV) and eaten by predators such as ravens and vultures/eagles. The graphic nature of the image highlights that this is a serious matter, even a deadly one.

Allen Ross: The point is that the eye manifests the inner heart attitude, so the contemptuous look runs deep. The punishment is talionic; the eye that mocks will be pecked out by the birds. By these images the sternest punishment is held out for one who holds one's parents in such contempt.

Matthew Henry: Those that dishonour their parents shall be set up as **monuments of God's vengeance**; they shall be hanged in chains, as it were, for the birds of prey to pick out their eyes, those eyes with which they looked so scornfully on their good parents. The dead bodies of malefactors were not to hang all night, but before night the ravens would have picked out their eyes. If men do not punish undutiful children, God will, and will load those with the greatest infamy that conduct themselves haughtily towards their parents.

II. (:18-19) 4 WONDERS IN NATURE THAT ARE HARD TO FATHOM

A. (:18) Introduction

"*There are three things which are too wonderful for me,*
Four which I do not understand:"

Richard Clifford: The first three examples follow the sequence of sky, earth ("*rock*" is parallel to earth in **Job 18:4**), and sea. The sequence of heaven, earth, and sea occurs elsewhere (e.g., **Ex. 20:11; Amos 9:6; Hag. 2:6**). "*Way*" in the first three instances retains its literal meaning: the effortless flight of the eagle (or vulture), the legless movement of the serpent, the progress of a ship. The medium of each course is different: air, earth, and water. The metaphorical meaning of *derek*, "*way, course*," serves as a bridge to the fourth instance.

Paul Koptak: If all four creatures move in ways both wonderful and mysterious through God's created order (**30:18**), we also see that **wisdom is needed to make one's way rightly**, as the picture of the unrepentant adulteress in **30:20** makes clear. Each of these wise travelers knows how to make its way in its part of the created order: Eagles don't try to swim, snakes don't try to fly, and ships that go on rocks are destroyed. Therefore men or women who despise the mystery of love and sex and move outside of its

boundaries are like those who step out of their place in created order and cause the earth to tremble (**30:21–23**; cf. *derek*, "*strength*," in **31:3**). Here with the adulteress, just as in **30:14–17**, eating is associated with behavior that is out of bounds, this time depicting a sexual appetite that knows no restraint (cf. **7:14–18; 9:16**). Finishing one's improper eating by wiping the mouth characterizes someone who is both casual and proud in her ignorance. The contrast between the wonder of **30:18–19** and the contempt of **30:20** is striking.

Lindsay Wilson: Part of the wisdom movement is to study and observe the world, to notice features of everyday life, and to explore how things work in an orderly way. All four aspects mentioned in **verse 19** are hard to fathom fully or describe. The way the majestic eagle flies; what drives the actions of a snake; the many variables of sailing on the unpredictable seas; and then finally the nature of relationships between young men and women – **all these are difficult to explain** or outline. The sages cannot fully comprehend how such scenarios are ordered, and yet there appears to be patterns and familiar cycles. **Life is both hard to understand, yet a wonder to explore**.

B. (:19) List

1. Eagle Soaring in the Sky

"*The way of an eagle in the sky,*"

Allen Ross: first entry is the way of the eagle in the sky, a marvelous creature soaring with apparent ease but certain determination and purpose, all hidden from the observer.

2. Serpent Slithering across a Rock

"*The way of a serpent on a rock,*"

Allen Ross: Here is the mysterious but smooth and efficient movement of a reptile without feet.

Matthew Henry: The way of a serpent in the sand we may find by the track, but not of a serpent upon the hard rock; nor can we describe how a serpent will, without feet, in a little time creep to the top of a rock.

3. Ship Navigating the High Seas

"*The way of a ship in the middle of the sea,*"

Allen Ross: The way of a ship in the sea portrays the magnificent movement of a vessel through a trackless sea. All these phenomena are marvelous to observe; they focus our attention on the majestic and mysterious movements in the sky, on the land, and on the sea.

Matthew Henry: a ship leaves no mark behind it, and sometimes it is so tossed upon the waves that one would wonder how it lives at sea and gains its point.

4. Man Making Love to a Young Woman

"*And the way of a man with a maid.*"

Tremper Longman: Since the previous three have highlighted the motion of one body moving on another (gliding, slithering, cutting), the point of reference here might be sexual intercourse: how a man's body moves on a woman's body. That a sexual meaning is intended may explain why the sages places the next proverb (**v. 20**) after this numerical proverb.

(:20) AIDE – THE WAY OF AN ADULTEROUS WOMAN

"*This is the way of an adulterous woman:*
She eats and wipes her mouth,
And says, 'I have done no wrong.'"

Richard Clifford: The saying is connected to the previous verse by its topic of sexuality and by the word "*way*," but it speaks of the **abuse of sexuality in adultery**. The vivid vignette is reminiscent of the seduction scene in **chap. 7**, except that here the accent falls on the woman's nonchalance rather than her cunning. There is a double meaning. In the Talmud, "*to eat*" can mean "*to sleep with*" (b. Ketub. 65.13–23), and *"mouth*" can refer to the vulva (b. Sanh 100a; b. Menaḥ. 98a).

Tremper Longman: The woman claims to have done no wrong, but such relationships threaten the stability of marriage.

Allen Ross: It is incredible that human beings can engage in sin and then so easily dismiss any sense of guilt or responsibility, perhaps by rationalizing the deeds or perhaps through a calloused indifference to what the will of the Lord is for sexuality.

III. (:21-23) 4 DISRUPTIONS OF NATURAL ORDER – UNBEARABLE (UNDESERVING) THINGS

A. (:21) Introduction

"*Under three things the earth quakes,*
And under four, it cannot bear up:"

Richard Clifford: All the events are not so much immoral as they are instances of **people attaining what they do not deserve**. Earth itself rebels against such unfittingness. Cf. **26:1**.

Paul Koptak: Just as the "*way of an adulteress*" (**30:20**) is out of step with the created order of wisdom, so the four items listed **threaten to overturn that order**. In ancient Near Eastern thinking, **the earth shakes when the natural order is disturbed**. The "*trembling*" (**30:21**) of the earth is like the raging of the fool that disturbs peace in every sense of the word (cf. **29:9**). Two male examples (the servant who comes to rule

and the sated fool) have occurred before (**19:10**; cf. **Eccl. 10:5–7**), but not the unloved woman or supplanting maidservant.

Lindsay Wilson: The assumption of an ordered, stratified society, with everyone in their assigned place, made governing predictable and orderly. A cohesive community was more important than individual ambition. In such a community the righteous are rewarded and prosper, while the fools' sufferings include material want, and hence no food.

Allen Ross: Certain people who are suddenly elevated in their status in life can be unbearable. The sage says that under these things the earth trembles and cannot bear it (**v.21**)—obviously using humorous or satirical hyperbole to say that these changes **shake up the order of life**. This observation assumes that the elevated status was not accompanied by a change of nature.

B. (:22-23) List

1. (:22a) A servant Who Becomes King

"*Under a slave when he becomes king,*"

Tremper Longman: To the sage, a servant is a servant and does not have what it takes to be a ruler. If someone with the mentality and background of a servant takes over, then who knows what havoc would be the result.

Allen Ross: But the "*earth trembles*" when a servant is king; unaccustomed to such dignity, he might become a power-hungry tyrant and oppressive ruler (Greenstone, 324, suggests the example of Hitler).

George Mylne: The greatest tyrants in the world have generally been those who never expected to reign such as Maximin the Roman emperor, who put to death all who knew him in his low condition, and, among the rest, those who had relieved his father and himself that he might blot out the memory of his former baseness.

