

PRACTICAL WISDOM IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

by Paul G. Apple, April 2005 (rev. April 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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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 *da ‘at* (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*” (*hokmā*; 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*” (*mūsār*; GK 4592; cf. **4:5**), the necessary companion of wisdom. *Mūsār* 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*” (*‘imrê 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. *qr’*, **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 scoffers. 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.

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-lives.

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 tsunami 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. (: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.

* * * * *

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.

* * * * *

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 three points; 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 fail 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*” (*tokahat*), 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 reproveth,
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 *shalom* 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.”*

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?

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.

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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.

* * * * *

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?

* * * * *

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 ACCOUNTABILITY – 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 *“captive,”* 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.

* * * * *

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.

* * * * *

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 Yourself 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 ASSUMING 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** [*'cjdcjm*], 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 modern 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 [hōrēš] wicked schemes [maḥšebôt ’āwen].”* 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.**

* * * * *

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?

* * * * *

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**) *imagination*s, 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 **defiant**. 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, blanced 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

I. (:1-11) THE CALL OF WISDOM

- A. (:1-3) Universal Accessibility – not restricted to some special elite group
“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”
- B. (:4-5) Target Audience – those who need wisdom
“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.”
- C. (:6-9) Righteous Content – True and Just and Worthwhile and Right
“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.”
- D. (:10-11) Surpassing Value
“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 OF WISDOM

- A. (:12-14) Those Exercising Good Judgment
1. (:12) Positive
 - a. *prudence*
 - b. *knowledge*
 - c. *discretion*
 2. (:13) Negative – *“to fear the Lord is to hate evil”*
 - a. *“I hate pride”*
 - b. *“and arrogance”*

c. *“evil behavior”*

d. *“and perverse speech”*

3. (:14) Positive

a. *“Counsel and sound judgment are mine”*

b. *“I have understanding and power”*

B. (: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.”

C. (:17) Those Loving and Seeking Wisdom

“I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.”

D. (: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.”

III. (:22-31) THE CO-EXISTENCE OF WISDOM WITH THE CREATIVE ACTIVITY OF GOD – THE LEGACY OF WISDOM

A. (:22-23) Co-Existence from Eternity Past

“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.”

B. (:24-26) Co-Existence from before the Creation of Waters and Earth

“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.”

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.”

IV. (:32-36) THE CAUTION OF WISDOM – BLESSING VS CURSING

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.”

* * * * *

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:

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.

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).

Kidner: A chapter which is to soar beyond time and space, opens at street-level, to make it clear, first, that the wisdom of God is as relevant to the shopping-center (2,3) as to heaven itself (22); second, that it is available to the veriest dunce (5; cf. 1:20-33, especially 22); third, that it is active in seeking us – so that our own search, earnest as it has to be (17, 34), is a response, not an uncertain quest.

Goldberg: Re vs. 22

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.

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

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.”

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.

2. Sumptuous Feast

“She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table.”

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.”

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

DECISIONS LEAD TO DESTINIES -- **Goldberg**

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”

- 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.”

Bridges: *Wisdom’s* messengers must discriminate in the proclamation of their message. If the *simple* welcome it, the *scorner and wicked* will rebel.

- 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.”
- 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.”

**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

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.”

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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?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Goldberg: (Re 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."

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.

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.

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