

PROVERBS

Principles to live by.

Thoughts come from a wide variety of sources. Some from messages I have heard from individuals, some from assemblies Bible studies, some from home life and some from books I have read. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher who makes them real to me.

- "What the Bible Teaches, Proverbs." by A.J. Higgins. John Ritchie Ltd.
- "The Life Application Bible." Tyndale House and Zondervan
- "Proverbs, a devotional commentary." By William MacDonald. Gospel Folio Press

David, who wrote many of the psalms, was a very intense man who lived in danger of one kind or another for much of his life. The highs and lows of his soul and spirit are reflected in his writing. He was a valiant soldier on the field of battle, and benevolent king who truly cared for his people, and a man who loved His Lord. But he seemed to have a restless spirit when there were no challenges facing him. Yet, this man had the heart of a poet and song-writer. Perhaps it was because of his courage and vision as well as his willingness to express his inner person in passionate love for the Lord, that he was called by God, "a man after Mine own heart."

The Lord is strong and mighty in battle over His enemies, sin and the devil. He defeated them all – even death. But there is another side to our Lord that is so wonderful. His love surpassed all other loves of mankind, nations or any other kind of love. His grace is beyond measure, from the gracious words of His mouth to His multiplied actions of grace given when grace is needed. How wonderfully human our Lord Jesus Christ was when He lived here among men. How glorious is His divine nature that is infinite in all its ways!

David seemed to be of a "kindred spirit" with our Lord in his way of thinking, acting and doing. How I would like to have such a unique relationship with my Lord! But He knows who I am and what I am capable of doing, and what He is able to entrust to me and share with me.

Solomon, David's son, was a very different man than his father. He seemed to have been a quiet reflective person who took a lot of time to think and meditate. As long as thinking and meditating are on the right things, they are good. It is when a person like that gets sidetracked by what is going on around him in the world, and in the lives of other people, and starts to look at things through their eyes, and takes actions like they do, that trouble comes. Our thoughts and actions must be guided and controlled by the word of God.

The wisdom of Solomon did not come from his reflective personality nor from his meditation. He knew his own limitations, and knew from his meditations, that he was lacking the ability and intellect to lead the nation as it should be led. He had learned enough about himself and God, to know his greatest need was God in his life. Any wise person knows their limitations and has sense enough to admit their need of help for others, and especially from God. Even so, Solomon was God's chosen man. God had plainly pointed him out as the next king. But he was incapable of doing what was needed without divine guidance and understanding that was beyond him.

How that humble man must have pleased God! So, God gave him what he asked and needed – and then gave him much more. We too have obstacles that are too difficult to overcome in our own strength. When we lack wisdom, we need to "ask of God," and He gives from His abundance what we need.

It is from this man who had a godly heritage, and a sense of his own need, that the principles for living in the way God intends, and appropriate conduct in the many areas of life with common sense, come to us in the book of Proverbs. His father prayed for Solomon. That would have surely left an impact on him. David taught him with godly counsel, so that now in his new role as king, he has been somewhat prepared. But He needed more, He needed God and the wisdom of God.

As a result of our parentage, we hopefully learn certain things that can help us in life. When we are in fellowship with God, we learn from Him. He can use what we have been taught by parents and other wise people for our benefit. God's favor toward us, like in the case of Solomon, added to what we have been taught, and then the learning received from our own life-experiences, equips us to live by the principles given in the book of Proverbs. It is one thing to have knowledge, that is to know facts, but it quite different to have wisdom to know what to do with the facts.

Without wisdom, knowledge is useless. This book of Proverbs is a great assist in learning how to live out daily what we know to be true.

God wants us to be wise. When we choose to do what He wants, He will give us the wisdom to do it. The word of God in the Bible gives us all the information we need to live right, form the right relationships and make the right decisions. May we always appreciate those who taught us right when we were young. May we always apply the truth and wisdom of God to the situations we face in our busy lives as adults. May those of us who are older, be willing to take the time to pass on to others, that which we have learned and experienced, at least to those who want to hear. May we learn the lessons of this book and apply the principles that are needed to live “a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty.”

The Proverbs then, gives us a verbal portrait of the wise man. In his character, he is teachable, not a know-it-all. In his daily living, he is committed to righteousness because he fears the Lord. In his nature he is humble, not a proud man who considers himself better than others. He is temperate, not touchy. He has a calm spirit, and though he may be cautious, he moves ahead. With care, he thinks before he acts or speaks. He is not a vindictive person, but knows how to forgive, and is willing to. He is patient, and a person who wants the best for others.

He is committed to the relationships he is in. He values the relationship he has with the Lord, with his/her spouse and with his family, friends and neighbors. His words can be counted on because they are honest and trustworthy. He knows the power and character of his words, and the fact that words can be a great help or cause great hurt. What he has to say is not superficial trivia, but from his heart with careful reflection, he is committed to speaking the truth. These subjects and more are addressed in the book of Proverbs. So, in a general way, we are looking at the book more from a devotional view rather than getting a message from each verse or phrase. Others have done that with great intellectual skill. The point of this is to reach the heart, so that in open devotion to the Lord, we practice these principles of living and experience the joy of doing things God's way.

Proverbs 1:1-7

STATED PURPOSES

The book of Proverbs is written in condensed language with terse sentences with pointed comments. In order to get the most out of the proverbs it is probably best to read them out loud. There are not a lot of places in the proverbs for contextual reading, because it is really a gathering of pithy sayings to be considered one at a time. There quite a number of different subjects that are not dealt with all at one time. For instance, a comment may be made about morality in one place and not picked up again until another place in the book. Different subjects are picked up and perhaps connected with other subjects, so that time and again, throughout the whole collection of proverbs, we learn how one subject adapts to another in various ways, or how one principle in life has an effect on others.

Wisdom, morality, integrity, righteous living and mercy are dealt with in a variety of ways with the light of truth shining on them from different perspectives. Sometimes they are spoken of in contrasts; other times in similarities. The value of this is for our learning how to apply the truth of God and common sense to the many challenges of life.

Because of the wisdom of Solomon, and the prosperity of the nation of Israel under his reign, one of the things on the “bucket list” of many people in the Middle East, was to visit Jerusalem to see the wonders of the city and the building that Solomon erected there. This king who started out as a simple, retiring and perhaps, fearful young man, became the most popular leader in the Middle East.

Right in the middle of the Old Testament, there are five books that deal with the personal issues of life, rather than the unfolding of history, or the teaching of doctrines and prophecies that were incorporated in the lives of the Jews. Job through Song of Solomon all have very personal and social subjects like pain and suffering, rejection and acceptance, right and wrong, love and hate. Many similar issues that face life in society are referred to, and addressed directly, by those who the Spirit of God moved to open their hearts to scrutiny. Society is only as good as those who live in that place. Wisdom is needed to know how to be content when there are times of trouble or peace. We need wisdom to know how to live with people personally, or how to avoid those that would lead us astray. In the middle of all these subjects are the proverbs to help us act right in our personal, family, and assembly life, and how to conduct ourselves as believers in an ungodly society.

The first seven verses introduce us to Solomon who wrote most of the Proverbs, and to give us the purpose of writing them. We can read about him in the books of Kings and Chronicles in historical context. He had learned much from his father David, the hero-king of Israel. From David he would have learned what to do and not to do. What he should

know as a ruler and how to conduct himself as a leader of people. By the time of the writing of the book of Proverbs, he would have lived long enough to gain insight into life and how to live it, evil and how to avoid it, sin and the consequences of it, responsibility and how to exercise it, wisdom and how to pass it on. The people of God in every generation need instructions for living life as God intends. Proverbs give us access to that knowledge.

We begin life like Solomon, as learners. In passing on what he had learned, he became a teacher, and so should people who are parents and mature believers in every generation. Social mores change very quickly in our day, but the truth contained in the scriptures, including the Proverbs does not change. Solomon knew the people he was teaching. Because of human limitations of intellect, patience and wisdom, the proverbs are written down in short, precise statements. There are five reasons for the Proverbs to be written down. Verse one and two: to give reverence and obedience to the heart. Verse two: to provide discernment to the eyes. Verse three: to develop alertness in the walk. Verse four: to establish discretion and purpose in life. Verses five and six: to cultivate keenness of mind.

Solomon had received instruction from his father, and as a humble young man, had received wisdom from God. People need to know how to process what they have heard until they really understand the words and how to apply the principles personally. To hear something may only be briefly remembered and not too often lead to appropriate changes. Classrooms are full of people who listen to teachers. Understanding comes when we practice what we hear and see the outcome. We may learn what is right in a general sense, but we need wisdom to apply what we know with fairness and justness. Wisdom and instruction give us the information. Judgment and equity provide the sense of how to adapt what we know to life-situations.

It is necessary to have the right attitude in ourselves to take advantage of what we have learned, and to how and where to apply that knowledge. To know what is right and how to apply it is good. But the way to apply that to a given situation, and the attitude in which that is passed on is what makes that action accepted by the learners. Learning and counsel established in our minds, gives purpose to living. The concisely stated proverbs, plainly give some principle of living that is needed. The "dark sayings," are riddles that need to be solved. In the book of Proverbs, some principles are taught by getting the reader to solve a puzzle or a riddle. That thought process makes the answer real to us, and hopefully, personal, so that the principle is applied.

The whole outcome of knowing the proverbs is "the fear of the Lord." When that respectful reverence for the Lord is present, then it is possible for that person to live with others peacefully and happily. Dogmatic know-it-alls are very annoying people to be around. They may know a lot, but who they are and how they present themselves, have a tendency to make us reject what they say as soon as they say it.

If a person responds to the Lord with reverence and obedience to God, they are starting down the path, the good path, of wisdom. If they are closed in mind to what the scriptures say because it is new to them, or if they resent discipline and will not heed what is taught, they are a fool. That contrast is made many times in the book of Proverbs. Knowledge is plentiful today, but wisdom is scarce.

The fear of the Lord moves a person to trust Him for salvation and surrender our will and life to him. Then we will be committed to obeying His word and worshipping the Father in spirit and truth. Lest we bring dishonor on our Lord and His name, one who fears the Lord will choose to live godly and pray earnestly. That is the purpose of the book of proverbs which is stated in verse seven.

Proverbs 1:2-4. *"To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment and equity; to give subtility to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion."*

RECEIVE THE INSTRUCTION.

*To my heart God speaks, as a father to his son –
To teach to me the value of obedience from the heart.
It's never enough to pretend to myself or anyone,
That I am obeying, if I don't intend to from the start.
Reverence for my teacher, my father and my God,
Is expected, when my heart, toward each of them, is moved.
I learn wisdom from their truth, as I listen to their words;
And then apply to my life, all that I have understood.*

*To my eyes comes from the words, of each of my instructors,
Information I will need when decisions I must make.*

*Discernment from the Proverbs may include some corrections.
I will not repeat the wrongs, when their instructions I will take.
To look into the future, and carefully plan ahead,
To my eyes of understanding of judgment and what's fair;
I need to assimilate and be willing to be led,
By those plain teachings that from my instructors I will hear.*

*In my daily walk of life, from those who've gone ahead,
I am taught that all I see, is not really all that's there.
I need to always keep alert, paying attention to all that's said,
Remembering all I have learned, and speaking words with care.
Deceptive words and people, will simple men surround.
Developing an alertness is the only way to walk;
The Proverbs that I've learned, in my ears will ever sound.
The steps in life that I will take, will stop the gossips' talk,*

*In my life, a purpose and discretion will play a role.
I must establish this great trait, if my life fulfills its reason.
A purpose thus should be defined, that's formed within my soul,
That I can stand against the winds in temptation's stormy season.
Disorientation quickly comes, when I look in the wrong direction.
The Proverbs that I read, keep me focused on the goal.
Far too often I have seen, those I know in a situation,
That leaves them wrecked and ruined, on temptation's awful shoal.*

*To my mind there needs to be a keenness cultivated,
That will easily make decisions, when choices before me lie.
Which one is right and which is wrong, when each is plainly stated;
Depends on what I've learned, when the truth I chose to buy.
My mind takes in a multitude of impressions every day,
That must be clearly sorted as the Proverbs I apply.
A carefully nurtured mind, has a keenness that displays
A son learned from his Father – on His wisdom he relies.*

*"Father in heaven, from this book of sayings and instructions, I learn the value of living a common, ordinary life in an effective way.
Give me the needed grace to apply all that I learn from these lines in a common-sense way – today and every day. In the name of the
Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."*

Proverbs 1:8-32

CONTRASTS, CONCLUSIONS, COMPARISONS

(contrasts - "but;" concluding – "and;" comparisons – "so.")

The introduction to Solomon and the purpose of writing the book opens the door to wise sayings that compare wisdom as a parent with an evil woman personifying all that seeks to trip up, stumble and bring down a young person. "The fear of the Lord" is a most suitable beginning to the whole subject of principles to apply to daily living. Parental guidance is the next tier of authority and guidance to young people. Parents do not only have the experience of having lived longer than their children, but they also have an emotional attachment to their children that no group of friends or cadre of secular instructors in schools and universities have.

When children are little they learn daily from their parents and don't even realize that fact. Personality and bents are easily recognized by mothers and fathers who should guide each child "in the way he should go." Educators often have their own personal template that they try to impose on students, and unfortunately many governments support the teachers and undermine wise parental guidance. Moral character is passed on in homes, not in laws. The moral character of wisdom is personified as a father and mother who pass on to their offspring their own learned wisdom and resulting honor.

But then comes the problem of peer pressure from those who do not have the character traits of wisdom. After a child reaches a certain age, often between twelve and twenty, they resist parental guidance and authority to the point of resentment against those who truly love them. Enticement by others who have already been practitioners of open sin

and its fleeting pleasures, becomes an absorbing temptation. The tantalizing attractions of walking close to the edge of the law and morality claims the young person's thoughts at night and then they try gradually to practice them in the day. Linked with that is the pressure to be accepted by peers rather than follow the parental guidance of wisdom. Instead of thinking about the consequences of bad choices, they look for the thrill and false promises of lawbreakers. The desire to be like those of their own age, and to do the things they do, ignores the inevitable results of deliberate sin.

Wisdom calls again with an urgent appeal, giving warning that they are getting close to the place of no return if the course which they are following continues. Getting close to capital crimes for some reason appeals to the sinful nature of people. They want to try one step across the boundary of morality to see whether they can get away with it and avoid the consequences. The society in which they want to live believes that one murder of an innocent unborn child doesn't make a person a murderer. Or one act of sexual congress with a person to whom they have made no legal vows, doesn't make them immoral. The craving for excitement and lust is life-threatening, but they are convinced it will bring some form of satisfaction. So, they take the action and live with the regrets of an awakened conscience they had ignored, and live their whole life from then on with a sense of guilt. Those who are greedy for that which is not their right to have, destroy their lives and that of others around them, or at least impose on themselves an unhappiness inside that will not leave.

From verse twenty to the end of the chapter, there are urgent warnings from wisdom speaking as an honorable woman calling out public warnings to the whole group of people who are like a gang of young people challenging each other to go a step farther on the downward course. Wisdom invites them to listen to wise counsel, but even though they are warned and entreated, they refuse to repent and go in the right way that is opened before them. Wisdom rebukes unteachable fools again and again, but to no avail. So, a solemn warning is given.

Wisdom will always have the last word. Payday is coming. Calamity cannot be avoided. When one listens to the counsel of wisdom and obeys, there is deliverance, but distress and anguish will inevitably be brought on one's self who will not listen. The laughter of wisdom is not humorous, but a grieved reaction to open rejection. Righteousness will be vindicated, and sadly the resulting fall of one who rejects the counsel of wisdom, which is personified in our Lord Jesus Christ, will bring suffering, trouble and desperation from which there will be no escape. Calls of regret will be too late and will not be answered. Such calls after the consequences of sin comes, will all be futile.

Those who hate or reject common sense, knowledge and the fear of the Lord, are losers. To reject sound advice and wise correction from wisdom, no matter which parent or concerned person gives it, will leave a foolish person in a hopeless condition. Wrong choices bring bad results. Consequences suitable to the choices made, will always come. The outcome of rebellion, stubbornness and the rejection of wisdom is death and damnation. Fools could have had peace and could have lived in safety and security. They could have had meaningful lives. Fools are not mentally deficient; they are morally deficient.

Faith in God is a fundamental principle for effective living, for understanding the times and having a right attitude toward life, people and God. It enables one to live in an honorable and wise way. We learn from the people at home first, but also people around us should be able to discern our values, moral standards and priorities by watching our conduct and listening to the way we speak. Reverence and respect for God are not just evident in our words, but are also demonstrated in our actions.

The attractiveness of sin is often based on what is popular to people in this place and time. Even though we know fads do not last, they are attractive because that is what the majority of people want to do. The media and advertising that we see on every hand, is calculated to make us discontent, so we will buy what others are buying and do what others are doing. For a believer in Christ to adapt to what is wrong, he or she will be negatively affected very quickly. Financial or personal gain from short-cuts is a trap to one's soul and life. Wrongful gain leads to more covetousness and a habitual determination to get more.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is made to us "our wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." His wisdom is offered to us but not forced on us. We as children of God make choices and eat the "fruit" of our choices the same as those who are not believers in Him. Taking heed to advice will preserves us from pain in the present, and for unbelievers, rejection by God in the future.

Proverbs 2

THE VALUE OF WISDOM

It is interesting that in the first seven chapters of Proverbs, the writer speaks specifically to "my son," indicating that what he was saying was emotionally important to him as well as to his son. A personal heart to heart talk often makes what is said a treasure to remember later, especially if what was said was received gratefully. Wisdom in this chapter

is for us, the word of God. It is never to be taken lightly nor should it ever be ignored or considered irrelevant to our present day. To get wisdom one has to go after it. Wisdom comes in at least two ways. One, it is a God-given gift to those who are humble, and another is it is found after an energetic search in the word of God. Earnest prayer, and a desire for understanding go together in seeking for wisdom. We need to make understanding the word of God a goal.