Servants have not more seeds of pride in their nature than other men but they are sown in human nature, and are wonderfully nourished when the sunbeams of prosperity shine upon them with extraordinary warmth. Leave men of low condition where you found them, and they will behave in their station as well as kings. Raise kings to an unexpected height of grandeur, and they will become Nebuchadnezzars and Alexanders. This observation is of use in the affairs of the church as well as the state. Therefore Paul forbids a novice to be made a ruler in the church, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

2. (:22b) A Fool Who Gets Enough to Eat

"*And a fool when he is satisfied with food,*"

Allen Ross: The second, a fool who is full of food, describes a fool who becomes prosperous but continues to be boorish and irreligious. But now he is overbearing and,

worse yet, finds time hanging heavy on his hands.

Charles Bridges: Then look at the fool (not an idiot, but a willful sinner) who is full of food. Can we wonder that he causes trouble and is a curse, since he gives full rein to his appetite and becomes even more devoid of understanding than before?

3. (:23a) An Unloved Woman Who Gets a Husband

"*Under an unloved woman when she gets a husband,*"

Tremper Longman: **Verse 23** presents two situations involving females that are not right, according to the sages. They are situations that will cause chaos in the social realm. In the first place, a woman who has been hated finally gets a husband, and now that she has a position of power, she can begin her work of revenge.

George Mylne: For the like reasons, is an odious woman who is married. Women of meek and quiet spirits are a lovely part of the human race but women of fretful spirits and unbridled passions are odious. And when they are married, it would require all the patience of Job, and the meekness of Moses to bear with them! Before marriage their pride was checked by neglect, and covered with the mantle of prudence but when they come into their new state of life, they throw off every restraint, and their new situation is a means of increasing their vanity and ill-nature, until neither their neighbors, nor their servants, nor their husbands, can endure them.

3. (:23b) A Maidservant Who Displaces Her Mistress

"*And a maidservant when she supplants her mistress.*"

Lindsay Wilson: The final example is like the first in that it involves a crossing of normal social boundaries, and is likely to create upheaval. A servant girl replacing her mistress is suggestive of broken-down and illicit relationships, and these often cause division within a household or community.

Allen Ross: The tension from the threat of Hagar in **Genesis 16:5** and **21:10** shows how unbearable this situation could be. Such upheavals in the proper order of things make life intolerable.

IV. (:24-28) 4 SMALL (INSIGNIFICANT AND LACKING POWER) BUT WISE (RESOURCEFUL AND INVINCIBLE) CREATURES

A. (:24) Introduction

"*Four things are small on the earth,*
But they are exceedingly wise:"

Richard Clifford: The examples exalt wisdom over size and power. By their wisdom, these insignificant animals ensure their own survival, they govern themselves.

Paul Koptak: There is the folly of the small pretending to be great, but there is also the **wisdom of the small who use their ingenuity to do great things**. So the ants make up for their size with foresight that stores up food, the coneys make use of the strength of the rocks to find a safe haven, the locusts organize themselves into a devastating power, and the lizard finds a home wherever it wants.

B. (:25-28) List

1. (:25) Industrious Ants Who Act with Foresight

"*The ants are not a strong folk,*
But they prepare their food in the summer;"

Paul Koptak: It is not strength for ants, but rather foresight and preparation of provisions (cf. **6:6–8**).

Tremper Longman: Definitely small, they nonetheless have an excellent strategy for survival. They get their food ready in the summer for consumption during the winter. Their wisdom is demonstrated in their planning for the future and their hard work at the opportune time.

2. (:26) Invincible Rock Badgers

"*The badgers are not mighty folk,*
Yet they make their houses in the rocks;"

Richard Clifford: The **rock badger** (*procaria syriacus*) lives on rocky heights ranging from the Dead Sea to Mount Hermon in Lebanon. It is herbivorous, about the size of a hare, possessing feet with suckers enabling it to climb on rock surfaces. Though small, its nests are in remote crags, secure from enemies.

Paul Koptak: It is not power for coneys (or badgers; cf. **Ps. 104:18**), but rather their ability to make a home where no one can touch them.

Tremper Longman: These are small animals (technical name is hyrax) that have small hooves with soles that are suctionlike, and thus they can climb steep cliffs. By doing so, they keep themselves relatively safe from predators and thus show a skillful life-preserving strategy.

3. (:27) Organized Locusts

"*The locusts have no king,*
Yet all of them go out in ranks;"

Richard Clifford: **Verse 27** probably refers to the **migratory locust**, which has six legs and four wings. It moves in vast swarms, capable of devastating all the plant life it encounters. Though without a king, that is, disorganized and apparently vulnerable, it nonetheless moves in serried ranks, and cannot be diverted from its course.

4. (:28) Ubiquitous Lizards

"*The lizard you may grasp with the hands,*
Yet it is in kings' palaces."

Paul Koptak: The lizard is also small and powerless; it can be caught in the hand yet it lives in the house of the powerful king.

Lindsay Wilson: Although a person can pick up a lizard (or perhaps "*spider*"), no-one can stop them going where they want to find food, drink or shelter. While there is an illusion of human control, lizards can make their way even into the most impregnable of human strongholds – kings' palaces. These are four small and seemingly helpless creatures, but they can achieve their goals by **acting cleverly**. They are described as wise (*hakam*), which is not confined in the OT to intellectual sharpeness, but includes **living successfully**.

V. (:29-31) 4 STATELY CREATURES

A. (:29) Introduction

"*There are three things which are stately in their march,*
Even four which are stately when they walk:"

Allen Ross: Leaders exhibit majestic qualities.

Richard Clifford: Just as **vv. 24–28** instanced four insignificant beings of invincible survival ability, so this saying instances four beings whose imperiousness is visible in their walk. . . In **Job 39:22**, the phrase "*not to turn back from*" signifies **fearlessness.** Lion and king are also associated in **19:12** and **20:2.** The ancient versions could not resist expanding the lines: The cock strides fearlessly among the hens as does the he-goat in the herd, and the king takes his stand and addresses his people.

Paul Koptak: Again, power comes not from strength or numbers alone but from wisdom, especially the wisdom that fears God and acts uprightly (cf. **30:1–14**). Any other view betrays its arrogance and pride, silly as a strutting rooster or billy goat.

B. (:30-31) List

1. (:30) Bold Lion

"*The lion which is mighty among beasts*
And does not retreat before any,"

Matthew Henry: A lion, the king of beasts, because strongest among beasts. Among beasts it is **strength** that gives the pre-eminence, but it is a pity that it should do so among men, whose **wisdom** is their honour, not their strength and force. The lion turns not away, nor alters his pace, for fear of any pursuers, since he knows he is too hard for them. Herein the righteous are bold as a lion, that they turn not away from their duty for fear of any difficulty they meet with in it.

2. (:31a) Strutting Rooster

"*The strutting cock,*"

David Guzik: Waltke (along with Kidner) has strutting rooster instead of greyhound.

3. (:31b) Male Goat

"*the male goat also,"*

George Mylne: An he-goat is an animal so remarkable for its strength and stateliness, when it marches at the head of the flock, that the Macedonian power which crushed the strength of the mighty Persian empire, is represented by it in the book of Daniel. The prophet Jeremiah calls the delivered captives to imitate the he-goat, by setting an example of vigor and courage to one another, in improving the merciful providence of God.

4. (:31c) Powerful King

"*And a king when his army is with him.*"

George Mylne: A king with his army, is another of those creatures that are **stately in bearing.** For the God who has given courage and strength to lions, has given majesty to kings, and stamped on them such dignity that their subjects are awed by their appearance. Kings should therefore employ their authority and influence for the service of God; and their subjects owe them reverence as well as obedience; they are ministers of God, and are entitled to honor for the sake of their master and their work, and to obedience both for wrath and for conscience sake.

Lindsay Wilson: The structure of this numerical saying (x, x + 1) suggests that the **emphasis is on the fourth example**, the king whose army is with him. The focus is on the appropriate stateliness of the king.

(:32-33) EPILOGUE – WARNING AGAINST FOLLY AND STRIFE

A. (:32) Refrain from Folly

"*If you have been foolish in exalting yourself*
Or if you have plotted evil,
put your hand on your mouth."