To seek for wisdom is not a casual look here and there in the scriptures for a quick answer to a question. It is an earnest and consistent search for that which is of great value. Hidden truth is not obscure, but it is truth that reaches beyond what is obvious or on the surface of a subject. To find true meaning of a passage of scripture requires careful thought, meditation, comparison with other scriptures, questions, consolidation of information and review. A person who is seriously wanting wisdom will be anxious enough to search for it, and humble enough for God to trust him or her with it.

It is the Lord who gives wisdom that can be understood, articulated and then passed on as knowledge to benefit others as well as ourselves. The qualifying principle necessary for wisdom to be given to a person is to live a godly life, in which fairness is evident in our relationship with other people publicly and also in private. Wisdom from God protects people and promotes justice. It also preserves those who have been willing to receive it from going down wrong roads in life that seem attractive, but they lead away from God.

When we know God and learn from Him, He gives the needed wisdom to those who trust and honor Him. The scriptures of truth reveal the wisdom of God to us so that we make the right decisions and choices, and avoid the snares of the world, the flesh and the devil. If and when we make wrong choices, wisdom gives us the ability to learn from that which we have done that is wrong.

The second part of this chapter begins at verse ten pointing out the search for wisdom will open our minds and hearts to gaining the insight we need. That insight will keep us from pitfalls and will give us the guidance we need, and common sense that can be appropriately applied to any situation. It then follows that because wisdom is desired, sought for, and accepted, a person will be preserved from following evil people whose speech is unclean and whose lifestyle promotes vulgar conversations, suggestive stories and unclean humor, as well as "speaking evil of dignities." Such people choose the shady and dark side of life. They love darkness and want to live in it.

Those who break laws and try to profit from illegal practices, seem to get a feeling of power and accomplishment when they get away with crimes and are able to get others to do the same. In depraved minds and lifestyle, they find nothing to keep them from doing that which is legally and morally wrong. But it is not only ungodly companions who desire to do wrong that wisdom (the word of God) warns against. There is also sexual temptation. Pride in thinking one is getting away with sin appeals to empty heads. Immoral sexual activity appeals to empty hearts. Wisdom preserves our heads, and love preserves our hearts.

An immoral woman wants her own way, and she also wants to control others, particularly men, who think they are stronger than she. Her immoral strength is stronger than a strong man's common sense if he does not have divinely imparted wisdom. The practice of sexual immorality is common among those who are not children of God. To lose one's virginity in a way that is not divinely approved, is to lose something valuable that can never be recovered.

The wise father warns his son, and urges him to live a righteous and pure life until he is married. Those who are upright in life, and moral in words and deeds, will live in the place God intends, doing what He wants, and enjoying it throughout an abundant life. To obey God and listen to wisdom is always best and opens the way to blessings in this life and in the future. By contrast, those who practice evil, who do not tell the truth and are unfaithful to their spouse, will perish, rather than have a place of blessing.

Covenants made and kept are a wonderful blessing, but when they are broken, there are irreversible consequences whether they are made with God, in business life or with one's spouse. The description of those who desire and follow the path of wisdom, and those who do not yield to the temptation of personal gratification, is that they are good in conduct and practice; righteous in dealing with others; and upright in the sense of being trustworthy. They are perfect in their loyalty and mature in commitment to that which is of God.

Proverbs 2:5, 9. *"Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God... Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path."*

THEN.

*Words heard – commandments hidden – remaining undiscovered: and wisdom waits.
The voice is silent – bland eyes wander uselessly – feet remain unmoved: and wisdom waits.
A Father's voice sounds in the silent air – the call is personal, "My son:" and wisdom stirs.
A heart is moved, and from it, the spiritual body parts awaken: and wisdom readies itself.*

*The words spoken and read are received – the commandments hidden inside: and wisdom begins.
A voice is heard, asking for information – a voice cries loudly – insistent, “I want to know!”, and wisdom answers.
The eyes are focused now – a goal is sighted – searching eyes are looking for every clue: and wisdom comes to light.
Feet and eyes are coordinated – the search is on – unstoppable – unrelenting – “I need this treasure.”:
And wisdom is given.*

*Understanding comes revealing its starting point – God Himself – His revealed Word: wisdom in a Person.
Reverential respect opens the door – wisdom enters and alongside it comes understanding: the fear of the Lord is the beginning of
wisdom.*

*What has been looked for is now able to be found – not just information: God Himself is wisdom.
The knowledge of God – I know Him – I learn from him – I love Him – I have found Him: and I have found wisdom.*

*Which way is right and which is wrong? How can I start if I don't know what is the end? questions – and wisdom is in the wings.
What is right and what is wrong? How can I discern the solution? more questions – and wisdom is silent.
Which decision is fair and which is unfair? How can I decide which motive is right? still more questions – and still wisdom is not
moved.
Where will this path end? Is this the road to the right goal? questions, questions, questions – and wisdom does not move.*

*Until in faith the acts of righteousness are carried out – then wisdom affirms the action.
Until the right decision is made with God's principles of judgment – then wisdom accepts the judgment.
Until the fairness and charity with impartiality is evident and reached – then wisdom applies its decision.
Until the good path is entered and walked and traveled experimentally – then wisdom acknowledges its goals.*

*“I am afraid, O Father God, that often I wait when I should walk; wonder with questions when I should work, I am learning from
these simple words of Proverbs that life doesn't need to be complicated; just lived in the light of Thy Word. Amen.”*

Proverbs 3

OBEDY SOUND GUIDANCE

Actions and attitudes reveal our character. Character reveals what we really are. In this chapter, the collection of proverbs has a lot to do with character and how it is formed. Things that we learn from the training our parents gave us, have a tendency to stay with us for life. Hopefully they are good things, and when they come from God's word, we know they are. Love and faithfulness go together. When we learn how to choose love, then we will have ample opportunity to faithfully obey the Lord and respond to the needs to which He directs us. Loyalty and responsibility have a link in that when it is clear to what and who we owe our allegiance, we will choose to act responsibly to whatever wisdom directs. Truth and obedience also are tied in that when I know what is right according to the word of God, He gives me the wisdom to obey His command.

This chapter begins with fatherly advice, “my law,” that has the weight of a command from God. This plea for a son to pay attention is like the promises in the 5th commandment: “honor thy father and thy mother...” This is the first commandment with a promise attached, and expects obedience to parental guidance and purity of life to be a choice and a commitment. When such commandments are given, they are there to guide every decision and action we make. It is to be expected that we do this all the time with lovingkindness and honesty. Obedience to God and a good reputation before people is no accident, but rather a response to wisdom that comes from God to us through channels of His choosing.

Verses five and six give us the biblical approach to living an effective and good life. There is a great contrast between human wisdom and wisdom from God. Trust in the heart is more than an emotional response to a person but it includes our intellect and our own will. To “lean” is to put full confidence weight and trust on something or someone. Whole-hearted trust in the Lord leads to whole-hearted commitment to Him. To believe in Him and confess Him is how we can give first place to God. Then we learn from Him and learn how to walk with Him. We speak directly to Him when we pray and get advice from Him through His word. Wise spiritual leaders also can confirm to us those things they know to be applicable to our decision making. By the word of God, prayer, and counsel are ways we acknowledge Him. Our own understanding cannot do this for us. Only the Lord can: and we can, and must, trust in Him.

When we know what His will is, then He will “direct” us, or make straight the way before us. He then enables us to go forward in confidence. When guidance is confirmed, then we need to wait patiently for the assurance that the time has come to act on what we know, and then act on the guidance we have received and not wait any longer. There is

no reason for us to think we did it on our own, so there is no reason for conceit on our part, but simply to be obedient to the Lord and submissive to His divine directions. There is a definite link between our emotions and our physical well-being when we are able to confidently go forward even into, and through, hard times.

The Lord does make us to prosper sometimes, and it is then we may have a temptation to hoard what we have been given in preparation for a "rainy day." No matter what we are allowed to have, the "first-fruits" belong to the Lord. Then we should manage our finances wisely as God prospers us. In this day of the church, we lay aside a proportion of what God has "prospered" us with, and on the first day of the week, we give it as a spiritual sacrifice. The "new wine" is the juice just pressed from fresh grapes, and is a reference to the spiritual blessings we receive from God. The new birth, of a new creation, who is given a new nature to enable a new life to be lived for the Lord are just a few of the spiritual blessings we have received. The way we handle what God allows us to have or go through, reveals who we really are. The more we give the more is given to us.

There is a difference between a "tongue lashing" and verbal correction. Chastening is to correct wrong behavior and is to be consistent with the grievance committed. Correction and motivation go together. Appropriate correction should motivate a son to not do what is wrong again, but to know what is right and be committed to do it. Counsel and encouragement go well together. Wise counsel that is given in wisdom can be a great encouragement to make the necessary changes needed in life. There are times when a rebuke is needed for learning to take place. By firmly pointing out what is wrong, a son will be inclined to learn from his mistakes and not do that again. It is normal for a person to resist authority because we were born with a rebellious nature. Fathers will have to be patient and firm because training takes time. There are at least six forms of correction given in the New Testament, one of which can be applied to provide appropriate correction. Discipline is both learned in teaching and training. This enable us to do what normally we wouldn't or couldn't.

Benefits from correction are wisdom and understanding are gained. Long life is a general principle relating to honoring parents rather than an unchanging fact. There is profit, "merchandise," and value that is not able to be measure in money or treasure, but can be seen in evidence of increasing Christ-likeness. "Rubies" have to do with the knowledge of the Lord that opens up to us the way to a good and a full life for one who chooses to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Spiritual riches far exceed anything a person can get from the world. Wisdom found in our Lord Jesus far surpasses all other pleasures and gives us peace within. Wisdom, like the "tree of life" in the garden of Eden of which the angel was sent to guard, brings happiness when we daily live out our eternal life. Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil rather than the tree of life.

Divine wisdom is revealed in countless ways in the creation when the Lord "founded the earth." Visibly there is majesty, beauty, glory that moves the believing child of God to give honor to Him. There are unseen vistas in His creation that cannot even be seen by either a telescope or a microscope. Even the wonder of the millions of tons of water above us that protects us, the water that covers the largest portion of earth, or even the water that makes up the majority of our bodies, opens to our limited understanding some of the wonders of our Great God. When we keep even the limited amount of what we have learned as a source of our understanding and decision making, we will find ourselves living in harmony with our Lord. Discernment is the God-given ability to make correct choices. Judgment is how we apply those choices to life situations. By wise decisions and godly living, we can be kept safe from being tripped up and falling into sin. Faith in God, and confidence that we have made the right choices, takes care of anxiety and fear, even in troubled times.

When trust in God is real, and we are assured in our obedience that this is right, there is no need of second-guessing or fear. Real fellowship with the Lord is our best protection from any evil plots that are calculated by our enemy to bring us down. Confidence in God no matter what is happening around us, allows us to live a "quiet and peaceful life" ourselves in spite of turmoil, strife and even war going on around us.

Wisdom also instructs us to pay what we owe others when it is due, and do it on time. Holding back what needs to be given is unfair and inconsiderate. Take positive action when you have an opportunity to do good. When something needs to be done and you can do it, do it now, don't wait for a more convenient time. To procrastinate may mean a lost opportunity which may never come again. Do what you can for neighbors without expecting anything back. The time may come when they will be inclined to help you in time of your need. Don't argue with people about trivial things or just for the sake of arguing to win over some antagonist. Commit to living peaceably even though a person you deal with may be a bully or shrewd in business. Such a person is not one to envy. Such a person may be "forward," which is another way to say they are crooked, a transgressor, one who deliberate rejects what is right. That is what apostasy is. The Lord knows who he is, but in contrast He shows Himself to be full of grace toward a righteous person and will guide them.

It is a fearful thing when God passes a legal curse on a wicked person and their family. It is a blessing when He shows favor to those who are fair to others and just in their dealings with others. God will deride the wicked and

arrogant. Those who show contempt to Him and those who love Him, will be objects of divine contempt. People who act wisely, obey and trust God, will be honored by God. Fools on the other hand, will be made ashamed and will be dishonored, disgraced, denied and demeaned.

Proverbs 3:3-4. *“Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: so shalt thou find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man.”*

THINGS THAT GO TOGETHER.

*Mercy and truth are linked together by God, for both have Him as their Source.
They are given to the person who walks with the Lord, and His paths are always his choice.
These two will preserve him from foes all around, and shall go before him preparing his way.
Tied tight about the neck of him who has found, they met together when sin's price Christ did pay.*

*Wisdom makes clear what has to be done, when God calls us to serve with our heart.
Understanding tells how the willing one, can further a work when he has made a good start.
Wisdom exceeding what's normal to us, gives the counsel that each willing one hears.
Understanding a matter and what applies, brings to conclusion the charge that we bear.*

*The heart and mind of a woman or man, are both involved in our service for God.
The trembling of heart and the strength of the mind, are moved by our love for the Lord.
The faithful priest with lifted, clean hands; moves with reverence into the Holiest of all.
With a heart full of love and clear mind, he stands; knowing this is where his Master has called.*

*Grace and humility are another pair, that are matched because God put them together.
The one given by God, is willing to share – for genuine humility in man is the other.
Grace is unearned, and humility knows – it cannot claim a reason for grace to be given.
Humility, when bowed to the earth clearly shows, it knows grace finds its origin in heaven.*

*Honor and blessing all go to the Lamb, for it is He who has provided these pairs.
Some things there are we will not understand, but each of these things truly share,
The stamp of divinity, the heavenly Source, that is linked here on earth to mere man.
May I firmly lay hold of, and make these my choice, and by this means honor the Lamb.*

“Father in heaven, I bow my head and neck to place mercy and truth tightly in place. I know I have to tie the final knot to keep these in position that I will not act without their consideration. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Proverbs 4

A SATISFIED LIFE

We need to have clear boundaries for our lives in order to have an abundant life and escape the latent dangers in life that are all around us. When we pay attention to those who care most for us, then we can experience contentment in life even when everything in the world seems to be coming apart socially, morally and spiritually. The words in this chapter are similar to the previous chapters except for the fact that here it is an earthly father who is transmitting truth to his son. The Lord is not mentioned in this chapter even though we can see His influence in every comment the father makes. As an earthly father, I am responsible to my children and my God to make sure I have taught truth for living and the truth of salvation in an understandable way. Hopefully our children will be willing to accept what we say as the truth of God. The best time to start teaching truth is as soon as they are born. More than half of what a person will learn in life they will have learned by the age of ten.

The first nine verses begin with the father calling to his children to “Listen to your father, and you will enjoy abundant life.” The teaching he gave to his son he learned from his father. Solomon was taught positive teaching by his parents from an early age. Our young children are like sponges that gather information even when it doesn't seem like they are paying attention to us. Each generation is responsible to pass on to the next generation the fundamental truths they were taught by the generation before them, who were taught by the generation before them.

“Good doctrine” is good teaching that covers all aspects of life and the practice of right living. As parents we have the privilege of speaking for God to our children if we know the Lord. Young children who do not have believing parents are deprived of one of the most fundamental necessities of life. Probably even worse is Christian parents who don't take the time to give instruction from their own Christian life, or at least from the Bible. Bible-reading with the family and audible prayers are likely the best way to give impressionable children a good start in life. They may not get

much at one time, but when words from God in that Holy Bible are read and explained, the Holy Spirit of God can take it from there and reveal it to young minds at the right time.

Both parents are involved when their children are at a young age, “my father’s son, tender and beloved in the sight of my mother.” It is important that we urge our young people to spare no effort to get what wisdom teaches them through parental guidance and then to guard what they have been taught, and obey it consistently. If we as adults go after wisdom, then we can expect our children to do the same and hopefully they will not forget what they learned. We should never be careless with truth that we have learned. Our sons and daughters need to know and practice what they have been taught and they will not be disgraced.

Wisdom is the starting point, so they must be taught to go after wisdom with the same urgency we have to seek the Lord. “Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.” “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found...” Esteem wisdom and you will be promoted by wisdom before those who know you. Honor wisdom and wisdom will honor you. Faithfulness to wisdom, personified in our Lord Jesus Christ, will be rewarded. Your reputation will be respected. Your character will be enhanced. Your integrity will be such that you will be trusted by people now in this lifetime, let alone the future reward that comes from God. We must pass on the legacy of wisdom to our children that we learned from those who passed it on to us.

The next ten verses urge the son to “Listen to your father, and you will escape the dangers in life.” When a son obeys his parents, and applies what he has learned from them, he will avoid things that shorten life. Honoring parents is more than just taking your hat off or saying, “Yes.” It is following the training his father gave who “led” him in right paths. In other words, the father practiced what he taught. That involves being consistent in what we teach and do as well as being humble in the practice of everyday life. If a person does what they have learned from good teachers, they will not fail in their work and will not stumble when they are under pressure to conform to those around them. When you make what you have learned to be right, your own commitment, you will live a full and safe life. Hold what you have learned, and don’t drop your guard.

We are in the world but not of the world. We can be friendly without compromising our convictions and commitments. We should be gracious in words and actions without a sense of pride or arrogance. It is possible to love people, including those who oppose us, without surrendering any principles by which children of God are to live. Truthfulness without deceit is not obnoxious, and it generates respect. Separation from evil and those who want to do what is wrong is very important. Some things we are not to go near, let alone touch. The word to the son is to “enter not,” don’t even try the door of the wicked. Don’t even go by the place to see what is going on, even though you keep your distance. Avoid the temptation of doing what others do by going a different way. Make sure you don’t pass by the door of temptation, turn your head the other way from what is wrong and keep your distance as far as possible from things you know do not please God. Stay off the road that leads to such a place of temptation.

Wicked people want to do evil. That is their life. They plan for doing evil, and they prepare themselves to carry out their plans because they really like to do evil and enjoy what is evil. Evil living becomes a habit and then an addiction to those who go back again and again to what they know is wrong. It becomes like food and drink to them. They need it to sustain life as they know it. We can care for people and their immortal souls, but we need to still be skeptical about their behavior and not join in with what they want us to do with them.

The contrast between the wicked and the just is like day and night. Those who are not saved and refuse to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, “love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.” On the other hand, we are called upon to “walk in the light, as He is in the light, and we have fellowship one with another,” with those who are like precious faith and with our Lord Himself. For those who walk the path of “the just,” that which is fair, honorable and true, there is light that continues to show the right way before us, and through us to others. Keep doing that which is right and just, and your testimony will be brighter and brighter as your walk of faith progresses. In contrast, the path of the wicked gets darker and darker as they fall over and over again.

The last eight verses of this chapter, for the third time is the call of a parent to the son to “Listen to your father, and you will experience contentment in life.” The father is basically saying, pay attention to what I have told you and apply it to yourself. Don’t forget the advice I am passing on to you from my own experience, and this is from my heart. What he had to say to his son was good for him spiritually and physically.

What our mind feeds on is what we will actually become, and will characterize our lives. Therefore, it is very important for us to guard what we allow ourselves to think about, let alone do. Never speak dishonestly. Never try to deceive people or even to mislead them by the way we speak. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,” our Lord Jesus said to those who were critical of Him. Whatever is in us is what will come out in our speech if we do not guard our tongues.

There are a lot of things that attract our eyes, and much of it can pollute our minds. I need to think about what I am going to read or look at on a TV or a computer before I even start to open them up. Our eyes are one of the entrances to our soul and what goes in, is indelibly impressed on our brains, and can come back to bite us or even ruin us. We need to consecrate everything to that which is of God, and not be led astray by those visible things that attract us and make us dissatisfied.

Our feet have an inclination to go the wrong way if we are not being constantly guided by the word of God and biblical principles of living. I should never go anywhere I could not take my Lord if He were here with me in His physical presence. I should never be comfortable where known sin is going on, nor should I let anything tempt me to leave the paths of righteousness and a pure and decent life. We need clear boundaries for our lives that will keep us from going after all we see. I should never allow myself to get sidetracked.

When we keep our heart and control our emotions, when we speak the truth and speak it in love, when we keep our eyes on the Lord and the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, and when we commit ourselves to keep our feet on the paths of righteousness and maintain a godly lifestyle, we will enjoy the abundant life and all that is associated with eternal life here. We will escape being overcome by the dangers in life, and we will be contented and fruitful in every good work.

Proverbs 4:3-4. *“For I was my father’s son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, ‘Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live.’”*

MY FATHER’S SON.

I AM MY FATHER’S SON.

I **watched** him – and saw in him all that I wanted to be. True, his hands were calloused and large – but his knees were calloused too. I watched him work – and saw his skill at multi-tasking, at making each step count that his family would have all our needs met – but needs of other people were met too. I watched him when he didn’t know it – and what he was when he was alone, was the same as when he was with his family or in a crowd. He was consistent. I watched him do business – and he never compromised his character. He dealt with employees respectfully - and he was the same with bankers and businessmen. I watched him with mother – and he always treated her with dignity and honor. She knew she was loved – and so did I. I watched him with his family – and he made the boundaries clear. We knew what he wanted, expected and demanded – and knew he was like that for our good. He loved us.

I **listened** to him – his words were not usually hard to take. His speech was firm and still caring. I knew he meant what he said. I listened to him preach – he never preached what he didn’t practice. His words were plain – and easy to understand. I listened to him tell stories – his stories always had a point. A few were funny – most were to instruct. I listened to him sing – he sang the words like he really was a participant in the message. I listened to him speak – he spoke to others with respect. He gave honor where honor was due. I listened to him – he never spoke evil of dignities. I listened to him speak – he spoke to God like he was confident God heard.

I **worked** with him – he taught me how to enjoy work. He appreciated the honor of being able to work. I worked with him – he taught me how to do what I did not know how to do. He patiently waited until I did it right. I worked with him – in physical work and in spiritual work. He was wise in making decisions. I worked with him – he didn’t stop working at 65. He worked for God, not for retirement. I worked with him – he did what he could do, and didn’t waste his time trying to do what he couldn’t.

I AM MY FATHER’S SON.

I AM MY HEAVENLY FATHER’S SON.

I **watch** Him – and I see daily benefits that supply my needs. I watch Him – and see evidence of His power, authority and grace wherever I look. I watch Him – and see what He does in the lives and hearts of those who go to Him in faith. I watch Him – and see He has given evidence of Himself in those who belong to Him. I watch Him – and I see evidence of His existence that so many people miss.

I **listen** to Him – He still speaks to me in the words of the Bible. I listen to Him – and hear His voice in the quiet recesses of my heart. I listen to Him – and He speaks peace to my soul.

I **work** with Him – rather He lets me work for Him, and the labor is full of the sweetness of labor with a meaning. I work for Him – and He multiplies the seed many more times that what I have planted. I work for Him – and rejoice as the harvest is gathered in and I am much closer to home than ever before.

“Heavenly Father, I am so thankful for my earthly father and all that he was able to exemplify of Thee. His ways, his words and his work were godly and I truly wanted to be like him. He loved Thee, he loved mother, he loved his family, he loved the Lord’s people, he

loved sinners, he loved the Gospel, he loved serving Thee in so many different ways – and I know he loved me. Thanks, heavenly Father, for Thy love to me. Amen.”

Proverbs 5

MORAL TEMPTATION

In this section of the book of Proverbs, the emphasis is on preparing young people for living full and effective lives by giving principles for living that come from God and have been tried and proven by those who have lived before us. Unfortunately, many young people will hear the words from their parents but think they have to go and find out for themselves what they have been warned against. Consequently, the moral standards of modern life in this country have gone down the drain already for the majority of young people, and personal life, family life and national life suffers the consequences of unrestrained immoral living.

In the preceding chapters the principles relating to the man – God relationship, and father – son relationship has been written about. In this chapter it is the husband – wife relationship, even though it is a father giving warning to his son. To know how to deal with a problem doesn't deal with the problem. Solutions have to be applied, not just defined. The subject of how interpersonal relationships are maintained in the way they should be, is addressed in this chapter. A person who will listen to this advice will benefit greatly by the wisdom given if they will act upon it. How can the relationship between a man and a woman develop into what God intended to be like “heaven on earth?”

The basic social structure of humanity is a family. That is where it began in Genesis with Adam and Eve, and that is where it will end for those who are in the kingdom of God. He is our gracious Father and we are made children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. But we have a problem as Christians in this day. Morality is being legislated by governments and law-makers who change laws to suit the desires of the people rather than changing people to meet the demands of the law. By a vote and a stroke of a pen people seem to think moral laws are changed. It may change the degree of correction and punishment meted out by the judicial system, but it does not change the evil heart of mankind nor the moral standards and unchanging laws of God.

We may be told by humanists and atheists that gender is in the mind of a person rather than a physiological fact, but that doesn't change a person from being a male to a female or vice versa. The differences are physical, emotional and psychological. Marriage is between a man and a woman who have been formed by God in body, soul and spirit to adapt to the differences in each and find fulfillment in each other. Because someone's “thinking has evolved” on that subject doesn't change the life-principle of mutual happiness, social safety and recreation associated with marriage. Strangely, educators seem to think that human relationships have to be taught to our children by those who don't even know them, rather than by parents who brought them into the world, love them, are responsible for them, and know the uniqueness of each personality.

From the husband-wife relationship comes the parent-child relationship from one generation to the next in the cycle of listening and learning and then passing on what has been learned. Unfortunately, there are holes in the road ahead of daily living for those who do not look carefully at the consequences of bad choices, and there are “rocks in the run” that lead to a safe place in the harbor at the end of life. Those rocks can shipwreck a life in a moment of time for the young who will have to live with the consequences for a lifetime, or even for an old person who is almost home.

Wisdom in the book of Proverbs can represent our Lord Jesus Christ who is the embodiment of wisdom in a human. He is the perfect Man. So, the teaching and warnings of the father to his son in this chapter can apply to everyone, and comes from the highest possible legal source – the throne of God. The ungodly woman the father warned his son about is like the world and its immoral, subtle, smooth talking and changeable ways that accommodate to the sinful nature of man. By nature, humans know that sex outside of the verbal, moral and legal commitment of a man and woman to each other, is wrong. The consequences of sexual immorality are guilt, greed, unsatisfied lust that changes normal behavior into a hunter looking for a prey to dominate and surrender to his or her evil will.

God does not cover sin, nor does sin go unpunished. What is written in this chapter is to warn young men and women ahead of time as to what can happen to them, and what to expect when they choose to surrender their minds, common sense and their bodies to a “momentary gratification of the flesh.” The outward attractions of a sexy woman, may draw the passing attention of a young man for a brief time, but if and when that woman stops and talks to him, looking at him with languid eyes and speaking through tempting lips, He stops everything. It is impossible to not focus one's attention on a person who makes you their target. The only way to escape the resulting temptation is to flee. Sweet words spoken in a suggestive way, from tempting lips with dulcet tones, sounds like honey would taste – not poison to reject.

To respond to calculated words and physical beauty is like being pierced through with a sword that claims your life and leaves a bitter taste to your soul. A moment of fleshly pleasure to satisfy the lusts of the flesh, is one of the ways

to sell your soul. Herod the king found that out when he took his brother Philip's wife and ended up being responsible for the murder of John the Baptist, a prophet of God. Sexual sin is an example of any sin that tempts us. It has consequences beyond our control. Sexual immorality is dangerous physically, emotionally, spiritually and personally. It destroys self-respect, respect for others, and destroys family life. It erodes the mind so that it is open to other temptations with other people and things. It degrades personhood in both persons involved. To perverted minds, people become no more than objects for personal pleasure momentarily. With it can come disease, unwanted children, and the murder of unwanted children. That can bring inward personal grief that won't go away for life.

Sexual immorality is against God's law, and "be sure your sin will find you out," and "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," are principles that are inescapable, not empty threats. Excitement is temporary. Contentment and fulfillment as they are intended to be are forever lost. Unfortunately, the changing standards in our present-day society has loosened moral restraints so much, that most people can't conceive that what they consider liberation is really bondage that will never be healed. Guilt, remorse, bitterness, broken homes, rebellious children and a population without stable guidelines to conduct life by are results of rejecting the law of God and embracing the changing laws of human beings.

When those standards of righteous living and moral conduct are gone, the only way to live is for today. Don't plan ahead. Don't think about what might happen if we do this now. Live for the moment and forget about the consequences. There are phrases people who think like that use in relation to the future: "Whatever will be, will be," is one of them. They don't consider tomorrow or the future, or how this action I want will affect other people. "This is what I want for me – now." What a sad way to live.

From verse seven through fourteen, a wise father warns his children again to pay attention to what he says, and stay away from the sight of immorality and avoid all contact with those who engage in such practices. All that a person is by reputation, trust and dignity will be lost in a moment when one throws moral restraint to the wind, and gives their seed to one who has no good intent but to make a gain at your loss. Don't fall for the advertising of media, magazines, billboards, TV and the internet throw at you to purposely make you discontent. The result will be remorse, guilt, loss of self-respect, money, reputation, integrity and happiness when you take the step of sexual immorality.

When a body is contaminated with STD and the mind cannot forget what one did for a moment of pleasure, the rest of life will be a reminder of the warnings given by a loving, caring parent that was spurned. The consequences of bad choices will inevitably come. The loss of character results in the sad gain of unending remorse. Take the warning that all of those things calculated to make you dissatisfied with what you have and your life as it is, will cost you far more than what you think you will get. The loss of your honor and the blight you cast on all around you are bad enough, and one who engages in immoral activity continually will lose their soul. Even a believer who falls into temptation and sin, has to live with a certain loss that can never be regained.

Starting with verse fifteen, Solomon presents why marriage is so important and the benefits and blessings that are so good when it is a biblical marriage. There is honor in marriage that is established by vows taken by a man or woman to each other, and that is witnessed to publicly. Such a marriage has the purpose to bring personal joy and procreation.

There is lasting pleasure, not a temporary release that won't last, when a man and woman are joined together by God and for the purposes God intended when He brought Eve to Adam. In the framework of marriage there is ample scope for pleasure, intimacy, trust, companionship, fellowship, friendship and maturity that makes life so meaningful and happy that we are deeply grateful to God for designing such a thing.

Family life as it should be, is a source of joy to a husband and wife. Then they can find not only joy in each other, but in their own children – the fruit of their union. Openly giving of each one to the other in a marriage relationship can bring satisfaction that goes beyond description. Without restrictions, one is able to shed their inhibitions and present themselves without reserve to bring joy to their spouse and receive joy from their spouse. Descriptions of that joy are given here as living creatures of beauty and grace, strength and focused consciousness of the other person. In that way two really become one in mind, soul and spirit as well as body.

There is nothing in a passing fling that will satisfy a person. In the whole-hearted commitment of one person to another there is a satisfaction that is illustrated by Christ's love for the church for which He gave His life. The principles for living that are given by the Lord, work. You will never get away with from the binding cords of immoral sins. Life will never be what it could have been or should have been if you had listened to the warnings given by those who cared for you. The advice given, received and obeyed can make the difference between unrestricted joy in life and relationships, or a secret bondage that refuses to loosen its grip on your conscience.

Proverbs 5:21. *"For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings."*

TAKE TIME.

*All that I do, where I go, and the reasons - are all known to Him.
The causes behind it, the consequences that bind it, how and why it began.
So, it's wisdom to me, when all that I see, can be acted upon without any shame.
When the activity is done, and I able to come home, everything is complete without blame.*

*Motivations are strange, because often they range, from sublime to ridiculous too.
I must take time to think, because often - quick as a wink, my actions will cause me to rue
The things that I did, when off the top of my head, what was done was easily misconstrued.
What could have been good, ended up badly instead, and I ended up acting the fool.*

*But the Lord knows all this, and He does not miss, the motives - the action - the result.
And by knowing all that, I must think on this act - will it bless or end up as a fault?
Will it honor my Lord? Is it taught in His Word? Will the end of it justify the means?
Will it have the stamp of new life? Bring blessing or strife? Is the benefit all that it seems?*

*There is a practice that's taught; it is more than just caught; the Lord sees all that I do.
When I am alone, out about or at home, I need to remember this fact that is true -
What I do every day; where I walk, what I say - reflects on God, on me and on you.
This I learn from my Father, "pondering" is not really a bother; it's the way true blessing will show.*

"Father, I am careful to remember to think before I act. The results of quick decisions and actions not thought out fully may reflect negatively on Thy family that I am a part of. Help me to always apply the principle of thinking before acting. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Proverbs 6

LISTEN TO YOUR PARENTS

It is not uncommon for people, when they become adults, to think they know as much, and likely more, than their parents. They might know more about computers, science, business and how to make money, but it takes a lot longer to know about people. Parents have been around long enough that they can often make a good judgment call on people by watching their eyes and body language, and also listening to the tone of voice and where inflections are placed in conversation. That skill comes by experience, not from some classroom professor who lives in the ivory tower of higher learning that is isolated from the real world where most people live and work.

In this chapter of the book of Proverbs there are six different people that are spoken of, some of whom we need to be warned against. The son in this context is not some young child but a grown person about to go out on his own into the world of all kinds of people, all kinds of temptation and all kinds of danger. Both father and mother have serious concern for the son as he walks away from them and strikes out on his own, so they give him warnings as well as good advice. Then there is the money-grabber, the person who makes money off of unsuspecting people by borrowing money for some get-rich-quick scheme and then leave you holding the bag. Following him is the lazy bum who won't work and think he is entitled to all his parents and friends will give him. The worthless trouble-maker is also warned against because he doesn't only cause trouble wherever he goes, but wants to get you involved. Then comes the "strange woman," not the stranger, but the neighbor's wife who wants sexual adventures. Lastly there is the jealous husband who is out to get a foolish young man.

The description of these people in society in the past, fits society in the present. We have to give our children and young adults teaching, instruction and training, but that isn't enough. We also have to give warnings to unsuspecting people who are moving out into an ungodly "Me first" society. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. We owe it to the next generation make sure they know what they will be running into. We can't make them obey what we say, nor can we be assured they will even pay attention to our concern for them, but at least we can warn them, and tell them what we have experienced and know they will run into in dealing with people who are not believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Friends can turn out to be a problem if they try to get you to loan them money for some project, they will convince you will give you a real good return on your investment. If something seems to be almost too good to be true, it almost always is. There are extortioners and hard-nosed people in business who may not appear to be dishonest, but be very cautious in what you say and do. You will be pressured at times to co-sign for a family member or someone you know, but co-signing is a trap. It may not be a deliberate trap, but it is a liability you are making to be responsible for

another person's debt. When you sign, you are financially obligated until that debt is paid. Those who borrow to get more than they need, are not to be trusted.

A Christian must be as good as their word. If you say it, you are responsible carry a matter through to the end. The father who speaks in this chapter urges his son who perhaps got caught in the trap of loaning money, to get free from this obligation as soon as he could. The longer he stayed in the situation, the worse it would get, so get out of it even if it means you will be humiliated in some way. In order to keep your reputation, your integrity and your good name, don't put off doing what needs to be done before you go to sleep. There are good reasons to be afraid of what may be coming on you so act quickly.