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 32** refers to the general category of being foolish, but also to two more specific attitudes: exalting yourself (the hitpael or reflexive stem of *ns'*, "*to lift up*") and devising evil (strictly speaking, it only means devising or planning, but the context suggests that a wrong action or goal is in view). It seems to refer to speech that is boastful and used to do wrong, and the solution is to put a hand over one's mouth, thus stopping any further destructive talk (**Job 21:5; 29:9**).

Tremper Longman: This proverb urges the listener to be careful about mistreating others in pride and through plotting. **Verse 33** gives the motivation by suggesting that pride and plotting will lead to anger, which will result in accusations (a legal term) just as naturally as churning milk will give way to curds and pinching the nose will lead to nosebleeds.

B. (:33) Unrestrained Anger Produces Strife

"*For the churning of milk produces butter,*
And pressing the nose brings forth blood;
So the churning of anger produces strife."

Lindsay Wilson: The lesson seems to be that some *pressing* produces good outcomes, while other forms of *pressing* are harmful.

Allen Ross: The sage advises those who have "*exalted*" themselves and "*played the fool*" and those who have "*planned deception*" to cease their efforts and control what they say, viz., "*clap your hand over our mouth*!" (*yād lepeh*; cf. **Job 40:4–5**). The explanation for this warning is that **talking about these things only causes strife**.

Two similes are used in the last verse—churning the milk and twisting the nose. Both involve a **pressing**, the first producing butter from milk and the second drawing blood from the nose. In the same way stirring up anger (through pride and evil planning) produces "*strife*" (*rîb*). There is also a subtle wordplay here, for "*nose*" (*ʾap*) is related to "*anger*" (*ʾappayim*). So the intent of this concluding advice is to **strive for peace and harmony through humility and righteousness.**

TEXT: Proverbs 31:1-9

TITLE: ORACLE OF KING LEMUEL FROM HIS MOTHER –
DUTY OF KING TO AVOID TEMPTATIONS AND DEFEND THE POOR

Richard Clifford: **Verses 1–9** are skillfully composed. The first section (**vv. 3–5**, 26 words) is an admonition against the imprudent use of sex and alcohol ("*wine*," "*strong drink*") lest the luxury-loving king forget the poor. The second section (**vv. 6–9**, 28 words) is an exhortation to the prudent use of alcohol ("*strong drink*," "*wine*") in order that the miserable poor can forget their poverty. **Verses 8–9** are positive as **v. 3** is negative; the verses urge the king to open his mouth not to drink but to speak for the voiceless and poor. The underlying subject of the poem is a **king's duty to effect justice for the poor**. How easy it is for a king to squander the authority God has given him to protect the weak! . . .

The Proverbs passage is a well-crafted exhortation from the queen mother to her royal son. The author transforms traditional warnings to rulers against the abuse of sex and liquor into an exhortation to **practice justice**. Use the wine for the poor, the queen mother urges, and use your mouth to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. "*To judge the poor*" in biblical idiom is to intervene on their side, to become their champion. The poem's wit and light touch might render benevolent a king who would otherwise be offended by criticism. The piece is an admirable example of *mûsār,* "discipline; warning," which is etymologically related to the verb *yāsar*, "*reprove*," in **v. 1**. In its biblical context, the exhortation is applicable to all who are tempted to turn authority into privilege.

Paul Koptak: A mother's lesson to her son reminds the ruler to serve all the people, especially the poor.

Lindsay Wilson: The first section of this final chapter sets out an oracle to King Lemuel from his mother. They are words of warning, correction and encouragement for him in his duties as a king. Lemuel was not a king in Israel or Judea, so this "foreign" material has been incorporated into this wisdom book because its truths need hearing. The inclusion of this "overheard oracle" implies that it is relevant to more than King Lemuel alone. The attribution of the oracle to his mother also reminds us of the role of women in the wisdom tradition, and their significant contribution to training up the next generation. . .

While these words are addressed to a king by his mother, they are included in this book because they have a wider application. If kings can distort justice by drink-affected decisions, so can other officials and leaders, and they will need to take notice of the same warning. The underlying principle is that we need to use our influence or power for the benefit of others, not for our own self-indulgence, but to promote justice. The section ends with a reminder that it is not enough to refrain from unhelpful actions, since se also need to speak out for what is right and builds up the entire community.

Tremper Longman: With the majority of scholars, I treat these two poems **(:1-9; :10-31**) as separate rather than intentionally linked. In other words, I do not think that the picture of the noble woman is intended to provide an alternative choice to the women to whom the king might inappropriately give his strength (**v. 3**).

(:1-2) PROLOGUE – A MOTHER'S INSTRUCTION -- (REGARDING KINGSHIP TEMPTATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES)

A. (:1) Source of the Oracle

1. Immediate Source

"*The words of King Lemuel,*"

Allen Ross: Jewish legend identifies Lemuel as Solomon and the advice as from Bathsheba from a time when Solomon indulged in magic with his Egyptian wife and delayed the morning sacrifices (see Greenstone, 329). But there is no evidence for these assumptions.

Charles Bridges: Both Agur and Lemuel have been identified with Solomon, although there is no historical evidence. It seems unlikely that Solomon, having given his own name more than once in this book (**1:1; 10:1**), should give two mystical names at the end, without any distinct personal application.

2. Originating Source

"*the oracle which his mother taught him.*"

Richard Clifford: A mother and father could be a source of instruction in Proverbs (**1:8; 6:20**). The mother of a king in the Canaanite world played a major role in the palace. Because of her longevity, knowledge of palace politics, and undoubted loyalty to her son, she was in a good position to offer him reliable counsel. The Aramaisms and the place name show the **non-Israelite** origin of the piece.

Tremper Longman: We have already noted and commented on the fact that in Hebrew proverbs, as opposed to other ancient Near Eastern proverbs, mothers are mentioned as those engaged in the instruction of their children. However, this is the only place where we actually hear the voice of the mother **independently** of that of the father. The topic of her conversation is something that a wise mother, especially the wise mother of a leader, would want to drive home to her child: women and drink are two large temptations to a man with power and money.

Caleb Nelson: **Wisdom's last word goes to mom**. The structure of the book tells us in no uncertain terms that the greatest reward the wise son can find is a wise and valiant, God-fearing wife who will be a wise mother and speak wisdom to her children.

B. (:2) Supplication of the Mother

"*What, O my son?*

And what, O son of my womb?
And what, O son of my vows?"

George Mylne: When this venerable lady was instructing her son, her heart was overflowing with inexpressible tenderness of affection to him. . . This fond mother considered and pondered in her mind what way she should express her tender regard, and she could find no better way of showing it than by teaching him the wisdom which befits his station; for what greater testimony of love can any mother give to the son of her womb?

Richard Clifford: "*Son of my vow*" refers to a vow the mother promised if God were to give her a son. A notable biblical example is Hannah in **1 Sam. 1:11**: "*O Yahweh of Hosts, if you will only regard the misery of your servant and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will bring him to you as a nazirite until the day of his death*." After such a vow, the royal son was born to the queen.

Tremper Longman: Besides three vocatives that indicate the mother's intimacy with her son and therefore her right to speak to him in an authoritative manner, as few could address the king, the three cola all simply begin with "*What*?" Perhaps it is an incredulous "
What!" short for "*What are you doing*!" that leads her to comment on <u>women</u> and <u>drink</u>. In any case, this opening salvo leads to these two subjects in that order.

Matthew Henry: I must reprove thee, and reprove thee sharply, and thou must take it well, for,

1. "Thou art descended from me; thou art the son of my womb, and therefore what I say comes from the authority and affection of a parent and cannot be suspected to come from any ill-will. Thou art a piece of myself. I bore thee with sorrow, and I expect no other return for all the pains I have taken with thee, and undergone for thee, than this, Be wise and good, and then I am well paid."