The next person of concern is the one who is lazy, and the father uses the ant to illustrate what should be the responsible way to work. We learn from that creature that we are responsible to provide for ourselves and others, not expect them to provide for us. Meet your own needs. Be responsible rather than lazy. Don't think you are entitled to be cared for by your parents, other people or the government when you are able-bodied. Personal initiative is expected, so get out of bed early and go to work. A grown young man shouldn't have to be told what to do when he already knows what is expected of him and what he can do and should do. Opportunities do not wait for your convenience. Take them when you can. Use every advantage available to you to prepare for coming needs whether you know what they are or not. Don't hesitate to work when you can so that you will be able to care for yourself and your family when the time comes that you can't work. Remember, work is honorable, and can be enjoyable if we choose to set our mind that way.

A "sluggard" seems to think he needs a lot of sleep and needs someone to take care of him so he can stay in bed late, and sleep away his time. He convinces himself he needs more sleep than he gets if he goes to work. The lazy person always wants a little more time to fold his hands over his belly in casual complacency. Small things become big debts and unfulfilled obligations quite quickly. Remember, reckoning time will come. When you have nothing, and have given no reason to others to help support you, you will soon find no one will want anything to do with you.

There is another kind of person to beware of. He is not just lazy, but he is trouble in a body. He is really a worthless person who a wise person will avoid if at all possible. He talks dirty and may use curse words saying it is only a habit that he got from others. He doesn't think it is a big deal to use bad language when he walks and looks around at people and makes uncouth comments. Young people sometimes do that to impress other young people, but that is demeaning to the one who speaks and can embarrassing to the one who hears what he says.

There are a lot of signs that such a person is shifty and not to be trusted. Shuffling feet, rolling of the eyes, winking at girls, pointing a finger, all indicate that he is not a person you want to associate with nor be a companion of. Often a person like that is actually planning serious mischief and maybe even breaking of the law. That person usually has some deceit in his heart, and for his own nefarious reasons creates dissension and division among others for some selfish motive for his benefit. A slanderer wants to put someone else down and put himself up. In God's plan of things and divine providence, calamity will come on such a person and the disaster that will come on him will be permanent. "Payday, someday."

Some people think because God is love, He cannot hate. The seven things listed here are so common among people today, that they think God would be peevish or petty to hate them. They have convinced themselves that they are basically good except for a few faults that are common to everyone. But this list pretty well covers all that people think about themselves. A proud look reflects a proud heart that expresses itself in a way that passes judgment on another person based on what they see. In essence it means, "I am better than you." Their lying tongue speaks words of deceit, half-truths and open falsehood. The lying tongue is characteristic of Satan who is the father of lies. Those who do not tell the truth are like Satan who uses lies deliberately. Believers are to put away lying and speak the truth to those we meet.

Murder is deliberately taking the life of another even if your hand may not touch the victim. You may not like that person because they are interfering with your life and inconveniencing you in some way. For some dark reason, many people today think they can murder unborn children and get away with it because a court says it is okay. Any person with life is valuable to God and "be sure your sin will find you out" is a life principle that we should never forget.

Planning for wicked activities is a challenge against righteousness of life that God expects from people. Such plans will bring divine judgment down on a person in the time and way of God's choosing. Those who rush to do evil, whether it is an individual, or in this modern day a mob of young people who like to riot, break things, burn, do damage to property and do injury to people, are hated by God.

The lies of false witnesses have put innocent people behind bars, caused the death of others and caused others to commit suicide. Some false witnesses have even caused wars. People bore false witness against the Lord Jesus

when He was here, so we can expect them to do the same to believers in Him. Unfair criticism, gossip and self-opinionated heretics can create divisions that will never be healed.

In the middle of these warnings, parental advice is given to an adult son who is likely going out on his own. He was told that he was taught and trained by his father, and taught and cared for by his mother. All they taught him should not be forgotten but placed deeply in his heart, and made obvious to others so they know where he stands in society. He knew what they taught was right, now he had to practice it himself and make it openly clear to others what his convictions are.

Think about all you learned when you are making plans, making decisions and taking action on any matter. "What would father and mother do?" "How would they deal with this person or this issue?" "What would they think if they knew what I was doing now?" Whether you are far away from home in the military or on a business trip, remember who you are, who taught you, and who you represent. In the sleepless nights of decision making, do not fantasize or imagine vain things. Be serious, be cautious, be wise. In the morning when you wake up, do the right thing. Act on what you know is right and you will not be ashamed. You will know when to say, "No," and when you do what you do, right, the way God intended, then you can ask God's blessing on it.

But you will have to be super-careful. Not every married woman is content in her marriage or faithful to her husband. Young men are fair game for some married women and they will begin their hunt by flattering you. Then they will tempt you to go beyond what you know is right in a more gradual and subtle way than a prostitute who is in it for the money. If you think you can get away with having sex with a married woman, you are greatly mistaken. Beauty and boldness along with provocative words, actions and glances can quickly overcome the inhibitions of a young man. The convictions you thought you had, and you will and conscience, will be overcome if you stay in that place with that woman.

A prostitute will cost you money, but a married woman who seduces a man can be much worse for a lot of reasons. She can blackmail you, tell her husband you attacked her, or tell the police you raped her. Your whole life can be ruined in a brief time for a fleeting bit of pleasure that can in no way last. Not matter what immoral actions you take and think you are getting away with, there will be a high cost. Remember, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." You will get burned when you play with fire. No matter what you think you gained from a short time of gratification, it will come back to bite you.

Not only will it burn in your mind and heart, but adultery will have serious negative consequences on your life and walk before people and before God. There is an awful price to pay when a man commits adultery with a neighbor's wife. It will not be hidden. Your credibility as a trustworthy person will be lost. Your reputation as a philanderer will not go away. Sin will be exposed. A starving hungry thief who steals for food has done wrong, and will have to face the consequences of what he did. But there is a sense in which he will be pitied, even by those he wronged. He may be able to pay back what he stole and a fine or some jail time will satisfy the people he wronged.

The adulterer will never be able to make amends for what he did, he has damaged the lives of other people, and done irreparable damage to himself. He may be attacked and beaten by those he wronged. He will be shamed and disgraced. He will never forget what he did and how foolish it was to go against the warnings of his parents when he was young. He was even warned again when he was an adult leaving home. The anger of a wronged and jealous husband will never go away. There is no way he can make up to the husband what he took, even though it was offered to him. Likely the husband will seek revenge in some way even if it is a long time coming, because he knows you will be living in fear and will wonder daily what is going to happen and when. The situation in which an adulterer will have to live for the rest of his life will be fraught with anxiety and remorse, and there is nothing that can be done about it. No money paid, no humble action taken, no tears of repentance and remorse will remove the fact that and an adulterer has taken that from one or more people that which he had no right to have and there is no way to give it back again.

Proverbs 6:1-2. *"My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth."*

WARNINGS.

*"He needs my help don't I owe it to him? He's asked many times before."
Stop to consider for a minute my friend, is he asking for less or more?
You feel you should give and ask no questions, but is it really yours to give?
All you have has come from your Lord; you're just a steward of what you have -
It is not wrong to help if you know a need is there, but don't fall for every plea -
Because we're servants of a Master and from what He has, He has given to you and me.*

*Don't get used to lying in bed and thinking there is a lot more hours to work,
Learn from the ant who can multi-task; using its energy, from work it does not shrink.
The temptation is there to say, "Work can wait, it'll be there – I'll do it later on."
But time is of essence and sleep becomes a habit, take your rest when the work is done.
You have obligations there are needs to be met – yours and those who depend on you.
Arise when it's time to get to work – then go to bed when your work is through.*

*Not everyone around is a friend of yours, even if they seem so and do avow –
That what they have for you is the best possible thing, but act on advice right now.
When a person in pride pushes hard, check their words; likely he has a lying tongue.
And before he is done there will be serious wrongs that start with evil imaginations.
Mischievous and lies go hand in hand they are partners that lead to some crime.
Soon a division comes between you and your brothers, that's their goal all of the time.*

*People are saying it is happening all around, no one thinks it's too bad any more.
But another man's wife is totally off limits to cross that line is terrible grief to be borne.
God has a plan laid down in His Word it is there for you just at a time like this –
If you are to marry, God will bring you the right one, don't trust your will, only trust His.
Crossing that barrier to meet a craving is one of the most dangerous things you can do.
Not only will you have jeopardized her, the one most adversely affected is you.*

"I know Holy God, that much of what leads people to wrong behavior has been warned against many times. I am reading and remembering that every action is done before the eyes of God. Give me the sense to read the warnings and not go there under any circumstance. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Proverbs 7

THE DOWNFALL

Solomon gave a number of positive exhortations to his son in the beginning verses of this chapter, and later in the chapter he speaks to all his children. Then following the passionate urging to his son to be wise and make wisdom his guide as well as his teacher, a sad illustration is given of the dynamics of compromise and how it loses badly to temptation and a fatal fall. The learner hears an incident in which plain expressions are used to describe what happened to a young man who yielded to temptation and pressure to conform to the ways of the ungodly.

Parental advice was given right at the beginning with urgency because experience taught the father that young people often discount the warnings of a parent and unnecessary meddling in their life. The father speaks of his commandments as a treasure to be guarded, "keep," and not to let go of them. The "apple" of an eye is the pupil, which is the entrance into the brain of all the images of life around us, including light and dark, good and bad. The eye is especially sensitive because of its extreme value to the whole body. A godly course in life when you can see the pitfalls before you and avoid them, is the way to lead to a godly life. Tying something on your finger is a reminder of something important that needs to be tended to. When it is written on the heart, wisdom will instruct our intelligence, control our emotions, and our will which will control our actions. Writing on a tablet makes it a personal act and an impression that the information is permanent. It does not change an issue because people say it does. Think ahead and prepare in advance for the dangers that await you.

An understanding of what can or will happen if you do not follow the guidance of wisdom, will prepare to resist this greatest of personal dangers you will face. So, the father tells what he saw looking through his window. There was a group of young people just "hanging out" on the street, doing whatever young people do, and talking about what young people talk about who have had no guidance like you have. Careless talk and suggestive stories lead to foolish laughter making jokes about something that is serious. Walk away when sexual stories and experiences are being recounted or are treated as fun. Some foolish young people talk about their "conquests" over the opposite sex as if is normal because "everyone is doing it." They may even try to outdo each other with the stories they have to tell and they think you are a "prude" if you don't go along with what the majority does. Such gatherings are no laughing matter because they lead to a downfall.

Those young people knew where the prostitute lived. So did the father watching through the window who saw a young man go toward her house rather than run the other way. Approaching darkness, the twilight leads to real darkness in which people who plan for sin prefer. Approaching darkness is playing with sin thinking that you can control what is happening. The moral darkness of this world is increasing all the time so that many people don't know what is right or wrong any more. The closer we get to evil, and the more we associate with people that love darkness,

the more likely we are to fall into the pit of actual sin. It ceases to be potential evil when you walk toward it because it is then you compromise with what you know is right. That compromise flourishes and then occurs. When you choose to compromise, you enter into the compromise which ensnares, happens and finally costs you dearly.

In the illustration the father gives to his son, a woman who was dressed provocatively met this young man, indicating she was inwardly planning to seduce a man for her own purposes. Her outward clothing drew attention to her looks. The subtlety of her inward person was to take advantage of a man for her own purposes. She was obviously not looking or acting like God intends. His desire is for a woman to be strong of character, and can be quietly trusted to guide a young man in a right path to a righteous life. This woman of the street laughed and talked loudly. She was an "in your face" person and unrestrained in the ways she speaks and what she says. She has no embarrassment when she reveals as much of herself as she can to attract attention to her body. She doesn't want to be at home. She wants to be out on the street where the action is so she can get what she wants one way or another.

This woman makes it openly known she is available by publicly displaying herself so that she will be noticed by as many people as possible. By embracing the young man who was a stranger and taking the initiative by her aggressive and open shamelessness, she takes control of the simple young man's common sense. She indicated she has fulfilled some religious practice, so that now she is free to do what she wants. She came out to look for him especially which appeals to his male ego, and he falls for it hook, line and sinker because it relates to his own opinion of himself.

She makes her intention known that she has more on her mind than to have a meal with the young man. She wants him, and described what she had prepared for his pleasure. The bed is the focus because she knows that is what is on his mind. The preparations she made implies she is going to go to great lengths to fulfill his fantasies. She promises him experiences he never had before and calls it "love," as if he is the main thing to her. She also assures him that her husband will not be coming to catch him in the bed with her, so he doesn't have to worry. Sadly, even some professing Christians have done these things thinking no one will ever know about it. Remember, "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." One's conscience will keep you from having peace and rest of soul because of sin committed that is not known by other people – but God knows.

This beautiful dangerous woman overcomes his father's instructions with flattery and false promises. The action of yielding to this woman indicates he fell for her enticements, makes his choice, and follows her with his head down like an ox in a yoke or a prisoner about to be beaten. He knew better, had been warned, but through foolishness succumbed to what he knew was wrong. A dart to the liver is a fatal shot, but a slow painful death. He will have lots of time to painfully regret his choice to ignore wisdom and take an unsatisfactory fleeting moment of pleasure instead. A bird in a trap flaps its wings for a short time, and then resigns itself to a slow death.

The father who had been telling this to his son, now turns to all his children and tells them to take seriously what he had taught them. Stay away from those who tempt you to sin. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." The best way to avoid sin and the practices of an evil world, is to stay as far away as you possibly can from compromise and temptation. Don't think you can handle temptation on your own. A sexually appealing woman can take down a strong man without any weapon but herself. She appeals to the moral weakness of sinful flesh. The devil is an obvious enemy; the world is an attractive enemy; the flesh is an insidious enemy. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life all join to bring a young man down, and they will succeed if you neglect or despised wisdom.

What began with food, beauty and an attack on the senses – touch, taste, sight, smell and hearing – ends in a person going to hell after a long process of dying slowly. Sexual sin is a killer that can ruin a Christian's testimony for life, even though they may be restored to the Lord personally. Guard your mind. Avoid books, pictures, TV programs and websites that promote fantasies and tempt you to think they could be real. Think ahead. What you do today has the potential of ruining all of your "tomorrows."

Proverbs 7:1-2. *"My son, keep my words and lay up my commandments with thee. Keep my commandments and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye."*

COMPROMISE.

*Stop what you are doing and listen to me -
This is wisdom that is tried and proven.
This is for your good I want you to clearly see
And take for yourself this exhortation.*

*Compromise flourishes when you hang out with friends
One says one thing that soon leads to another.*

*When one foolish person makes a comment, compromise begins
And a foolish son forgets the good wisdom of his mother.*

*To prove he's a man he looks and then acts –
He hasn't thought how such dalliance ends.
Falling for enticement true wisdom he lacks –
And then compromising his virtue – he sins.*

*He is ensnared by his lust that seeks for his soul –
Not considering the consequences ahead –
He sacrifices virtue and never again will know
The sanctity of the marriage bed.*

*It seemed fun at the time but now he has lost
What could have been the best gift of all.
Never will he forget that compromise costs
What he has done he can never recall.*

*Compromise takes many forms in our day –
Much is done without consideration or thought.
When compromise happens, there is always a price to pay –
Don't think it sells itself out for naught.*

*The effects remain and one can't go back and begin
As if compromise never has happened.
Listen to wisdom now – pay close attention to him
Whose advice will your conscience's voice sharpen.*

"O Gracious and Righteous God, how often do I wonder if I have been true and faithful to those who come for advice. The one who has asked and soon will want an answer, I am afraid is ready to compromise. Keep me from leaving unsaid what should be said and help me to not say too much. I ask in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Proverbs 8

THE VOICE OF WISDOM

In this chapter of proverbs, wisdom is written as a woman in contrast to the adulteress in the previous chapter. The fact that wisdom is spoken of in feminine terms does not diminish the importance of the message but rather makes it more personal. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the One who is perfect in wisdom, so wisdom here can be applied to Him who was here, "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners." Wisdom guides in the first thirteen verses; wisdom makes us succeed, verses 14-21; wisdom was present at creation, 22-31. Those who listen to wisdom are approved, verses 32-35, and those who hate wisdom love death verse 36.

Wisdom is basic and fundamental to successful living because it is the foundation on which everything is built, and it is available to every person. The origin of wisdom is in God, verse 22, and is from everlasting, because it is in God. Wisdom was before all things. The teaching of wisdom gives prudence and understanding, verse 5. It contains excellent things, verse 6, which includes truth, and hatred of wickedness verse 7. Wisdom teaches righteousness, verse 8, and knowledge, verse 12. It gives direction, verse 12, and produces the fear of the Lord, verse 13.

The value of wisdom is that it yields riches and honor, verse 18, which is greater than gold, verse 19. It blessed the wise, verses 32-35, and condemns the foolish who love death, verse 36. Love for God and love for sin cannot coexist because the characteristics of God are absolutely pure, holy, just, righteous and wise. "The Lord possessed me" wisdom says, and "I was the Lord's." It is everlasting because God is eternal in His being. His limitless wisdom "set a compass," a circle on the horizon that is unending

The tribute to wisdom can be applied to the Lord Jesus Christ because it is "unto all" and calls out to all with a loud voice that can be heard by everyone. She calls from high places where everyone can see her, and on the paths of life where everyone has access to her. Wisdom is always available to everyone when they make decisions in everyday life. No matter where people are in the world, wisdom can be found by anyone. All of humanity is the concern of wisdom. The exhortations of wisdom are there for the simple people to teach them how to act and conduct

themselves. She offers herself to fools who need understanding so they can avoid the consequences of foolishness and sin that will surely come upon them.

Wisdom exhorts people to claim those things that are right, fair and honorable in society. The standards of ethics, morals and right living and conduct come from wisdom. Wisdom always tells the truth and deliberately rejects deception, lies, slander and evil suggestive words and language. Wisdom does not mix honorable and right words with unclean speech. Truth and deception don't mix. Wisdom is not complicated. You either receive wisdom if you are willing to learn, or you will remain ignorant of what is right and what pleases the Lord.

A person can receive wisdom if they choose to. The words of wisdom are of the highest possible value to learn and live by. The teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ when He was here, and the whole word of God, are of greater value than any precious stones like rubies or any precious metals like gold and silver. When a person has wisdom, they have the best that a human being can have. They have the Lord Jesus Christ.

The next group of verses from 12 through 21 states the high status of wisdom in the practice of living. The benefits of the practice of wisdom, is to be able to make sensible decisions, have good judgment because you will be able to see the "big picture," and it produces the positive effects of discretion when we act in the fear of the Lord. There will be given by wisdom the discernment to hate all forms of evil that are present in our world. Pride, arrogance and corrupt speech are all used along with other bad attitudes for making excuses for sin, making false accusations and blaspheming God and other people.

Responsible people will be glad for wisdom to give good counsel, advice and instruction for decision making that will affect my life and the lives of others. Those in authority need our prayer to the Lord to give them the needed wisdom to guide those they rule over in ways that will bring peace and tranquility to those they lead. Right decisions are not "off-the-cuff" statements, but are given by wisdom to those who know their limitations and responsibilities. Wisdom loves those who value her and seek her at the beginning of each day. They know each day will bring new events and new challenges that call for wise decisions. The rewards of wise choices are beyond the value we place on the most precious physical things of great financial worth. Honor and respect because of a godly life lived before God and people is of far greater worth than money. Spiritual blessings come from the Lord.

Wisdom guides us in this life and enables us to do what is right, and helps us choose which is the right path before us so we can go forward in faith and confidence in God. Having wisdom is not an accident but it is a choice we make. Material things are not what determines the success in life we crave. In Christ we have all we want and need, but what to do with it is what makes the difference between success and failure. The wise person uses what they have to honor God and bring glory to Him.

The next number of verses from 22 to 31 are a hymn that describes wisdom in creation. There was perfect and complete wisdom in the Lord before He created anything because wisdom is part of His divine nature. It is in the nature of God to have all wisdom, all knowledge and all understanding. In grace He allows us to have wisdom when we seek for it. There was never a time when there wasn't wisdom in the Lord Jesus Christ. Even when He was here, "found in fashion as a man," He had all wisdom that was needed for every need and every situation. All divine Persons of the Godhead are all-wise, because our God is the "All-wise God." When the Lord was here, people said, "Never man spake like this Man." "We have never seen it on this wise before."

Before the oceans were formed, wisdom was there to design them and set the parameters of them. Wisdom planned and produced all that is in them. Before food was released from the fullness of the earth through plants, the wisdom of the Lord arranged how everything would happen and the resulting benefits to us. The stars above the circle of the earth defy our imagination as to their expanse and our ability to describe, but wisdom was there to put everything in its place and functioning properly in the universe. Clouds and rain, evaporation and the cycle of water from earth to clouds and clouds to earth are one of the millions of marvels produced by divine wisdom.

Wisdom in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, brought joy to the Godhead as the wonders of God unfolded in preplanned places, doing preplanned things for preplanned purposes. Then in divine wisdom, and to fulfill His divine will, God made mankind so He could share all He had done with those who would choose to love Him and live in harmony with Him. "How Great Thou Art!"

There is blessing from wisdom that guides us, instructs us and gives fulfillment in life to those who guard wisdom and its teaching. By maintaining fellowship with the Lord, obeying the wisdom God gives, and not rejecting it in any way, there will be happiness, satisfaction in life and labor, and faithfulness to God in this life when our minds and hearts are fed by divine wisdom from the word of God in the scriptures. Wisdom in control in the life of any person who loves the Lord, makes life worth living, and bring the favor of the Lord to us even when days are difficult as we live in the

darkening days of the end of this age. Those who reject wisdom, wrong themselves, cripple themselves for life and living. They condemn themselves to eternal doom, because they “love death,” – the wages of sin.

Proverbs 8:22-23. *“The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning or ever the earth was.”*

BEFORE THE BEGINNING.

*It was there in eternity – in a body – in a Person
Before the Voice on earth was heard – the world was only a plan
Before the dividing – when the water was hiding – when its substance was only a purpose
Before the hemispheres – before the atmosphere – before the mountains were positioned
WISDOM WAS THERE!*

*It was there before the fields – before the trees and grass made cover
Before the oceans covered the deep places – before the compass or the circle
Before the seasons – before the years – before the sky filled with clouds
Before the orbits – before the galaxies – before the shining constellations
WISDOM WAS THERE!*

*When the tides began their relentless movement to the boundary
When the animals and birds found on earth a sanctuary
When the Craftsman on the sixth day formed man carefully
When each part of creation kept its place functioning orderly
WISDOM WAS THERE!*

*When deity walked among humanity in the divine purpose
When angels, His gracious words and acts joined in proclamation
When sins were forgiven and disease healed by One powerfully
And words of truth and righteousness were taught passionately
WISDOM WAS THERE!*

*When the Sinless One was made sin for us in a righteous act
When the Just One suffered for the unjust that we to God might come back
When the Perfect Substitute took my place providing for what I lack
And death was defeated by Him who held death's key and the earth did crack,
WISDOM WAS THERE!*

“Eternal God, who is the Originator and Sustainer of all things: I have great wonder as I look at all the things that form Thy design of creation. The personification of wisdom is seen in the Lord Jesus Christ when He was here on earth it is true. I also am made aware of the fact that in Thy wisdom everything was planned and carried out by Thy eternal wisdom. I worship as I consider all the works Thou hast done by Thy word. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Proverbs 9

TWO WOMEN

Chapter nine of the book of Proverbs is the conclusion of the first section of the book which has to do with a father instructing his son to seek wisdom. Wisdom is personified as a woman which was planned by the Holy Spirit to better deal with some of the sensitive issues addressed. The life principles given to young people in these chapters are certainly applicable to people of every age, but the focus is on the time of life when people make personal choices which will affect them for their whole life.

There are two contrasting subjects which are seen in the appeal of a good woman called Wisdom, and a wicked woman called Folly or Foolish. The appeal of the good woman is in the first six verses. The next six verses are the response of a wise man, and the last six verses, the response of a fool. The contrasts are obvious between wisdom and foolishness. Wisdom appeals to the mind; folly to the senses. Wisdom lasts; foolishness gives in to temporary pleasures. Wisdom is open to the public; folly is private and underhanded. Wisdom leads to life lived as it should be; folly leads to death and hell.

Wisdom is presented as a wealthy woman who has a great house to which she invites all to come into. This house has seven pillars which speak of perfection and strength so it will not fall, and all who enter will be safe. She has a

wonderful meal prepared and it is spread out on the table with all that is needed to satisfy a hungry soul for any and all who will partake of that meal. The invitation goes out, and is delivered personally by those who serve wisdom. The invitation is publicly offered so that “whosoever will may come,” is the same at the house of wisdom as it was in the feast the Lord spoke the parable about when He was here. God has prepared enough for every man, woman and child in the world at the Gospel feast. Preachers and servants are all over the world calling out to the people to come.

Wisdom calls to people who know their limitations and their need. Wisdom directs her call to them, wanting the simple, gullible people who need help to find that the Lord is the One who can give it. He is true Wisdom. When people don't know, and know they don't know, wisdom is there for them. When people don't know, and don't know they don't know, they are in danger. When people don't know and know they don't know, and don't want to know, they are lost souls. The same scenario as was at the wedding feast in the parable the Lord taught, is here. The door is open. The feast is prepared. People are invited to come, and they all can come if they choose to. Attendance is not forced on anyone, but the decision to attend is a personal one. If they would stop going in the way of fools, and would choose to go in the way of wisdom, they would understand what life is all about, and be willing to follow the life principles taught in the word of God.

But a problem arises when a teacher seeks to correct the fool. Even though the teacher is a wise man who knows from experience what is right and tries to help simple person understand, the foolish young man turns on the teacher and mocks him. He scoffs at the morality he teaches. He refuses the instruction that would help him. He even insults and hates the wise man. A wicked man will mock truth, especially if it is from the Bible in which the divine standards of God are unchanging. Righteous living is not popular and those who speak against people of integrity, honor and virtue use “smart remarks” against those who want wisdom. “Your truth is your truth, and my truth is my truth,” they say, “So you mind your own business and I will mind mine.”

How do you handle criticism? A wise person will listen to the one who rebukes and corrects them. They learn from that criticism and choose to walk in the way wisdom points. Wisdom begins with God. To know God is eternal life. Then we learn from God who gives insight as to how we are to live guided by the principles of living that come from the One who created life in the first place. To know God is to have a respectful and reverential relationship with Him. The more we know Him; the better life gets.

When one rebukes a scoffer of the Lord, His laws and His word, the scoffer will hate him or her. A wise person will respond in just the opposite way. That person will love the one who cared enough to correct him. Not only will he appreciate being corrected, he will learn from the correction and will take what has been said and apply it more and more to the decisions and actions he makes. The result will be that he or she will increase in knowledge and will see ways to use that wisdom on their own initiative. The truth of verse ten is a similar repetition of chapter one and verse seven. The response to the teacher who corrects and instructs, is first to trust Christ as personal Savior. Not only is it wise, it is reasonable, because from this beginning, “the fear of the Lord” comes the on-going blessing of wisdom, the increase of spiritual knowledge and the understanding spiritual maturity brings.

Such a positive response to divine instruction will draw you closer to the Lord, will separate you from sin that will bring death earlier in life because of an ungodly lifestyle. Long life comes best when there is purity, holiness and wise decisions – all of which find their source in “the fear of the Lord.” If one is wise, they will choose wisdom and greatly benefit from wisdom all their life. If one mocks the way God intends us to conduct ourselves in life, there will be lasting consequences from which there is no escape.

The last six verses are the response of a fool to a noisy wicked woman. Wickedness is like being intoxicated. Once it starts, we want more, and sinful behavior becomes more exciting and hypnotic to fools. The banquet of wisdom is healthy, wholesome and life sustaining. The table of the wicked woman, folly, is stolen food, deceptive, forbidden and dangerous to those who eat of it. Foolishness or folly seeks out the same people that wisdom calls to. The foolish woman does the same things wisdom does. She doesn't know any more than the simple fools she is trying to seduce. She is a loud-mouth, pushy and ignorant, but insistent in her deliberate deception.

The deceiving woman makes herself obvious in the public, desiring to attract attention. She begins first at her own door, and then goes to high public places where she will be seen and heard. Those who pass by doing their business, know who she is and keep on going. They are not turned aside by her wiles. But the simpleton, young fools who are idle and are like her, may be taken in and deceived by her attractiveness. She uses the same tactics as wisdom but for a very different reason. Lies and deception often use the same techniques as those that messengers of God use to present the truth.

Seduction and the lust of the eyes were used by the devil to tempt Eve and cause Adam to sin against God. It brought death then and it still does. It appeals to the sinful nature of human beings to try to get something for nothing, or to try out something that is forbidden. Getting away with something illegal and forbidden attracts the perverse fallen

nature of man. But there are fatal consequences when one falls into the trap of promised passion, sexual indulgence and the excitement of doing what one knows is wrong. They try it anyway in spite of the warnings of wisdom. Deliberately going into sin is much easier to get into than out of. The consequences ruin a good, honorable life, and if not repented of and forsaken, will end in hell.

Proverbs 9:1. *“Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars.”*

PILLARS OF WISDOM.

*Seven pillars of wisdom have been around for a long, long time.
It means completion and perfection which from ancient pages shine.
All God does is perfect from His wisdom to His ways –
And men are made the wiser when they act on what God says.*

Genesis 1:31

*When God made the world, He said it was very good.
Every plant and animal – even mankind was perfect where it stood.
No longer is it perfect because man ruined it with sin –
But in a future time ahead, God will make “all things new” again.*

Psalms 19:7

*God’s Word is perfect too, providing guidance for every need.
But it only is effective if I to its truth pay heed.
The man of God can be made “perfect,” not sinless but mature
When he applies the principles of the Word and lives out his new nature.*

Deuteronomy 32:4

*The works of God are perfect all down through His history.
These works apply to all, but in a special way to me –
For I have experienced myself God’s reconciliation –
And as a result, find great delight in His blessed redemption.*

Psalms 18:30; Romans 12:2

*It is true God’s ways are not our ways, but His are always perfect.
They are best for me and certainly for Him as my wrongs He does correct.
His will is good and perfect in every way when we present ourselves to Him –
It keeps us from being “world-conformed” and satisfies within.*

*The seven pillars can be publicly seen when we gather in His name,
To do His perfect will and work, and His presence with us claim.
We gladly received His Word and after baptism, continue in doctrine and fellowship,
Breaking of bread and prayers – then added to the church in partnership.*

*The wisdom of God can be seen by men when saints own Christ as Lord.
The perfections of God and His wisdom can be learned when we read His Word.
We don’t run wild in disarray or disorder but as seven pillars hold a roof –
The church of God in its wisdom gives to the world God’s living proof.*

“There is no doubt heavenly Father the assembly is in a unique position to show the wisdom of God. In every way the “pillar and ground of the truth” has been able to make a clear presentation of divine wisdom. May I never lose sight of the value of the work of which I am a part. So much around us is based on the wisdom and convenience of men. I thank Thee for calling me to this place. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Proverbs 10

CONTRASTS AND COMPARISONS

Wisdom for young people is the emphasis in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs. Wisdom is the truth that is applied to the situations of life in which we are found. Those who are more mature in life and have experienced failures as well as blessings, need to pass on what they have learned by experience to those who are younger. The next chapters contain practical wisdom for all ages to make their own in order to live godly lives “in Christ Jesus.”

That will not be accidental, but is the result of wise decisions when choices have to be made. There are a great number of topics covered in these proverbs given by Solomon. Some were his own and some were gathered by him from other sources and included in the whole collection.

The value of wisdom is one thing, but it is not true wisdom until it is carried out in life's experiences. Then a person really knows what is taught really works when the results show by being applied. To accomplish this, the first group of proverbs from chapter ten through fifteen are, for the most part, contrasts between wise and foolish behavior. To be forewarned is to be forearmed when it comes to all of the aspects and incidents of life. Proverbs 16:4 is a summary of the Lord's sovereignty over everything we think and do that is taught in this collection of wisdom.

The first contrast is a simple one between wise parents and their children who need to be taught and corrected. Joy and/or sorrow follow the response of the son who is hopefully listening to the counsel given by parents. Our Heavenly Father said of His Son, "This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." The Son said, "I do always those things that please the Father." What a wonderful example of what parent-child relationships should be.

Wickedness and righteousness are contrasted by teaching that getting money dishonestly will not bring security nor stop death because everything is then left behind. Honesty, righteousness and integrity in a life lived for God removes the fear of death and separation from God, and is treasure laid up for the future. The Lord makes sure the righteous will have satisfaction in what He provides. "They shall be filled." He will also make sure the wicked do not get that for which they crave. A poor workman who does as little as possible will come to poverty because a poor reputation will bring poor results. No boss will want him around. On the other hand, a man who strives for excellence in his work and in his service for the Lord, will be successful because he is doing all he does "as to the Lord."

When a harvest is ripe, it has to be brought in or all the previous labor is in vain. A wise son works until the job is done, and he does it with diligence. Diligence in one thing usually means he will be diligent in everything he does. The disgraceful son doesn't care whether the harvest is in or not because he only cares for himself, not even his family. He feels he is entitled to do or not do as he decides. Fairness in one's mind produces righteousness in one's actions which the Lord will bless. Big and bold words, evil speech and innuendo from the mind and mouth of the wicked are easily seen in the face that tries to hide sin. The words may be spoken behind the hand or not heard at all, but facial expressions including the eyes express the thoughts.

When a servant of God has gone to be with the Lord, if he or she was fair, honorable and righteous in life, even to think about them is a blessing to us. We remember their words, instruction and correction with fondness and are blessed by those things still. The very mention of those who were noted for wickedness causes a stinking scent in our minds when we are reminded of the evil they have done. A wise person will be glad someone has been spiritual enough to care for them, to instruct and correct them. He knows they have a true interest in their well-being and growth. The person who "runs off at the mouth" will stumble and fall because he will "trip over his own words."

Integrity is a characteristic of one who is maturing spiritually, morally and personally. Such a person will be secure in how they conduct themselves in all aspects of life. A person who wants to try out every sinful attraction will have a bad reputation and will be exposed for who he really is. "Be sure your sin will find you out." The "wink" in this context is a malicious gesture that deceives and indicates an attitude of, "I will get you." It can also mean he is sending a signal to others in order to stir up trouble. The foolish talk of a troublemaker will bring him down some day. He will be exposed for what he really is as a troublemaker. But the warning is clear to everyone – be careful what you say.

When a godly person speaks, it can be a positive help that brings blessing to those who hear what is said. In contrast, a wicked person hides his mouth when he is secretly planning something bad that will lead to violence. Whatever we allow to come out of our mouths in words can be good if the motive is good, or can be bad if it promotes evil intent. Hatred creates conflict. It is unforgiving, implacable, insatiable. Love is completely opposite in that it calms the spirit, promotes forgiveness, brings reconciliation and peace. Wisdom and understanding are bound together. Lack of understanding and the rod of correction go together in the hope that punishment may awaken a fool to change. A wise righteous person grows in understanding, and they are thoughtful and guarded when they speak. A fool, babbles without thinking ahead about what he says and brings ruin down on his head.

A rich man may think his money will be his security, but at the best it is only temporary. Moral strength is what lasts. Poverty leaves people without security and basically helpless unless one knows the Lord Jesus Christ as their own Savior. Then they trust Him knowing that He is able to do what is needed according to His will. Righteous people use the results of their labor to sustain life and to give help and hope to others. That also means they will be practicing eternal life here and now. The wicked squander what they have, to finance the sins they want to commit. When one knows and practices biblical principles of living, they are on the right road. Those who refuse those principles and forsake wisdom, go astray and lead others astray.