2. "Thou art devoted to my God; thou art the son of my vows, the son I prayed to God to give me and promised to give back to God, and did so" (thus Samuel was the son of Hannah's vows); "Thou art the son I have often prayed to God to give his grace to (**Ps. 72:1**), and shall a child of so many prayers miscarry?"

I. (:3) RULERS MUST GUARD AGAINST SEXUAL TEMPTATION

A. Prohibition

"*Do not give your strength to women,*"

Caleb Nelson: Lemuel's mother warns him first against living for sexual pleasure. Women destroy kings. Now, she knows because she's a king's mother. That almost certainly implies that she has lived most of her life in a royal court and seen more than

her share of kings brought down by women. Just as I know a lot of pastors because I'm a pastor, so kings generally know a number of kings because they are kings. And so on. Well, the point here is not that women are a problem, but rather that the abuse of women is a problem. If you live for sexual pleasure and give your strength to women (plural), you have handed yourself over to something that destroys kings. What does Lemuel's mom mean by this statement? She means that living for sexual pleasure destroys kings. Wanting to enjoy more than one woman is bad enough. Actually doing it saps a man's moral fiber, first of all. It uses up his time that should be spent on ruling and caring for his children, teaching them the way of wisdom. Look at David — lots of sons, most of them a total loss because dad spent his days f**king around instead of disciplining his children. Look at Solomon — lots of wives, but only one son, and that one a fool.

Let me just say it as clearly as Lemuel's mother did: Giving your manliness, symbolized by your man-parts, into the hands of more than one woman will suck your strength and blight your rule. You ain't man enough to take care of more than one. I don't care how impressed you are with yourself, and your mom doesn't either. Give your strength to woman, to a single one for a lifetime, and you will be repaid with the joys of the **Prov. 31** woman, joys Lemuel's mom is about to discuss. But give your strength to multiple women, and you will be a hollow shell, a sorry excuse for a man. This includes porn. This includes lingerie ads. This includes groping, flirting, and every other form of cheating from fornication to adultery and beyond. The man who is spending his time seeking women is not spending his time seeking holiness, or righteous rule. So if you want to be fitted to reign with Christ, keep yourself to one and only one woman.

B. Rationale

"*Or your ways to that which destroys kings.*"

Paul Koptak: The concern over the distractions of harems and drinking and the resulting **impaired judgment** were common throughout the literature of the ancient Near East, including that of Israel.

Lindsay Wilson: "*Strength*" (*hayil*) commonly means "*power*" or "*strength*", but can also mean "*wealth*" or "*substance*" (**Ge. 34:29; Deut. 8:18**). Later in this chapter (**v. 10**) it refers to a woman of "*ability*" or an excellent woman (also **12:4**). It can have a wide range of meanings covering all that a person has physically, financially and morally. The force here is "*do not expend all your energies and resources*" on sexual self-indulgence, seeking to win the favours of the court women (Murphy 1998: 241 suggests "the intrigues that are often associated with a harem"). The reason given is that they can destroy kings, probably by creating factions and divisions, or giving birth to rival heirs. Apart from these actions being self-focused, they are also a massive distraction to his real task as king. Power is to be used to serve others, not yourself.

Tremper Longman: It would be a tremendous temptation for a king to use his power to amass a number of wives, concubines, and other women. But women can get even a

king into trouble. Solomon is an example of that, with his multitudinous wives, who ultimately led him astray. This is also illustrated by David, whose pursuit of Bathsheba was responsible for many of the palace intrigues that plagued his later years and succession. In any case, the sages surely would argue that even the king had the same responsibility to act with integrity in sexual relationships as their teaching required for other young men (see **chaps. 5-7**). In light of the parallelism, the "*ways*" that wipe out kings certainly refers to the wrong way of relating to women.

Allen Ross: the point of the verse is that while it would be easy for a king to spend his time and energy enjoying women, doing so would be unwise.

II. (:4-7) RULERS MUST GUARD AGAINST EXCESSIVE STRONG DRINK

A. (:4-5) Negative Warning Regarding Alcohol – Kings Must Not Drink and Forget

1. (:4) Prohibition

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, It is not for kings to drink wine,
Or for rulers to desire strong drink,"

Lindsay Wilson: A particular temptation for kings seems to be the excessive consumption of alcohol, presumably paired with a self-indulgent party lifestyle. The rationalizations would be easy:

- I can afford it;
- I would enjoy it;
- perhaps even, I deserve it.

Caleb Nelson: If you are going to reign with Christ, you need to be very careful in your use of alcohol. And the more responsible your position is, the more careful you need to be with it. Jesus drank wine and gave it to others. The words of Lemuel's mother should not be taken as a total ban on the stuff. But she is adamant that if you drink enough to forget what the law is, you are in sin. If you drink enough that you can't exercise all the functions of your office, making decisions and tough calls, then you are in sin.

2. (:5) Rationale

Lest they drink and forget what is decreed,
And pervert the rights of all the afflicted."

Lindsay Wilson: A king's power should be used to promote justice and the rights of the powerless, but a king who drinks and parties can change or pervert justice for the marginalized or afflicted. A self-focused party lifestyle impedes a ruler's commitment to the needs of his community.

Tremper Longman: The Bible as a whole is not at all opposed to alcohol . . . but heavy drinking is frowned upon. It is very important for a king to know what he is doing as he makes decisions, because his decisions have important ramifications for many people.

That Lemuel's mother commends the use of alcohol to the poor may be seen in part as a strategy to discourage her royal son. In other words, she may be saying the equivalent of "Don't act like those derelicts who drink to forget their hardships. Act like the king you are." The king is the human representative of God, who protects the rights of those who lack power (the needy and the destitute).

B. (:6-7) Positive Purpose of Alcohol –
The Afflicted Should Drink and Forget

1. (:6) Target of God's Gift of Alcohol

"*Give strong drink to him who is perishing,*
And wine to him whose life is bitter."

Charles Bridges: Yet the abuse of God's blessing does not destroy its use. **Wine is the gift of God**. It makes a man's heart glad. It restores and refreshes. Give beer to those who are perishing, wine to those who are in anguish. The Samaritan did just this to the wounded traveler, and Paul prescribed it for the illness of his beloved son in the faith (**1 Timothy 5:23**). The rule, therefore, of love and self-denial is as follows: Instead of wasting beer and wine on yourself and merely indulging your own appetite, share your luxuries with those who really need them, such as the perishing and those who are in anguish.

2. (:7) Therapeutic Value of God's Gift of Alcohol

"*Let him drink and forget his poverty,*
And remember his trouble no more."

Matthew Henry: We must deny ourselves in the gratifications of sense, that we may have to spare for the relief of the miseries of others, and be glad to see our superfluities and dainties better bestowed upon those whom they will be a real kindness to than upon ourselves whom they will be a real injury to. Let those that are ready to perish drink soberly, and it will be a means so to revive their drooping spirits that they will forget their poverty for the time and remember their misery no more, and so they will be the better able to bear it.

III. (:8-9) RULERS MUST ADVOCATE FOR JUSTICE FOR THE VULNERABLE

A. (:8) Advocate Verbally for the Vulnerable

"*Open your mouth for the dumb,*
For the rights of all the unfortunate."

Paul Koptak: Above all, **wise speech** is speech that advocates for the rights of the poor. Kings are to make this part of their job description (e.g., **29:4, 14**; cf. **16:13; 20:28; 25:5**); note that in previous chapters this responsibility belongs to everyone. The Hebrew of **verse 8** reads, "*for the mute*," that is, those "who cannot speak for themselves" and be heard. Then, as now, the rich and powerful had the voices that counted.

B. (:9) Actively Defend the Vulnerable

"*Open your mouth, judge righteously,*
And defend the rights of the afflicted and needy."

Paul Koptak: Rather than deprive the poor of their rights (**31:5**), those who speak rightly will defend them. More than giving drink to cover over the misery of the poor (**31:7**), those who speak rightly work to remove the source of that misery.

Lindsay Wilson: It is the king's role to judge righteously or with fairness (*sedeq*, **v. 9a; 16:12; 20:28**), and to act positively for (*defend*) those who are variously described as poor, needy (**v. 9b**) and "*those whom fortune has passed by*" (*destitute*, most EVV, but the verb means to "pass on, by, away", **v. 8b**). This is not simply a call to "do no harm", but rather a rallying cry to "do good".

TEXT: Proverbs 31:10-31

TITLE: IN PRAISE OF THE EXCELLENT WIFE

Richard Clifford: The poem on the capable or valiant woman is an **acrostic poem** of twenty-two lines, each line beginning with a successive letter of the alphabet. . .

As with most acrostic poems in the Bible, the unity of the poem comes more from its alphabetic sequence than from its narrative logic. . .

We propose that it is a portrait of an **ideal wife** (of a great house) and, on a metaphorical level, a portrait of **Woman Wisdom** and what she accomplishes for those who come to her house as disciples and friends. Woman Wisdom in **chaps. 1–9** sought a permanent relationship to her disciples (**8:32–36**) and invited them into her house (**9:1–6, 11**). The portrait has two levels, as do the portraits of the two women in **chaps. 1–9**. A good wife, who is a gift of God, builds her house. She brings prosperity to all within—her husband, children, servants, and even to those outside—to the poor and those who benefit from her husband's counsel in the gates. If a young man, or, in the context of the entire book, any person, enters into a relationship with Woman Wisdom and becomes her disciple, she will invite that disciple to her house **(chap. 9**) and make that person "happy" in the fullest sense, bestowing the blessings of children, wealth, renown, and long life.

Lindsay Wilson: While some view her as a depiction of wisdom personified (like Lady Wisdom in **chs. 1-9**), she is at least a woman who exemplifies wisdom, and puts it into practice. At the end of the book, then, as a kind of inclusio with **chapters 1-9**, we return to the theme of embracing wisdom, and the reader is reminded of the benefits that wisdom will bring, and is urged to choose wisdom.

Allen Ross: Traditionally, this poem was recited by husbands and children at the Sabbath table on Friday night (see Y. Levin, "'The Woman of Valor' in Jewish Ritual [Prov. 31:10–31]," Beth Mikra 31 [1985/86]: 339–47). Christians, too, have seen it as a **paradigm for godly women**. . .

The vocabulary and the expressions in general have the ring of an **ode to a champion**. For example, "*woman of valor*" (*ʾēšet-ḥayil* in **v.10**; "*woman of noble character*," NIV) is the same expression one would find in Judges for the "*mighty man of valor*" (*gibbôr heḥayil* [**Jdg 6:12**]; "*mighty warrior*," NIV)—the warrior aristocrat; "*strength*" (*ʿôz* in **v.17** ["*vigorously*," NIV]) is elsewhere used for powerful deeds and heroics (e.g., **Ex 15:2, 13; 1Sa 2:10**); "*value*" (**v.11**) in "*lacks nothing of value*" is actually the word for "*plunder*" (*šālāl,* as used in the name "*Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz*" in **Isa 8:1, 3**; cf. NIV margin); "*food*" (**v.15**) is actually "*prey*" (*ṭerep*); "*she holds*" (*šilleḥâ* in **v.19**) is an expression also used in military settings (cf. **Jdg 5:26**, *"reached for*," for Jael's smiting Sisera); "*surpass them all*" (**v.29**) is an expression that signifies **victory**. . .

There are several reasons why the writer would use these literary features to present his description of wisdom:

(1) a personification of wisdom allows the writer to make all the lessons concrete and not abstract (we can see them in action in everyday life);

(2) it provides a polemic against the literature of the ancient world that saw women as merely decorative—charm and beauty without substance;

(3) and it depicts the greater heroism as moral and domestic rather than militaristic.

But the personification in this chapter differs from earlier personifications in the book in exactly these practical details that describe the noble woman. There is no reason to doubt that the writer has a historical person in mind when constructing the poem. From the way the poem is written, one must conclude that even if it is symbolic, it is nonetheless real. **The noble woman, then, becomes a role model of wisdom for all who read the poem.**

Bryan Miller: If we recognize that perhaps Solomon was using this imagery to summarize the whole book of Proverbs and to describe the fictional character of Lady Wisdom, it can help bring some perspective. The principles of wisdom found in this passage are just as relevant for any other person as well. In most of the book of Proverbs, Solomon was writing to his son, the prince, who would be king one day. For that very reason, many of the Proverbs have to do with ruling well, judging justly, and dealing with people. Yet no one would suggest that only princes who will be kings can learn from the lessons of wisdom taught throughout the whole book. Neither here is the intended audience only mothers but also all people who are interested to learn from Lady Wisdom and to heed her advice. Whether you are a man or a woman, married or single, child or adult, wealthy or poor, wisdom is worth getting.
https://outlook.reformedfellowship.net/sermons/a-virtuous-woman-who-can-find-proverbs-3110-31/

I. (:10-12) HER VALUE (WORTH)

A. (:10a) Worth Due to Scarcity = A Rare Breed

"*An excellent wife, who can find?*"

Paul Koptak: "*Who can find*?" communicates that faithful character is valuable because it is rare (cf. **Prov. 20:6**), and the question may refer to the elusive nature of wisdom itself (**1:28; 8:35; Job 28:12–13**).

From the start we are given a clue that somehow this poem is a summary of all that has been said about wisdom in Proverbs. The first of the praises describes this woman's character as a **treasure** (**31:10**), her worth measured in precious stones ("*rubies*"), thus reminding readers of previous descriptions of Wisdom (cf. **3:15; 8:11**). Her husband recognizes her worth, for he "*lacks nothing of value* [*šalal*, the same word that the violent gang used for "*plunder*" in **1:13**; cf. **16:19**]." What some would take by force comes to those who seek what is most important.

Caleb Nelson: We begin, then, by looking at who this woman is. First of all, how should her epithet be translated? The NASB calls her "*an excellent wife*," while NIV calls her "*a wife of noble character*" and other versions range from "*capable*" to "*virtuous*" to "*worthy*" and even "*good*." What is this woman? I believe that the best rendering is "**valiant**," because this term is used of warriors in other parts of the Bible. .

It takes courage to be a wife! That's the significance. You want to find someone with the heart of a lion and the guts of a warrior? Then just peek over the fence into the backyard of your next-door neighbor and take a good look at the housewife who's back there. She has courage.

John MacArthur: Understanding the implications of a bad one – boisterous, quarrelsome, self-centered, wicked, such as **Jezebel** – and realizing the influence she was bound to have upon his life, his mother encouraged Lemuel to find an **excellent wife.** The kind of woman she describes is the model, ideal woman. She is priceless. "*An excellent wife,*" – **verse 10** says – "*who can find? Her worth is far above jewels*." And she goes on to describe this woman both physically, mentally, morally, spiritually. https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-168/the-proverbs-31-woman

B. (:10b) Worth Intrinsically More than Jewels = <u>Precious</u>

"*For her worth is far above jewels.*"

Allen Ross: The introductory rhetorical question establishes the point that the wife of noble character is not easily found; but when she is, she is a **treasure**. Her description as "*a wife of noble character*" (*ʾēšet-ḥayil*) signifies that she possesses all the virtues, honor, and strength to do the things the poem will set forth. It is interesting to notice that this woman, like wisdom, is worth more than rubies (cf. **3:15; 8:11**).

John MacArthur: Too often when a selection is made of a woman or a wife, it is made for the wrong reasons: looks, education, personality, likes and dislikes, accomplishments, style; rather than virtue, character, those things that matter. But this woman has a value that is far above jewels. The word actually describes precious stones of any kind. Some versions translate it rubies, some translate it pearls. Jewels is the best; it's just the generic word for precious stones. The point being, this is a very, very valuable woman, not easy to find. Then in **verse 11**, she begins to describe this woman.