Hating another person who they profess to like, makes them a liar, a hypocrite and a fool. Concealing hatred is deception that leads to lies. To slander another person and then be proven wrong is an act of a fool. A person who gossips and promotes false rumors is a fool. Words of slander are malicious gossip which is intended to bring someone down. The more a person talks, the more of what is in their heart is exposed. Tale-bearing, off-color stories, too much talk leads to sin. As wise person knows when to be quiet and when to speak. In that way they won't be embarrassed and won't have to retract what they said. Edifying words come from one who is just, fair and righteous. Thoughtful words spoken by a wise person can be treasured because of the value placed on the person and the information and wisdom given. The heart of a wicked person is open to all to see and hear by the bad words he uses, the time he takes to say all his hurtful things, and the results that harm those who listen to him.

Righteous people build up others by their words of care and concern. A shepherd heart is revealed by his words and the tone of voice he uses. Those who don't use good judgment may bring death on themselves. The Lord gives the kind of riches that have no regrets. Salvation and all the blessings that come with it are spiritual and lasting. Our work doesn't add to God's blessings in any way. He freely gives the riches that are real. He is the source. How I use those spiritual riches is my responsibility, and I must give full diligence to use them wisely. Evil actions are like a game to fools. They want to see what they can get away with. A wise person's desire is to use wisdom and all that come with it to full advantage for himself and others.

Fear of the future and fear of justice being done is in the heart of the ungodly. By contrast a wise person wants to please the Lord in all they do for their own sake and for God's glory. "The wise man built his house on a rock," is more than just a Sunday School song. The sayings of the word of God are sure and lasting. They are a solid foundation for living. "The foolish man built his house on the sand" is how the wicked hurriedly build for a vain empty show. All they have and hope for is quickly gone and they have nothing to show for living. The taste of vinegar is so sour that one is anxious to get rid of it. Smoke in the eyes burns and irritates so much we can't wait to wash our eyes out to get rid of the irritants quickly. A lazy man is like vinegar and smoke to his boss who soon gets rid of him.

Respect, reverence and trust in the Lord is good for us spiritually, emotionally and physically. That kind of life helps us have a longer life than those who live in sin. Practicing sin shortens life. A believer's hope and confidence are in the Lord and they base their lives on biblical principles, and practice what the Bible teaches. All the wicked can hope for after they have gained all they can get, is disappointment. Walking in the ways of the Lord gives purpose in life, goals to strive for, strength from the Lord to go forward, and grace to give us what we can't do for ourselves. All the unsaved have to look forward to is a lost eternity which is much worse than what they already have.

The foundation on which a child of God builds their life is the solid unmovable word of God. The God of our salvation never fails. The faith and full confidence of those who trust Him is sure and steadfast. Those who do not know Him are "without Christ... having no hope, and without God in the world." Righteous living makes the word of wisdom from a person who is wise, worth paying attention to. People will want his advice that can be applied to their own lives. The "forward tongue" speaks evil words that are destructive and worthless. There is no value at all in what a "forward" person says. Appropriate words spoken in an appropriate way at the appropriate time will always be acceptable and appreciated. For some reason one who is wicked seems to find satisfaction in unclean, vulgar and unkind talk that is perverse. The wise person can generate interest and lift a conversation to what is acceptable, enjoyable and builds up those who hear and pay attention to his wisdom.

Proverbs 10:32. *"The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the wicked speaketh forwardness."*

THE ENTRANCE.

*It is not a very large part of me,
But it is the front door into me.
Double doors are there to keep the unwanted out
And the same doors are there to guard, and if necessary,
Imprison those things within that shouldn't leave.
A dangerous part of me is very valuable
Yet the same thing can be extremely abominable.
It can bring to others great blessing,
And can produce in them terrible hurt.
It is small and can become large enough to ruin my world.*

*Springs of life, as a fountain of blessing,
Can pour out abundantly through those doors.
Benefits to others that can last a lifetime
Pass through this guarded double portal.*

*Others can be nourished by way of this small part of me
And at the same time its lack of use is very important.
Appropriate actions can come from this part of me
And its proper use can be like refreshing water in the desert.
The challenge of knowing when to bite and lock
These doors, is constantly a reason for active duty.*

*Pressing to make use of these double doors
Is latent violence seeking to wreak destruction
On all those just outside or even far away.
Subtle deceptions line up to use those same doors.
Demanding to escape, they pressure those locks.
Deception making wounded spirits is determined to get loose.
There will be bodies lying and dying if it gets free.
From that small pit can come through those doors
Unseemly results that will affect families and nations.
The only solution is to guard those doors with your life.*

"O Holy God, I beseech Thee to not allow these lips to speak unless guided and guarded by the Holy Spirit. How much havoc can come from an unguarded mouth! Give to Thy servant lips that speak no guile; a tongue that is not deceitful; grace to be poured into these lips; words of truth and salvation tonight in the Gospel meeting. 'Preserve me, O God, for in Thee do I put my trust.' Amen."

Proverbs 11

PAYDAY ALWAYS COMES

Some of the proverbs are personal and have to do with things in our lives that no one else will know about but God. Others are more to do with public lives and the workplace. Much of this group of proverbs has to do with our interaction in general society and in the way we do our business. In business, honesty in every way is expected by the Lord. Deceit and dishonesty are detested by God because it reflects on His perfect standard of righteousness. It is possible to be dishonest in wasting our time for which we are being paid, pretending one thing while doing another. An accurate scale is essential in all our dealings with other people. Any deviation from God holy standard, is a rejection of His will and His nature.

At this time, people seem to think that their own sense of worth is all-important in order to be a fulfilled person. So, with pride and an "Up with man!" mentality, people praise themselves and expect others to praise them too. For some reason true humility is despised as considered weakness. Actually, pride will bring shame and disgrace because "God resists the proud..." A person of humility knows who he or she really is and consciously live in the presence of God who "gives grace to the humble." A person of integrity can be trusted because they have been tested and proved in honest, morality, loyalty – in good times and bad. His word is in obedience to the word of God. A person of integrity is a good guide. This is in contrast to those who have a duplicitous reputation and can't be trusted to tell the truth in business, in giving information, or in what they want from you. They have a personal agenda for their own purposes.

No matter how much money a person has, it won't help them in the day of judgment. That judgment could be natural disaster even now as well as when one stands before God. Wind, water and fire – terminal illness cannot be stopped with one's accumulated wealth. Those who have been saved by God's grace can face death and the future without fear, because they have the righteousness of Christ imputed to them. We have been reconciled to God and love Him because He first loved us. It is our desire to obey and serve Him. Out in the public, one who follows the word of God as our chart and compass for life, and the Holy Spirit as our teacher, can be counted on to be trustworthy and blameless in their labor. No lasting charges can be laid against one who walks a straight consistent path in life. They would not claim to be sinless, but they want to live godly in Christ Jesus. The contrast is those who choose to go their own lawless way, and they will fall and perish because of their sin.

We are preserved from many snares and pitfalls in this world when we are committed to being upright in business and in our personal life. Our choices affect our actions and the consequences that follow. The lustful acts of ungodly people will come back to capture and bite them. Every person has an appointment with death. Believers in Christ "depart to be with Christ" which is far better that life as we know it now. But when an ungodly person dies, he goes out into eternity to "perish," be separated from God forever in hell and the lake of fire. People who have built their hopes on an ungodly person to provide good leadership or come up with some remarkable discovery to help them, have put their hopes on something that is vain and empty.

The righteous are delivered from trouble, like Mordecai was delivered from Haman. The trouble that Haman had planned for Mordecai fell on his own head, and he was hung on gallows he had made. False accusations break friendships and make bad neighbors. The mouth can build up a relationship or hurt it depending on whether it is used as a tool or a weapon. The wicked make false accusations. The righteous use their mouths as a tool to gain knowledge. Such a person is delivered from false accusations by his calm consistency, his moral conduct and his Christian character.

When a leader is just and impartial, his fairness makes him accepted and respected. His leadership gives stability to those for whom he is responsible. Virtue is never out of place. When wicked leadership is overthrown, there is relief, joy and hope is kindled in the people. When citizens of a society are respectable, godly people, the reputation of that community is good. When rioters and rabble-rousers have their deceitful way, a society, whether a city or a nation, will soon fall.

Our neighbors deserve our respect if and when we can honestly give it. If we can't do that, then just keep silent. One man in this verse is putting others down for some supposed reason he has. The other man doesn't say anything because the time may come when he needs the help of those around him. When information is passed on that should be kept secret, it is usually because the talebearer is seeking to gain some advantage over others for a selfish motive. A trustworthy person keeps private that which he knows is confidential. There are times when a few choice words are all that are needed to correct a problem. A talebearer makes "a mountain out of a molehill."

Whenever counsel is asked for, don't think that one person has all the answers. Shared advice and a variety of opinions keep a person from making a serious mistake because of the shared knowledge of a number of people. Often quite a lot of people are affected by the decision one person makes. Elders of an assembly, older people of experience are useful counselors. Then when someone you don't know wants you to lend them money, you will remember not to throw away your money to finance something another person does. If you do, you are responsible for what is done with it, or what is not done. We are stewards of that which God has let us have to use. Do not be careless of that which is not really yours.

The care and concern of a man who has interest in the well-being of others are good for your own health. "Give and it shall be given unto you." A selfish cruel man will bring down on himself consequences that stress, covetousness and dissatisfaction produce in him emotionally and physically. When a person is satisfied with getting away with as little labor as possible on the job, anything he gets for his deceptive work will have no real value. His conscience, and those he did not know were watching him will ultimately expose him. A farmer or workman who does his best, labors hard, and excels in his work, is guaranteed a good return in some way or another. When the bent of a person's life is to do right in his labor and service done "as unto the Lord," the promise of heaven and eternal life are his now and forever. The person who chooses to do wrong, and pursues evil, will be lost eternally.

Corrupt, devious, crooked and perverse people are detested by the Lord. Those who walk a moral, blameless and upright life, delight the heart of God. There is no escaping the righteous judgment of God for those who do evil, even if there are a whole lot of people who do the same things. Those who live for God, He will deliver by His power according to His will without any needed assistance from people. You can wash a pig, dress it up and make it a pet – even put a gold ring in its nose, but it is still a pig. The same principle is true for a beautiful woman who is ignorant and without discernment inwardly. Outward physical attraction doesn't last, and a person who lacks discretion is not pleasant to even be around, nor to work with, or live with.

Good and bad are not able to be blended. They do not mix. An upright person who lives his or her life conscious of God and has love for God, can look forward to the blessings of God. The person who chooses wickedness and wants what they know is wrong, will find the wrath of God is upon those who do not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not want Him in their life. It is hard for many people to understand that generosity in giving increases what we receive. The way to get is to give. We have time, energy, money and the seed of the Gospel to give. The joy of giving is far greater than any satisfaction we might have from hoarding what we have. God is easily able to take away whatever we think is our own. To share what we have with others, warms our own soul, blesses others and honors the Lord. "Remember this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." [2Cor.9:6 NIV].

It is not uncommon for people to hold back selling their grain watching the "futures market" to get the highest possible price. However, when food is scarce and people need what you have, if you still hold out for more, people will despise and curse on you. If you make available what you have, they will ask God's blessing on it and on you. Take every advantage to do good. When you diligently seek that which is good, you will find it. If you are looking for sin and self-centered gratification, you will find the evil that goes with it. What you really look for, good or bad, is what you will find.

What a person depends on is indicative of the person they are. Those who trust in riches will find they fail him. It will cause his downfall. Those who trust in the Lord will find they flourish spiritually and emotionally. They will be happy and will be known as a person who knows how to live because they know what is important in life. Covetous business people, gamblers – people who bring ruin on their family for any sinful reason, will have nothing of real value to leave behind. They will have lost all they hoped to have, plus their reputation, their self-worth and their family.

Wise people are a blessing to all who will be blessed by the fruit of your life. Soul-winning, guiding and caring for a family, serving God's people are all good things that produce the fruit of real spiritual life and growth. The appealing life of a child of God is a great blessing and can be used by Him when we are leading souls to Christ. However, discipline does come to believers who have stepped out of the path of divine guidance. Wise and faithful servants of the Lord will have times of correction and discipline to change their behavior. Of how much sorer punishment will those who have rejected God, refused to trust the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, and have chosen sin over salvation, receive when the final payday comes.

Proverbs 11:3. *“The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.”*

A MAN OF INTEGRITY.

*He stands before his father and mother and listens to them – respectfully
Their admonitions and instructions do not fall on deaf ears – silently
From the models of two who love each other and him, he has learned – consciously
When the time comes for him to leave home, they are confident in his – integrity*

*Studying hard he applies himself to the subjects at hand – studiously
He hears the lectures and gives attention to the details – intently
While others play, he prepares himself for the exams – privately
At the graduation he walks across and is applauded for his – integrity*

*He is on his own now making decisions that affect others – cautiously
It is not his intent to compromise his work so he does it – carefully
People learn to trust him as day after day he lives – consistently
A reputation is earned and he is known as a man of – integrity*

*He has a wife who trusts him and looks up to him – lovingly
The children follow his guidance and speak of him – admiringly
The family unit lives happily together and enjoys each other – peacefully
Guided by one who has committed himself at home to – integrity*

*As believers gather together in worship and praise, he is there – devotedly
His leadership provided to the saints is trusted because he makes decisions – prayerfully
When needs arise that need to be met, he is there to assist – gladly
And when advice is asked or counsel given, he is well known for his – integrity*

*He is old now and life moves along more slowly but he accepts that – patiently
As he looks back over his life, he traces God's ways with him – gratefully
After saying his last good-byes to those he loves he looks up – confidently
Trusting in God's grace alone, he has lived and died as a man of – integrity*

“Father, I have known some men and women like this. Father and mother were people of integrity. Others too who are well known to Thee have left their mark on the people in their lives and even now are spoken of with appreciation. I would like to be a part of that band of saints who may be unknown to most people but those who did know them speak of their integrity. I ask that I might not waste my remaining years or lose any credibility because of a lack of integrity. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Proverbs 12

WISDOM IN WORDS

The balance of conduct and speech, communicate the character of a person. One person said to another, “What you do speaks so loudly, I can't hear a thing you say.” The wise person has learned they don't and won't know everything. But as long as they maintain a righteous life and learn when to listen and learn, they will be able to be trusted and used by God for the benefit of other people and God's glory.

A person who wants to learn is intelligent, because they will accept instruction when it is given by one who is wiser and more experienced than they. When correction is given, they will accept it gladly and the discipline necessary will be appreciated because they can see ahead. There will always be more to learn, but to refuse constructive criticism indicates the serious problem of pride. God resists that person. Someone who is a know-it-all, is ignorant and doesn't admit it. The person of integrity will please the Lord who show will favor to him or her. The crafty person is wicked, and their intentions will bring God's justice and judgment down on himself.

Wickedness will not bring success in life though you may save money by cheating the government out of taxes you owe, or pass an exam by copying someone else's work. You may save a bit of money by using poor material in a project and by allowing shoddy workmanship, but the result may be the loss of your character and reputation. The solid reputation of a righteous person means he can be trusted in all their actions, and that establishes that person as one who can be counted on because they are rooted in righteousness. This is a result of faith in God.

A virtuous wife is a woman of excellent character. She is morally upright, ambitious in her calling in life, strong in her convictions, and can be trusted. Her worth as a trusted person reflects well on her loved ones – her husband and family, as well as on herself. The contrast is a wife who doesn't care about others including her husband, but lives for her own self-centered interests. Her emotional and moral weaknesses are a drain on the lives of her husband and children. A righteous person plans ahead with a commitment to do what is right, rather than to react to events and problems after they come. Their mind is directed towards that which is pleasing to the Lord. The wicked pass on advice that is deceitful because they have a perverted sense of what is right and wrong.

The planned plot of the wicked is to verbally ambush someone they hate in order to do that person harm. A person of good character can have their reputation "murdered" by the lies and deceitful words of the wicked. On the other hand, the words of a righteous person who is known for speaking the truth, will deliver them from such attacks and the results of deception. "What goes around, comes around," so the wicked will be exposed, overthrown and destroyed. The family of the righteous will remain because of the firm roots that have been established by righteous living and the passing on of truth from one generation to the next. Those who taught us the truth are still praised when we speak of them, though they have gone to heaven long ago. Their imparted wisdom remains with us in fond remembrance. Those who undermine the people of God, or who have left a bad testimony and reputation, are still despised.

A person who is looked down on because he has those who work for him, is in a better condition than those who claim to be important and tell others of all their exploits, but have nothing to show for it. He doesn't even have enough to maintain himself, let alone a family. Some people live way beyond their means, and forget that their debts have to be paid. A righteous man even pays attention to the animals he owns. An animal in the days of Solomon would have been very valuable to normal everyday life as well as being an investment. If a person has animals, he is obligated to take good care of them. A wicked man has no mercy in him toward dumb creatures, so at his best he is still cruel in his treatment of them. God created them for our benefit, He has interest in animals and even sparrows, and He has chosen to give human beings dominion over them.

A good farmer labors hard to produce what he needs, and will not be satisfied until the harvest is brought in. "In all labor there is profit," so in whatever area of life we have responsibility, we need to make sure we do all we can to make that work a success. People who spend their time and efforts in frivolous things of no real value are foolish. When evil men steal and seem to get away with it, other wicked people are jealous of them. Those things that are forbidden are attractive to people who love sin. The righteous person is secure in what comes to him from his own efforts and his own property. Twisting the facts with deceptive words to support devious claims, will ultimately trap one who lies. It is not easy to tell a lie over and over without contradicting the lie that was told previously. Facts are truth that is plain and unshakable. You don't have to make up truth. It remains faithful to itself.