C. (:11-12) Worth to Her Husband = <u>Trustworthy</u>

"*The heart of her husband trusts in her,*
And he will have no lack of gain.
She does him good and not evil
All the days of her life."

Tremper Longman: The woman is first described by her husband's attitude toward her. He entrusts his heart to her. The heart stands for one's core personality and not specifically emotions, as it tends to do in modern idiom (see **3:1**). In any case, it means

that the husband is confident to make himself totally vulnerable to her. He trusts here to follow through and take care of him and the household.

Allen Ross: The noble woman's husband lacks nothing of value. The term *šālāl* ("*value*"; **v.11**) usually means "*plunder*"; the point may be that the gain will be as rich and bountiful as the **spoils of war.**

George Mylne: The heart of the virtuous woman's husband rejoices not only in his present pleasures but in his agreeable prospects of future happiness and contentment. He knows that his house is managed with such frugality and prudence that he can entertain no apprehensions of poverty. He is under no temptation to injustice, to make up any waste in his substance. For every part of it is managed to the best advantage.

Charles Bridges: Her faithfulness, oneness of heart, and affectionate attention to duty make her husband have full confidence in her.

Lindsay Wilson: Her habitual practice (all the days of her life) is to pay back his trust with what is good, not harmful (**v. 12**). Details of this are given in the subsequent verses.

Tremper Longman: Good things and evil things can encompass a wide variety of moral and material blessings, some of which will be unpacked in the verses to come.

John MacArthur: The husband can go to work, he can go away, he can do whatever he needs to do with absolute confidence of her integrity, her wisdom, and her discretion in the use of his assets and in the care of his interests. His comfort is her concern. His burdens are hers to relieve. He is at ease in absence, because he knows that all he has is safe with her because she cares for him, and he knows that. And love means he would never do anything that would cause him sorrow or suffering or pain or distress. He's not suspicious, he's not worried, he's not jealous, because **she is absolutely trustworthy**. **That is a great foundation for a marriage**.

II. (:13-27) HER VIRTUES REFLECTED IN HER ACTIVITIES

A. (:13-19) Virtues Reflected in Activities in the Home

John MacArthur: Vivian Gornick, you wouldn't know who she is, but she teaches feminism at the University of Illinois, says, quote: "Being a housewife is an illegitimate profession." I always thought being a prostitute was an illegitimate profession, but in our day being a housewife is an illegitimate profession.

Frankly, the most cruel and certainly the most damaging sexual harassment – you want to talk about sexual harassment – the most damaging sexual harassment taking place today is the sexual harassment by feminists and their governmental allies against the role of motherhood and the role of the dependent wife. That's real sexual harassment with devastating results.

But in God's order, this woman is **devoted to the home**. She is the ruler of the house. She manages the household. And her devotion is remarkable, really remarkable.

1. (:13) Resourceful

"*She looks for wool and flax,*
And works with her hands in delight."

Richard Clifford: Colon A, literally, "*she seeks wool and flax*," need not mean to shop for suitable material but to oversee its production, that is, growing one's own flax and shearing one's own sheep. Colon B, on the other hand, refers to manufacturing linen and wool cloth, which she does with her own hands (**v. 19**). In colon B, the phrase is, literally, "*at the pleasure of her hands*," which attributes to her hands the joy she takes in creating something useful and beautiful.

Charles Bridges: One thing, however, is most remarkable. The standard of godliness shown here is not that of a religious recluse shut up from active obligations under the pretense of greater consecration to God. Here are none of those habits of monastic asceticism that are now extolled as the highest point of Christian perfection. One half at least of the picture of this wife of noble character is taken up with her personal and domestic industry. What a rebuke this is to self-indulgent inactivity!

George Mylne: The virtuous woman **abhors idleness, and loves her duty**; and therefore she takes care to provide every necessary material and implement for work, that she may employ her time to the best advantage. It is not enough for a wife to manage the fruits of her husband's industry with frugality, or to keep her servants at work; the virtuous woman works with her own hands; and it is not a burden, but a pleasure to her to work with her hands.

John MacArthur: "*She looks for flax and wool*." Why? Because she has to purchase the bare product, the flax and wool, and then she has to spin it into thread, and then she has to weave it on a loom; and then once it's woven into fabric, she has to cut it and make the garments with it. Wool? Because of winter time. It was very cold in the winter. Flax or linen? Because of the hot times. Linen was used in the summer and wool was used in the winter.

2. (:14) Provider

"*She is like merchant ships;*
She brings her food from afar."

Richard Clifford: The far horizon evokes the picture of a merchant's fleet, bringing food from afar into her larder. It is the only simile in the poem.

John MacArthur: She's engaged, you see, in good planning, careful management. But it's not just simplistic; it's not just bread and water. There are little things that she adds to make it rich and enjoyable, even if she has to go a long way to get it.

3. (:15) Industrious

"*She rises also while it is still night,*
And gives food to her household,
And portions to her maidens."

Richard Clifford: The verse is the only **tricolon** in the poem. In v. 14 the wife imported food; she now **distributes it to her household**. "*House*" here and in **vv. 21** and **27** means household, including servants.

Peter Wallace: We need to recognize that this is speaking of a time when the "household" consisted of dozens, and in some cases, hundreds of people.

4. (:16) Shrewd / Entrepreneurial

"*She considers a field and buys it;*
From her earnings she plants a vineyard."

George Mylne: The virtuous woman employs her money in **useful purchases**. She will not, however, buy anything without considering it, that she may judge whether it is worth the money demanded for it but when she has considered, she buys. For she is not of a capricious and inconstant humor, like some whose mind changes more quickly than the wind. What she buys, she improves to advantage. For she has abundance of money the fruit of her labor and godly management, and with it she plants a vineyard in the field which she has bought, that her family may be well supplied with the conveniences of life in time to come.

John MacArthur: It's wonderful when a woman is enterprising, and if she has the time and the inclination and the talents and abilities to do things in the home **that can benefit the family**, that is a marvelous thing. Now the sad thing is when a woman decides that she's going to go have a career at the expense of the family, at the expense of the children, at the expense of the husband and the home.

5. (:17) Strong

"*She girds herself with strength,*
And makes her arms strong."

Richard Clifford: To do vigorous work requires an apron or other protective clothing. Putting such clothes on signals to all that she is vigorous. In colon B, the force of the piel conjugation of the verb is "declarative" -- **she shows her strength through her arms**.

John MacArthur: She's not soft, she's strong. And what has made her strong – and it's not just talking about her muscles – she's become strong **as the result of her effort** [not as the result of going to the gym to work out]. As a result of her strength exerted in the daily tasks, she becomes strong; and that's why she can do so much.

John Piper: She will be *morally* strong. **Proverbs 23:17** says, "*Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day*." The woman who continues in the fear of the Lord will have power to resist all the allurements to envy, to desire what she shouldn't have. The fear of the Lord will also increase her *intellectual* strength. The fear of the Lord is the impulse to wisdom, and rouses the mind to search for knowledge as for hidden treasure. And the fear of the Lord will even increase her *physical* strength. One of the reasons we let our bodies languish and get weak and out of tone is because we are bored and feel no excitement or hope about the future. But the woman who fears the Lord is confident and hopeful and eager to enter the future with God at her side. This kind of hope always gives us pep and vigor and increases the strength of the weakest among us.

6. (:18) Productive

"*She senses that her gain is good;*
Her lamp does not go out at night."

Richard Clifford: A burning lamp is a metaphor for prosperity (e.g., **13:9; 20:20; 24:20**). **Job 18:6** applies the metaphor to a household: "*The light in his tent grows dark; his lamp fails him*."

John MacArthur: She is spurred on not by self-fulfillment, not by self-indulgence; she is spurred on by the inherent goodness of what she is doing in the lives of everyone she loves. The family is not organized in such a way that everybody has to attend to her, but rather that she is committed to give herself away for the goodness of everyone else. And in order to accomplish all that's in her heart, her lamp goes not out at night.