What a man says and does brings its own results. Our mouths and our hands are the members of our bodies that produce the most benefit. Good words can be useful and encouraging to many or to individuals. Hard work can produce helpful benefits to others as well as giving joy to the person who can see the positive fruit of his ministry. Not everything that seems right is right. When a person has all the answers, he doesn't know all the problem. When a person thinks they are always right, he is fooling himself, not others. Shifting blame is really lying. A person is wise who is willing to listen to correction and advice from someone wiser than themselves.

When one is insulted, it is natural for them to want to retaliate. But venting anger at a simple annoyance only encourages conflict and doesn't solve anything. Uncontrolled temper only displays the character of a foolish person. A person who takes time to think and consider a matter, and then answers carefully and quietly to the shame of being insulted, has good self-control and self-respect. A positive response will bring a satisfactory result, and hopefully, a conclusion to an insult. Sometimes we have to speak. When that happens, a wise person always tells the truth when

called to witness to an event. In those times truth has to be told to vindicate some wrong testimony of a false witness has given. The character of the false witness will someday, sometime and some way be exposed for what it is.

Hard speech and words that hurt people, very seldom produce any benefit. To say things that are unnecessary in a way that is not helpful, is both reckless and produces a negative effect. A wise person uses words to encourage, help and heal, rather than infect communication with others in ways that bring sorrow and bitterness. Truth stands the test of time. It applies to the present and the future because truth is a characteristic of the One who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life..." The truth of scripture has never changed and has the power to sanctify those who read it and apply it to themselves. Laws change, opinions change, even interpretation of the scriptures are changed when people want to suit themselves. But the word of God is "settled forever." It is changeless. A lie has a very short life span before it is exposed for what it is and is rejected.

Deceit is in the heart of those who make plans of evil intent. For some reason they think they will find pleasure in being perverse and deceptive like their father the devil. A peacemaker who plans for peace and seeks it, will have joy in peace, and will know personally, "Blessed are the peacemakers..." Believers in Christ are not immune from harm in specific things, but in a general sense they escape from more than they will have to go through. Moreover, Christians will often find what may be physical harm is actually an opportunity for their faith in God to be openly seen. Those who are ungodly will not escape trouble and can have no benefit from it, so will have to bear the full brunt of it alone. Quite often in the proverbs, those who lie are spoken of as being detested as an abomination unto God. That devilish characteristic is the total opposite of truth in which God delights. Honest people are trustworthy people of integrity.

A person with true wisdom and intelligence is prudent with a quiet confidence that doesn't feel the necessity of having to prove anything. They know who they are, and what they have done, and what they are capable of doing. They don't have to advertise themselves, show off or have a whole lot to say. Their modesty is appealing. Fools can't keep quiet about themselves or even things they know very little about. When you hear in a conversation someone talking about "I did this," "I did that," "I said to him," "I know all about that because..." you know you are in the presence of a fool. A person of diligence is one who disciplines himself before he tries to discipline others and tell them what they should do. When one is diligent in business, he will be trusted to go higher and farther. A person diligent in the things of God will be used by God and useful in God's work. A lazy person will end up doing work for little or nothing because he gives nothing of himself to the tasks that honest labor requires.

When a person has not learned to walk by faith and is anxious about little things as well as the big things, their mind is affected and they can become depressed. They get depressed over things over which they have no control and can do nothing about. In contrast, instead of pessimism, an optimistic person can cheer people up and give them some hope. When they do that, they cheer themselves up too. It doesn't take a lot of time to say a few kind words to lift someone's spirit. Choose your company, counselors and confidants well. Those who will be a help to you will be trustworthy and wise. The "other side of the coin" is that wicked people may give counsel but will lead you astray from that which is right, what will do you good, and from God.

A lazy person does not value what he has or what is available to him. He has something good but either wastes it or ignores it. We need to take good care of what we have and make good use of it. We have "all things in Christ" available to us to use for our benefit. The word of God, the throne of grace, the indwelling Spirit, the new nature, the fellowship of saints and the guidance of wise counselors are all available to us, but are only valuable when we make use of them with diligence. For believers in Christ, those who have committed themselves to righteousness and live by the principles of wisdom, at the end of the way there is the light of heaven and a fullness of life forevermore that exceeds the joy of living for our Lord now. Immortality is real in that there is no more death after physical death. We enter into a greater experience of eternal life than we have ever had here. Any person who chooses to reject righteousness rejects life. One who goes in the "way of righteousness" will not lose, but will avoid all the sins that end in eternal death.

Proverbs 12:26. *"The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute."*

DILIGENCE.

The work the Lord has given me is a good work. Not necessarily because it involves constantly being with people and dealing with things that are spiritual and eternal, but because I am confident, He has put me in it. When I am tempted to slack back or consider my work to be less important now that I am getting older, I am reminded that my Lord put me in this area of responsibility, so it will have to be Him that takes me out of it and/or tells me to quit.

Therefore, I must be diligent to use every asset I have to fulfill the responsibilities I have been given. The blessing of good health is for a reason. The amount of money to meet the obligations we have; He has given us. The hours in a day can be used effectively if I am diligent. The degree of intellect He gave me is to be evaluated and used within the confines of my God-given ability. I should never aspire to be what my Lord did not intend me to be.

There will be areas of rule I cannot avoid. People do, and will continue to, ask for my advice and thoughts on a variety of matters. So, I have to consider it is God that made what and who I am; who put me in the place I am, and I must be diligent in maintaining this trust He has given.

“O my gracious Father, the life and work Thou gave me to do has not yet been taken away from me. I feel like I am still young and able to do any work that Thou asks me to do. I know where I am at this moment and doing what I am doing is right. Please continue to use this feeble servant in ways that will bring glory to my Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Proverbs 13

WISDOM AT WORK

Areas of personal life where we need wisdom taught by others in order to make sensible decisions, are in our words, work and wishes. Our communication is mainly through our words and body language. I have read that over 80% of communication is non-verbal. I am not sure about the percentage, but I do know that tone of voice, the tilt of the head and the position of the body, movements of the hand and facial expressions all reflect on what the words said really mean in the context of a conversation. Work in this chapter is referred to by the result of work which is wealth. To learn the value of meaningful work, parents need to begin to teach their children at a young age that everything they need to live has a value that is basically defined by how much work it takes to get it.

The wise son hears and heeds what his parents teach. Implied is the parents are willing to take the time needed to educate their sons and daughters. Parents have the responsibility to train their children, and children are responsible to learn and apply the instruction given. The foolish is not willing to listen, and considers what his parents tell him is of no value or interest to him. Many children today feel they are entitled to whatever their parents have, with no obligation on their part. Part of this attitude is the fault of the parents who don't expect anything from their children, and part is the attitude of children toward doting parents or parents who are too busy to spend time with their children. When relationships in life are the way they should be, there is joy and satisfaction by both parties in the relationship. Those who cannot be trusted have a perverted sense of pleasure in promoting violence and seeing what they can break or destroy. Some empty-headed children find an evil satisfaction in breaking windows and mailboxes, rioting or flattening tires on cars.

Sometimes to say nothing has more impact for good than having a lot to say. It is important to think before speaking; to wait before interrupting. Careless conversation and too much talk can bring disaster on those who hear the gossip that is started or listen to the half-truths and innuendo that are passed from unguarded lips. A person who does not want to work, still wants what others have, so is never satisfied with what he has. He can tell everyone what needs to be done, but does nothing himself. Even Christians who know what needs to be done but think they are too busy, wonder, “Why doesn't someone do something about that?” Laziness is contrasted by one who is diligent and goes to work to do what is needed and to be able to get what he wants.

A person of wisdom and diligence is approved of when he hates lying, deception and hypocrisy. He hates what is false. Wicked people are willing to lie to get what they want, but as a result, they become a disgusting smell to those who can see right through them. Right living is like having a guard around a wise person that preserves them from danger. Integrity is a preservative that doesn't fail to meet the need of holy living in an ungodly world. Obedience to God keeps a person safe and secure. The sinner will fall because his own sin will find him out. Pretense usually has a motive behind it that is generally unknown. If a person pretends to be rich and has nothing, his hypocrisy is usually to try to make others respect him. Perhaps he hopes to get some understanding as to how a get-rich-quick scheme that doesn't require hard work. When the opposite is true: a wealthy person pretends to be poor, that person is either a miser, doesn't want to use what he has, nor does he want to use what he has to help others. There are riches that are of more value than money. A Christian like C.T. Studd, who gave his money away to be consistent with his calling, is rich in mercy, grace and love for Christ.

Rich people may be held captive for their money if robbers know they are wealthy. The “cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches” can do that very quickly. A poor man won't face “rebuke” or threats because he has nothing the thieves want. Spiritual riches are the best kind because they are treasures laid up in heaven. A life of purity and right living is like a light shining in the darkness of this fallen society. The life of those who practice evil will not last very long.

Pride and arrogance are problems common to all people. So, they are addressed in various ways to suit various situations in the proverbs. Jealousy, quarrels, on-going strife and bitterness come from pride. As far as unbelievers are concerned, pride is probably the number one soul-damning sin. Common sense in intelligent people leads them to accept advice and the wisdom of others. In that way they can avoid the strife that is so common among proud people. Sometimes we will have to admit that we have made mistakes, and that is hard on our pride. Money gained in dishonest ways reflects on a person's character. Covetousness comes with a high cost, particularly to those who are

addicted to gambling. The temporary gain of dishonesty will soon drain away to the regret and sadness of those who think they had it made. Honest work provides honest buying power because God favors the honest labor of a man or woman.

False hopes are not raised by wise people. Realistic desires that come to pass give joy to one's heart and a new view of life, and a willingness to give God thanks for all we have received. Prayers are not always answered right away, but "the heart that burns" because of the wisdom and understanding that comes from the word of God, brings fruit that lasts. To scorn the word of God means you will have a price to pay. To obey the word of God and give it the honor it deserves, will bring great reward and that brings satisfaction. The word of God contains the wise teaching we need to live full lives. When we know the word of God and obey it, we will be able to avoid the snares of death that rob us of abundant life. Discernment is not an accident, but a choice we make when we open the scriptures of truth.

When a wise person respects the Lord and pays attention to what God's word teaches, that person's wisdom will be respected, and they will be respected. People know honesty and common sense when they see it in others, even though they reject it themselves. Those who don't take control of their own minds and thoughts will run into problems that are harder than their hearts. Lack of morals, resistance to God and truth, make a hard heart and low character. The way a person lives reflects who they are in character. The prudent person conducts themselves and their life wisely. They know there are consequences to every action. The fool can't help being foolish so he brags about all he does and makes an outward fool of himself.

If a messenger can't be trusted with the truth, trouble will come right behind him. Fear of man, a desire to please everyone, and false hopes can make a person with a message compromise that for which he has been trusted to deliver. When a true ambassador of Christ presents a message, there will be blessing of one kind or another from that message. Haggai was the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message. When a person is given good advice and beneficial discipline, the way they take it for themselves determines whether they will fall into poverty and shame, or honor. Can I accept criticism and improve, or do I reject criticism and fail? How we take criticism and discipline will also determine whether we have used our life for benefit or wasted it. Worthwhile goals that we reach, results in satisfaction that has worth and value to us. It is sweet to know that what we have accomplished has real benefit. Those who live only for the moment will continue to do what they know is wrong for fleeting pleasure. If one feels they are entitled to what they have not earned, they will never be satisfied, no matter what they do.

Choose your friends wisely. If you spend time with those who are wise, you will become wise. Watch what wise people do. Listen to how they speak. See how they treat their parents, their family and how they regard the law of the land and social responsibilities. Any person who tries to introduce you to new sin is not a friend, but rather an enemy in disguise no matter what they may say or do. Fools will be harmed in life and destroyed so far as a useful life and eternity. Consequences for sin are going to follow the sinner whether he knows it or not. Some day they will catch up to, and defeat, those who choose sin. Consequences will also follow those who do what is right and what pleases the Lord. Those good consequences will more than repay any losses experienced. The Lord will honor those who honor Him.

We all will leave some sort of an inheritance to our children and grandchildren. To give them a lot of money so they don't have to work will not do a lot of lasting good for them. The heritage of a good family reputation, praying parents and grandparents, words of wisdom from the scriptures, a lifetime of spiritual experiences passed on will do more for them than a free college education, a new car or a down payment on a house. A spiritual legacy will give spiritual direction. That which a sinner will end up with, will be given to the godly to be used in a right way. There is an abundance of food beneath our feet that is available to a poor farmer. It is up to us to break up the fallow ground. It may be that in some places in the world and under tyrannical government leaders or crooked business men, they will claim what the poor have by taxes or exorbitant rent to claim what they say is owed them.

Discipline in a family is essential to avoid chaos, selfishness, burst of temper and self-centeredness. How the "rod" of correction is used is generally indicative of the kind of love, and the degree of love the parent has for the child. Self-centered parents will let a child do what he or she wants. A loving parent will back up their love with discipline and training which takes time. Physical abuse is very different from loving but firm discipline. To leave a child untrained and allowing them to do what they want is unfair to the child, to the family and to society. It will leave him or her ill-equipped to deal with adult life that is not very far away. Those who know their children, know what kind of discipline to use, how much and when to use it.

A disciplined person will be godly in life and will know what is right and how to act upon it. They will have a spiritual appetite, and spiritual food will satisfy their spiritual hunger. The wicked have no "stomach" for truth and righteousness. They will live and die unsatisfied and unfulfilled.

Proverbs 13:7. *"There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches."*

PRETENDERS.

*He seems to have everything, at least according to what he says
If you were like him, there is no limit to what you could do
When he goes out to buy, whatever attracts his fancy he gets
The clothes he wears, where he lives, the cars he drives all show
He has made it big – he is shrewd and clever and rich
You should copy his way of life and find out all he knows
And maybe whatever made him successful, to the same star you can hitch.*

*Stop for a minute and consider this – most rich men only for riches live
Their life is wrapped around how to make their “much” still more
When a person’s heart is set on wealth, they’d much rather take than give
To meet the needs of the hurting and, when possible, help the poor
Often those that make a “big splash” pretend much, but it’s little they really have
They borrowed, schemed and bribed – and haven’t paid the lender what they owe
All they seem to have and spend is to impress those who are probably naïve
Their life-style isn’t to honor God – it is really a vain, empty show.*

*Another man may have so much he doesn’t want anyone to know
He is truly rich but not for any reason would he part from some of it
He is afraid if people know of his wealth, they would start to go
To his house on behalf of a person or cause, ask for a little bit
So he keeps it quiet, he dresses down, his wealth he does not show
And misses the blessings the giver receives as well as the one who gets
Forgetting that it is all left behind the minute he from his body goes
He lived for what he tried to keep but eternal riches he did forget.*

*Far better that a person here lives an open life of faith and modesty
If the Lord chooses to let one be rich be thankful for that blessing
And if one doesn’t have so much – so be it – just live honestly
People are not all deceived, the stingy man doesn’t know what he’s missing
And the one who pretends he’s rich will be exposed for his falsity
Both of them need to learn life is not made up of my hope of possessing
Riches either real or false – but when one has committed to real charity
Then God Himself is honored by one living out what he is professing.*

“O God, I know pretense is not possible before Thee who knows when a sparrow or a hair falls. But it is quite common for people to make a pretense to be holy and spiritual, or concerned and interested when it is not really true. I know because I have done that. I am praying that I will be kept from any false ways and be willing to live a transparent life before those who know me. Maybe I don’t want to let everything hang out but I just want reality to show itself for what it is. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Proverbs 14

THE MIND OF THE WISE

It is possible for us to live our whole life without anything of lasting value to show for all the years of labor and futile effort. To begin early in adult life with an objective, a life-goal, assists us in being realistic about what we can and cannot do. To chase dreams, or to “dream big,” are challenges carelessly thrown out at graduation ceremonies that do a disservice to young people who say to themselves, “I can be a millionaire if I put my mind to it,” or “I could be the president of the USA if I really want to.”

The proverbs help us to be realistic and sensibly aware of our strengths and weaknesses. They also give us an understanding of how the Lord works in the lives of “every-day-people” to enable them to be successful parents, successful in relationship, successful in personal life and in the areas of leadership to which God equips and leads us.

This chapter of Proverbs begins with a wise woman who understands and accepts her role in life, and is doing a good job of it. She is a builder of lives, not a critic. She applies effort to the benefit of her household, not just for her own

self-centered ambitions. She realizes her work is a full-time job that will have a greater effect on her family and others than any money she earns. The effect of her life and work on others, for good or bad, depends on her being a builder or a wrecker. What takes a long time to build, can be quickly torn down by a foolish woman.

A wise man who fears the Lord and conducts his life with honor and righteousness, is in direct contrast to those who do not consider the Lord at all, but despise Him. The thoughts of the mind determine whether both the woman in the first verse and the man in the second will be a positive or negative person in the lives of others – especially their own family. A young person who will not listen to wise counsel but is defensive, willful and rebellious, will suffer in one way or another. His conceit and his talk will bring regret and embarrassment. A person who thinks before he speaks is wise. He is the kind of person who is willing to listen and to learn.

When we put those first verses into a family context, if you want what you consider a “perfect life,” with no inconveniences or disruptive events, don’t have children. The joy of family life you will never experience when you choose to live a self-centered life. If you are a productive farmer, you are going to have to shovel some dirt. If you want all of the meetings of an assembly to always be quiet and reverential with nothing to upset your thoughts, do not allow children to come. You will have quietness, no growth, no inconveniences, no need to clean the building – and soon no need of a building because there will be no one there and no assembly.