7. (:19) Skilled

"*She stretches out her hands to the distaff,*
And her hands grasp the spindle."

Richard Clifford: The wife weaves linen cloth from flax and wool from the fleece she has cultivated (**v. 13**). "*Distaff*" (*kîšôr*) is the staff for holding the flax, tow, or wool, which, in hand spinning, was drawn out and twisted (spun) into yarn or thread by the "*spindle*" or round stick *(pelek*).

Paul Koptak: The **midpoint** of the poem is set apart by a **chiastic structure** that repeats Hebrew words for "*hands*." . . . The wordplay creates a contrast between the hands that close on her tools of production but open to share of her rewards with the poor (cf. **19:17; 22:9**). She is the mirror reverse of the generation that wants to swallow up the "*poor*" and "*needy*" (**30:14;** cf. **14:31**). The focus on hands carries over to **31:31** (lit., "*work of her hands*"), and the description of clothing extends through **31:21–22** to **31:25**: "*She is clothed with strength and dignity*."

Charles Bridges: Her personal habits are **full of energy**. **Manual labor**, even menial service, in olden times was the work of women in the highest ranks. Self-denial is here a main principle. The woman of noble character goes before her servants in diligence

no less than in dignity. Instead of being idle herself while they are working, she is not ashamed to work the spindle with her fingers (**verse 19**).

B. (:20-27) Virtues Reflected in Activities in the Community

1. (:20) Compassionate

"*She extends her hand to the poor;*
And she stretches out her hands to the needy."

Richard Clifford: The same hands and palms so industriously employed in spinning inside the house are now turned to **the poor outside the house**. A chiasm in **vv. 19–20** links her industriousness and generosity: **v. 19**, *ydyh šlḥh, kpyh* ("*her hand she puts*," "*her fingers*") // **v. 20**, *kph, ydyh šlḥh* ("*her palms*," "*her hands she stretches*").

2. (:21) Prepared

"*She is not afraid of the snow for her household,*
For all her household are clothed with scarlet."

Richard Clifford: The point is that even snowstorms, relatively rare in the climate, have been foreseen. She has made the garments of her entire household warm enough to withstand extreme cold.

John MacArthur: Now, she would provide wool garments for the snowy day; but not just wool garments. It's interesting that they're **scarlet**. She dyes them deep red, deep red. Why? Well, wool garments deep red in color would retain more heat. We all understand that, that dark garments retain heat and white garments reflect heat. Not just dark black garments, but she makes them **beautiful** with a deep scarlet burgundy kind of a red.

And those would be very important in the winter. As I said, all you have is a portable pan with coals to heat a room. And you may have worn that wool garment not only out in the day, but certainly in the night sitting in the home, and maybe even to cover you when you slept. Such garments were dignified. They were beautiful. They were well-made. They were functional. But they were red so that they could have some beauty. She cared not just about the basic things, she cared about the enjoyment of her family.

3. (:22) Classy

"*She makes coverings for herself;*
Her clothing is fine linen and purple."

Richard Clifford: Purple dye was expensive, which suggests all the cloth manufactured by the wife was luxury grade. The woman is elegant and her handiwork is beautiful.

George Mylne: Although the virtuous woman is liberal to the poor yet she is not impoverished. Some have been made poor by selfishness and narrowness; millions have been impoverished by pride and profusion but none have been impoverished, and many have been enriched, by charity. The virtuous woman after reaching forth her hands to

the poor, has enough remaining to provide proper and elegant furniture for her house, and a dress for herself suitable to her station.

There is no part of the character of a virtuous woman who will please some ladies so much as this part of it, which seems to allow some scope for finery. And it is not to be denied, that ornaments of a decent kind may very lawfully be used by those who can afford them but Isaiah and Zephaniah, Paul and Peter, testify against that vanity of dress which is too much coveted by some of the gender.

The *adorning* recommended to women by the apostles, does not consist in gold, and pearls, and costly array but in modest apparel, humility, sobriety and good works, and a meek and quiet mind. And Lemuel's mother says nothing inconsistent with this doctrine. If the virtuous woman has coverings of tapestry for her house, she makes them to herself; if she is clothed with silk (or fine linen, as it may be rendered) and purple, she earns it by her labors and godly management. She does not starve her charity by her finery, nor spend upon her dress that which might support a poor family. She does not reckon herself superior to the duties of a wife, nor exempted by wearing silk and purple, from using her spindle and distaff. From all this it appears, that the inspired writer allows the use of costly array to none but those who can afford it in a full consistency with the duties which they owe to their families, to the poor, and to all men.

John MacArthur: This woman appreciates the beauty that God has given her. She appreciates the fact that her husband rejoices in that beauty and enjoys that beauty. And so she's very careful, and she makes sure that her clothing is not just linen, but fine linen; and not just any kind of cloth or color, but purple, which was always associated with elegance. This woman knows how to take care of herself in a way that expresses her beauty and her loveliness to her husband.

4. (:23) Supportive

"*Her husband is known in the gates,*
When he sits among the elders of the land."

Tremper Longman: The implication is that her husband can achieve such a significant status only with the support of his wife. She takes care of the household while he works in the community. Her reputation also enhances his.

5. (:24) Enterprising

"*She makes linen garments and sells them,*
And supplies belts to the tradesmen."

John MacArthur: **Verse 24** says more about this **amazing enterprise** that she's engaged in as a **homemaker**. She makes these linen garments and sells them, and supplies belts to the tradesmen. The Hebrew word "*tradesmen*" here is quite interesting. It's the word *kna'ani*, and that refers to the Phoenicians who were the sailors of the ancient Middle East. And what she's doing is making garments, selling them to the sailors who are the traders who take their ships off the coast of Palestine and distribute their goods

all over the Mediterranean. So she's got **an export business** going. *Belts* is cloth girdles, like cummerbunds, sashes.

6. (:25) Confident

"*Strength and dignity are her clothing,*
And she smiles at the future."

Richard Clifford: As in **v. 17**, the wife's virtue is expressed by the metaphor of clothing, which is frequent in the Bible; for example, Yahweh girding himself with might. For the second time, strength, a military virtue, is ascribed to a woman, and honor as well. At first glance, colon B does not seem related to colon A. But a closer look shows that her strength enables her to face the future with confidence, as does her "*splendor*," which pertains to her attractiveness as in **Ps. 8:6**: "*You have adorned* [humankind] *with glory and splendor*." She can laugh at the future, like a confident warrior.

Allen Ross: The noble wife is diligent and prudent in her work; her strength and honor come from her solid financial and economic position, as **v.25b** shows (Toy, 547); so the result is that she is **confident in facing the future**.

John MacArthur: She is clothed, in **verse 25**, with spiritual character. She has **spiritual strength and dignity**. What does that word "*dignity*" mean? It refers to the fact that she is elevated above common things. She is elevated about trivial things. Her life is not all about what doesn't matter. She has true class, true virtue. She has godly character. She is spiritually strong and she has elevated herself to the nobler issues. And she has the power of true character, and its expressed in the fact that *she smiles at the future*. She has no fear. Why? Because she knows her life is right with God, and that secures His blessing in the future.

John Piper: When a woman fears the Lord, she will not be anxious about tomorrow, she will do what God has appointed for her to do and trust him in everything to show her mercy.

7. (:26) Wise Communicator

"*She opens her mouth in wisdom,*
And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue."

Richard Clifford: Not only does the woman act with vigor and dress beautifully, she also speaks wisely. Her "wisdom" is the art of governing her household. The phrase "*instruction of kindness*" (unique in the Bible) most probably refers to her instructions to the servants, which she gives with a graciousness that invites their assent.

Paul Koptak: If the husband speaks for justice at the gates, she does the same in the home (cf. **1:8; 6:20; 13:14**).

Matthew Henry: The law of love and kindness is written in the heart, but it shows itself in the tongue; if we are kindly affectioned one to another, it will appear by affectionate

expression. It is called a *law of kindness*, because it gives law to others, to all she converses with. Her wisdom and kindness together put a commanding power into all she says; they command respect, they command compliance. How forcible are right words! In her tongue is the law of grace, or mercy (so some read it), understanding it of the word and law of God, which she delights to talk of among her children and servants. She is full of pious religious discourse, and manages it prudently, which shows how full her heart is of another world even when her hands are most busy about this world.

John MacArthur: So she teaches law, God's law, to her family with grace. With pleasing, kind, gracious speech her tongue is regulated. Behind the teaching of the law is the tempering of mercy, compassion. This is the noble, excellent woman.

8. (:27) Focused

"*She looks well to the ways of her household,*
And does not eat the bread of idleness."

John MacArthur: She exercises, according to **verse 27**, **careful surveillance** over everything. She manages the children, she manages the household. She is not lazy; she's not eating the product of laziness, but the bread of loving hard work. And then the real satisfaction comes for her, it comes from the people she loves the most. She's given everything to them.

III. (:28-31) HER VENERATION (PRAISE)

A. (:28-29) Praised by Her Husband and Children

"*Her children rise up and bless her;*
Her husband also, and he praises her, saying:
'Many daughters have done nobly,
But you excel them all.'"

John MacArthur: And what does she get back? They rise up and bless her, and they praise her. They reverence her, literally. They honor her. They hold her in high esteem. And even her husband, because she has set aside her own comfort for his, she receives from him the supreme blessing: after all the years of life, he loves her more than he's ever loved her, because he now understands her character better than he ever understood it.

B. (:30-31) Praised by Everyone for Her Inner Spirituality and Outward Good Works

1. (:30) Praised for Her Inner Spirituality

"*Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,*"
But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised."

Richard Clifford: In comparison to the house the woman has built and managed, and especially in comparison to her fear of Yahweh, physical beauty is seen as transitory. It is her house that will endure. Indeed, Wolters believes that the poem is consciously

shifting attention from the erotic aspect of the woman, which was customarily praised in the culture, to her heroic courage, strength and wisdom. **Proverbs 11:16** suggested that renown and wealth obtained by questionable means are illusory: "*A charming woman gets renown, and ruthless men get wealth.*" Our verse reveals that the woman's virtue comes from her revering God. The book begins (**1:7**) and ends (**31:30**) with "*revering Yahweh*." Metrically, the verse seems to be a tricolon.

Lindsay Wilson: **Verse 30** then sets out what is her most salient characteristic, the aspect of who she is that is most praiseworthy. It is not her hard work, or her economic success, or her charm or beauty that are the grounds for praise, but rather that she fears the Lord, that is to say, she respects God as God. This is, of course, the essential foundation of the good life in the book as a whole (**1:7; 9:10**), and helps to make this final poem a reminder of the core teaching of **chapters 1-9**.

George Mylne: The **fear of the Lord** is the beginning of wisdom, and the most essential part of the virtuous woman's character. It is this which sanctifies every other part of it, and makes her all glorious within. The pleasant effects of the fear of the Lord spread themselves into every part of her behavior, and cannot but excite the admiration of all beholders.

John Piper: A woman who fears the Lord will not run away from God to satisfy her longings and relieve her anxieties. She will wait for the Lord. She will hope in God. She will stay close to the heart of God and trust in his promises. The prospect of departing into the way of sin will be too fearful to pursue; and the benefits of abiding in the shadow of the Almighty too glorious to forsake.
https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/a-woman-who-fears-the-lord-is-to-be-praised

2. (:31) Praised for Her Outward Good Works

"*Give her the product of her hands,*
And let her works praise her in the gates."

Richard Clifford: REB nicely catches the spirit of colon B: "*Let her achievements bring her honor at the city gates*."

Lindsay Wilson: The final verse calls on all that she has made or done (the fruit of her hand; her works) to join in this public praise (in the gates). The praise spreads in these ever-widening circles to bear testimony to the way in which her character and life display such a clear example of how to live wisely in the world.

George Mylne: She is entitled to honor; and if no tongue should give it to her, the works of charity and wisdom, which she is constantly practicing, will be a monument to her name. She is praised by all the wise who know her, and she shall have praise of God on the day when the seal shall be set to every character.

Plaut: Let all know about this kind of woman who, in piety, in devotion and with skill and diligence builds her home. Here is the foundation of society as Judaism sees it; for

in Hebrew, house and woman are often used synonymously.

Matthew Henry: Thus is shut up this **looking-glass for ladies**, which they are desired to open and dress themselves by; and, if they do so, their adorning will be found to praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Proverbs Topical Reference

Anger 1:18-19; 10:12; 11:29; 12:16; 14:17; 14:29; 15:1; 15:18; 16:14; 16:32; 17:12; 17:14; 19:11; 19:19; 22:24-25; 25:28; 27:3-4; 29:8; 29:11; 29:22; 30:33

Anger (Controlling) 12:16; 14:17; 14:29; 15:1; 15:18; 16:32; 19:11; 22:24-25; 29:11; 30:33

Anxiety / Worry 12:25; 14:30; 15:13; 15:15; 17:22; 25:20; 30:7-9

Assurance / Confidence 3:26; 14:26; 16:20; 28:25; 29:25

Authority / Leadership 8:15-16; 11:14; 16:10; 20:2; 21:1; 29:2; 29:12

Beauty 11:22; 31:30.

Blessings 10:6; 10:22; 11:25; 22:9; 28:20

Boasting 20:6; 25:14; 27:1-2

Body (Our) 3:6–8; 5:3–6; 6:10–11; 6:12–14; 6:16–19; 6:20–26; 7:1–3; 12:13–15; 14:30; 15:30; 20:27; 25:19; 31:12–13

Boldness / Courage 3:25-26; 10:9; 14:26; 28:1

Bribery / Corruption 15:27; 17:8; 17:23; 18:16; 21:14; 21:6; 22:16; 28:10

Caution / Watchfulness 1:10; 1:15; 2:11; 4:14–15; 13:16; 14:15–16; 22:3; 27:12

Charity / Generosity 3:27–28; 11:24–25; 14:21; 14:31; 19:17; 21:13; 22:9; 28:8; 28:27

Cheerfulness / Joy 12:20; 15:13; 15:15; 15:30; 17:22

Children 1:8–9; 3:1–2; 4:1–4; 10:1; 13:1; 13:24; 15:5; 17:6; 19:18; 20:11; 22:6; 22:15; 23:13–14; 29:15; 29:17

Choosing Friends 1:10–19; 2:12; 4:14; 12:26; 13:20; 14:7; 16:29; 20:19; 22:24–25; 24:1; 28:7; 29:24

Commitment / Faithfulness 3:3–4; 16:3; 20:6; 20:28; 28:20

Companionship / Friendship 17:9; 17:17; 18:24; 27:6; 27:9–10; 27:17

Contentment 15:16–17; 16:8; 17:1; 19:1; 21:17; 23:4–5; 28:6

Counsel / Advice 1:5; 11:14; 12:15; 13:10; 15:22; 19:20; 20:5; 20:18; 24:6; 27:9

Covetousness / Greed 1:19; 11:6; 15:27; 21:25–26; 22:16; 28:16; 28:25

Craftsmanship / Skill 12:24; 18:9; 22:29; 24:27; 27:18

Criticism / Correction 3:11–12; 9:7–9; 10:17; 12:1; 13:18; 15:5; 15:31–32; 17:10; 19:25; 25:12; 27:5–6; 28:23

Death / Mortality 2:18–19; 5:5; 7:27; 8:36; 10:2; 11:4; 11:19; 12:28; 14:12; 14:27; 15:24; 16:25; 21:6; 21:16; 22:23

Deceit / Lies 6:16–19; 10:18; 11:1; 11:18; 12:17–22; 13:5; 14:5; 14:25; 17:4; 19:5; 19:9; 20:17; 21:6; 26:18–19; 26:24–28

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