An honest person will tell the truth and all the truth. He will not try to deceive a judge in the courtroom, elders in an assembly, or caring school teachers and parents. Lying is the practice, not the exception of false witnesses in any situation. What a person is in character, is seen by what they do in conduct. What a person is in themselves is displayed when they mock the words of those who seek to teach them. They do not seriously take for themselves what is taught. Their self-centered pride rejects the words of the wise. Those who want to know what is right will seek for it and act upon the wisdom they have learned.

This is a charge to a son who is listening to a wise person, - “Stay away from fools!” When a person is speaking or acting nonsense, distance yourself. You will not benefit in any way from the nonsense of a comedian or the bitter words of a rabble-rouser. If you stay there it will pervert your mind, affect your conduct and may hurt your reputation and character as a trust-worthy person. The mind has an effect on who we are, how we mature and grow and how we gain wisdom. That opens up to how the things we do appears to other people. If I don’t bring “every thought into captivity,” I will find myself not being trusted even in public. A person who has wisdom will carefully consider the outcome of a course that is before them which they plan to take. That person will think about the positive or negative effects of this choice. The foolish person doesn’t bother to think about it and doesn’t care. Consequently, they deceive themselves and others.

Mockers have a callous attitude toward sin. They don’t consider the damage it causes. They don’t seem to have any consciousness of guilt. Those who are committed to a clean, upright life, have a sensitivity toward right and wrong. Their goodwill keeps them from having to be first, complaining a lot or creating tension. They know what is right and they are motivated to do what is right. True friendship is not very common. Consequently, there are bitter things in life we do not share with others, and sorrow that we keep to ourselves. There are also things that have brought us great joy when the bitter work is done and gone. There are truths that dawn on our souls, that we can’t express but they are real to us and bring us real joy.

Some great event or success in the life of a wicked person may seem temporarily to be a wonder, and it could be the startup of a business or a home. But because it is the fruit of wickedness and sin, it can be overthrown in a very short time. Who would ever think living in a tent could be a place where life could flourish? Abraham is an example of one who dwelt in a tent but his faith flourished, because he “looked for a city whose builder and maker is God.” It is what a person is, not what they have, that determines what flourishes. The way of man is contrary to the way of God. The way of man leads to death. The way of God leads to eternal life. When one trusts the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, that faith makes them able to please God, and they “follow Jesus in the way,” because He is “the Way.”

What we see on the outside maybe very different on the inside. A person may be able to laugh at something and yet it is a big inner hurt to them. Laughing and making a joke about something may be a person’s way of covering the pain that very thing causes. A self-centered believer is away from the Lord. One who has an inward sin issue that has not been confessed and dealt with, will find the consequences of that in all they do. One’s whole life will be inwardly miserable no matter how successful he may be, because his words and inner thoughts are different than his walk. The man of faith and righteousness in life, will find approval from God and encouragement and joy in what he does.

Just because something appeals to us, or seems to be a good deal doesn’t mean it is. Don’t be gullible. It is foolish to think that people will tell you everything when they are trying to get you to do something for them or sell something to you. A prudent person takes the time necessary to discern what is meant as well as what is said. Think before you act. On the other hand, take a careful look at any matter and what surrounds it before taking any action regarding it.

If it has the appearance of evil, likely it is, so get away from it quick and avoid it at all times. An arrogant person will boldly assert they can handle anything life throws at him.

There is a difference between a person with a short temper and one who schemes, plans and premeditates evil. The first one is a temperamental fool. The second one is a dangerous and hated person who knows what he is doing and carefully plans to carry out some wicked act. A thoughtless simple person will get nothing but the results of foolishness on his part, or being fooled by others. The wise person will be blessed because of his discernment and knowledge will increase. The day will come when those who have planned for, devised and then carried out evil purposes, will bow in respect to those who were righteous and conducted their lives before people in the fear of God.

Both rich and poor people have dangers to avoid. What a person truly is, cannot be measured by the amount of money he or she has. People avoid poor people who either ask for financial help, or appear so destitute that one who withholds helping them feels guilty. Those kinds of "friends" are those who are there when you have money and spend some of it helping them, but are not around when you run out of money. Spiritual and personal interest is what really counts in personal relationships. To balance things, the writer of the Proverbs points out it is sin to not do good when we can. Our neighbors may be helpless to do what is needed, and for me to "know to do good, and not do it, is sin." When we can help a person out of some hard situation, it is our privilege and responsibility to do it.

When a person plans to do evil, he has already gone astray, and when he is caught, he won't find mercy nearby. People will not trust that person. When a person makes plans to do what is right and good, they will find both mercy and truth. That person is fruitful and trustworthy. There is profit in hard work, both for one's self and for others. Sitting around and chatting doesn't help anyone. In fact, those who do that will soon find themselves without anything. Trivial talk has no profit to anyone. When a person is wise enough to look around and consider how they can get ahead, they will find the opportunity they seek and will find it has its rewards. When a person is known for "only fooling around," that is all they will get. Nothing more than foolishness.

When called upon to bear witness to an event or person, tell the truth. Truth and fairness with justice, will save people's lives. The lies of a false witness have no value and casts a bad reflection on our Lord Jesus if that person professes to be a Christian. God is a refuge for those who respect and honor Him. That person's children will have safety because of parents who trust the Lord. The best thing a man can leave his family is a legacy of faith. When the fear of the Lord governs our actions by the power and wisdom God gives us, it also gives satisfaction in life. It protects us along the way and contributes to our abundant and confident life.

Those who lead others, need to stop and look back from time to time to see if anyone is following them and their example. A leader needs to value people and let them know he does. Those who know leaders care for them and trust them, will be loyal followers. If people don't pay attention to your leadership, you are not really a leader and are not in the right position. It is very important to keep your temper under control, especially when being provoked and tested. A person with a short temper loses credibility quickly when his impulsive behavior exposes him as a man who cannot be depended on.

A person who is contented with their lot in life can avoid a lot of health issues that are associated with emotional stress. An unsatisfied mind leads to frustration, which leads to resentment, which leads to bitterness and jealousy. Poor people have always had a special place in God's heart. Truly poor people deserve our assistance. To insult, demean, mock or ignore those with real need is totally wrong. When people do that to the poor, that should move us to take action to meet their need and speak up on their behalf. A person without Christ is still in their sins and there is not hope for rich or poor to escape eternal judgment. Those who are saved by God's grace can die in confidence, trusting wholly in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a calmness and quietness of spirit in one who has learned from wisdom and can discern the mind of God without making a big fuss about it. Fools who are dramatic about senseless things are advertising their lack of wisdom. When a nation is committed to maintaining its righteous laws and maintains its standards without compromise, that nation will be honored. When principles of righteous living are abandoned, that nation will be a disgrace among all nations as well as those who live righteous lives in that nation. A leader needs wise counselors around him who know what is best for him and those he leads. One who was thought to be wise, and turns out to be a fool will certainly anger the king and soon will lose any position he once held.

Proverbs 14:34. *"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people."*

THE REPUTATION OF A NATION.
*The beginning was based on the Word of God
They came from all over the world.*

*Not perfect it's true but they all knew they should
Base their laws on a tried and proven Word.
Poverty stricken and hungry the people survived
They were tested in many different ways.
Through perils and pain – not much left but their lives
They put their trust in God and found better days.*

*It was only an upstart among the world's nations
But an identity was carved out in blood.
Small and weak they soon gained a reputation
As a people who were not afraid of hard work,
The expansion continued; people moved west
They didn't leave their Bibles behind.
Their reputation spread – they wanted the best
The nation finally its soul did find.*

*The bitter taste of wars – international and civil
Tried the soul of the nation severe.
And the people kept coming wanting to start over
They came from almost everywhere.
But now something has changed – a dangerous turn
A new religion has made itself known.
The Bible, its message and truth people spurn
A materialistic society has emerged full blown.*

*Now instead of righteousness that exalts a nation
Possessions and money are what people desire.
Covetousness and greedy is our reputation
Not only possessions but our souls are for hire.
Our people no longer pray, the Bible is strange,
Even our holidays are secular at best.
Our heritage, even history “revised” and changed
Our integrity has out the window been cast.*

*Sin on every hand has made us a reproach –
What now can the righteous do?
Our moral decay gives our nation a stench
Wherever in the world we go.
It is time to call a halt – make a right-about-face
Turn from sin and back to God we must flee.
Challenge every family in each and every place
To get back to the Source of our liberty.*

*We became what we are with our original commitment
To Almighty God and obeying His Holy Word.
The sinful society we are now needs replacement
By a people who acknowledge God is our Lord.
I cannot change others but I have a reputation
I am responsible before all who know me.
If one after another all over this nation
Repent and turn to God, by His mercy an honored nation we'll be.*

“O Holy God, the God of all nations: we have turned away and no longer is the fear of God among us. I am reminded of Ezra praying and weeping for his nation and a change happened in one day. We stopped to pray seven years ago at 9/11, but that pause was so short lived the death of 3000 people has been forgotten. Can I contribute to the nation being brought to repentance in ways that I have overlooked? If so, I ask that I will seek and find that work that needs to be done – and then do it. Until that time, I will continue in what Thou hast given me until now. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Proverbs 15

HUMAN BEHAVIOR

In the Proverbs there are many references to words and the way we use them. Also, there are references made to work in a variety of ways, and why it is important. The walk of a wise person is addressed often, because what we say and what we do is made real, by our attitude and conduct. When relationships are tested by emotional outbursts, the situation between people can rapidly deteriorate into positions of opposition that can potentially remain. There is a simple way to defuse the tension. A calm thoughtful answer takes away the tension so that reasonable and quiet dialogue can take place. This is not surrender on the part of one to the other, but a means of coming to a conclusion that removes the strain on the relationship. Wisdom provides the right words and the way to use them.

Clear explanation of what is right by a wise man gives understanding. A whole lot of words pouring out of the mouth of a fool makes no sense, provides no understanding, and gives no help. Keep things simple and to the point. There are no secret sins that escape God's eyes, nor are there things done privately or anonymously of which He is not aware. The actions and attitudes, the motives and results of everything we do is seen by the Lord. Don't even try to deceive Him. You'll lose. Words have the power to build or crush; to heal or to destroy. The tone of voice and the sensitivity of words and how they are used, can help and heal a hurting soul. Harsh criticism and cutting sarcasm from a thoughtless person can kill a sensitive soul.

There are times when parents need to correct as well as instruct their children. It is not always appreciated by young adults or older children who think they have already arrived at maturity. They are sure they know quite a bit more than their parents who are from a past generation. A sensible, prudent young person has looked ahead far enough to know they need guidance that comes from experience. Prayer, Bible reading, and open conversations in a Christian home, make that home a treasure house. All that is needed for successful and godly living, stability and character building, is best taught in the home where godly parents care for and guide their family in the ways of the Lord. Whatever those who do not want God in their homes allow in, will not bring treasure, but ruin. Uncontrolled access to a computer, to TV, to all books and magazines, to games and unsupervised time spent with friends, brings ruin to lives and families – and nations.

The experiences of God at work in a wise man or woman that are passed on to others, brings benefit to those who hear them. Those who want to go their own way and do their own thing without any interference, are fools. Some sinful people think they can get favor with God if they give money to a church, a charity or some foundation that does good things. Actually, that attitude and action is an abomination to God because it implies that God is limited in His power and ability, and He is able to be manipulated by the largesse of people. The first mention of prayer in the book of Proverbs assures us of the Lord's delight when people know Him and want to communicate with Him personally.

What is the pattern of life of the wicked? How about the life of the righteous? Arrogance, independence, self-centered and sinful life patterns of the wicked is detested by the Lord. The lifestyle and spiritual direction and conduct of a righteous person is pleasing to the Lord, and He assures them of His love. When a person knows what is right and then goes another way, he or she will experience stern correction. "Whom the Lord loveth, He chastens." If a person hates correction and will not take it, he is a candidate for death which awaits the Christ rejector. God has no difficulty understanding the hearts of people who chose evil over good. He has full access to both the grave and that which is beyond the grave. He knows all about hell and destruction about which we know very little. How much more does He know about us who are alive now. Nothing about us: our minds, our attitudes, our actions, our words – nothing is hidden from God!

There are a lot of people who don't like to be corrected. It is hard on our pride to learn that we are not right about everything. Those who mock wise counsel and scoff at those who want to give them wise counsel, are avoided by people who know them. Pride and haughty ways reject advice given, and it doesn't take long to show. Our face often reveals what is inside. A smile that does not reach the eyes is generally put on, and can be quickly gone. One who is happy in spirit reflects that happiness outwardly. A sad face may mean someone is hurt, is broken-hearted, is sorrowing and is going through a real hard time. It is then a caring person needs to come alongside to give comfort. A person of understanding and intelligence wants to know more, so applies themselves to feed their mind and soul. What we read, listen to, and watch needs to be filtered by the truths of the word of God which gives us discernment from God. The fool feeds on foolishness to get more foolishness.

Our attitude affects our personality, and our personality has an effect on how we view each event in life. What I allow my soul and spirit to feed on, affects how I observe and live my life. I can be pessimistic or optimistic about every situation I am called upon to pass through, depending on my kind of thinking. The real value of anything in life depends on my attitude toward the Lord. Respect and reverence for Him can make a cup of rice, a treasure and a pleasure. One blanket on the floor with a calm spirit is more comforting and restful than a wonderful bed, a big bank account and a huge house without having the love of God in one's heart. If a change of attitude is needed, make it!

To sit at a table with loved ones and very simple fare, makes it a wonderful time of fellowship and joy. On the other hand, a \$100.00 a plate dinner where there is tension and underlying hatred, will not only "leave a bad taste in your mouth," but will give you a bad stomach that lasts. The uncontrolled hot-head creates strife and dissension, whether he or she is at home, in a business meeting or taking leadership on a job. A calm person who does not react quickly to an unexpected crisis, an unprovoked personal attack or a problem that seems unsolvable at first, keeps his counsel and keeps quiet. Before speaking he considers what he can say that will avoid dissension and disarm touchy people.

A lazy person sees problems everywhere he turns. To him the obstacles are his reason not to go to work and remove them. An upright person builds their life and work on the solid foundation of the word of God and love for God. He continues to go confidently forward in faith. A son who has listened and learned from parental advice makes his father happy. The son who doesn't pay attention to wisdom, but chooses foolishness and treats his mother with contempt as if she doesn't know anything, is a first-class fool. Foolish people get a laugh out of foolishness that has no reasonable point. They have no reason for living beyond what brings instant satisfaction, and they don't bother to think ahead. A sensible person finds his satisfaction in the things that are real. They have meaning, so that person is committed to keeping a straight course in life with a goal to live for.

When we take good advice from wise counselors, that will help our plans to succeed and our hopes to come to pass. Without advice from those who can see what we can't see, our plans will fail. A word of counsel spoken at the right time, can make a lot of difference in the life of another person. To be able to say the right word to meet the need of a friend or another person, gives joy to the one who gives advice and is good for the one who takes it to heart. Putting into practice biblical principles for living, will result in the wise person going to heaven. It will also keep those who live godly from going to hell. We either go forward in life by the grace and power of God, or we go backward to a lost eternity. There is no standing still possible.

Proud people, and all they have hoped for and gained by their own effort without any thought of God, will lose it all. The inheritance passed on to a widow, the Lord will not allow to be taken from her by greedy men. Those who plan, scheme and grab everything they can get at the expense of others, are detested and rejected by the Lord. Gracious words spoken by someone who is upright and cares for others, are pure and appreciated by the Lord. A person who bribes others and is willing to cut corners to satisfy his greed, will find trouble at home with those of his own family. The one who is fair and honest, will enjoy a good life.

There is a need to take time to nurture relationships which can be delicate and hard to maintain. A wise person will take all the time needed before speaking or taking action. A wicked person doesn't care but just spouts out words that can hurt others because they are sinful. Sin separates us from God and often separates us from people who love God. When the wicked call for help, the Lord does not answer. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." On the other hand, He does hear the call of the righteous that comes from those with a pure heart and clean hands. The eyes of a person often reveal the joy that is within their soul. We often hear people say, "His eyes lit right up when he saw her!" That "light" brings joy to the heart. A cheerful person has a good impact on those around him as well as experiencing joy in his own heart.

"An ear that hears" and heeds corrective counsel is wise, and will find that there are other wise people who want him around them and want to share the experience of "life indeed." One who refuses correction and resents and rejects discipline, will soon hate themselves, even though they might not grasp the sad outcome when rebuke is first given. A wise person will take correction, be glad for it, and will greatly profit from it all of their lifetime. When one hears what the word of the Lord says, and practices what is taught in the fear of the Lord, he is given needed wisdom for living as God intends. Humility before the Lord opens the way for Him to give honor with His blessings. Obedience brings wisdom. Humility brings honor.

Proverbs 15:13. *"A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken."*

THE FACE.

*The windows to the soul open – gradually – a little light enters
The door to the world opens – widely – to the fullest extent
The safety valve opens – uncontrollably – scenting good and bad signals
Messages fly to the control center – a new day has come – light has entered the world.*

*Images and movement pass in front of the window – impressions are made
Sounds of joy or sorrow, meaningful or inane come through the door – communication
Unseen the atoms move past the safety valve – decisions are made*

Flashing impressions, quick decisions affect each other – a new day begins

*Through every hour of every day, the inner man is expressed – outwardly seen
Widely opened windows or windows tightly shut – each gives a message
The door opened wide, curved up or down expresses plainly – joy or sorrow
The real person cannot hide for long – the countenance reveals and expresses – me.*

*The cheerful countenance is the revelator of my heart – hopefully, contagious joy
A load is lifted, someone's day seems shorter, the burdens less – look at the face
The spirit soars, the soul sings, the body straightens – the heart is exposed
Blessings are passed on, communication brings understanding – gladness reigns.*

*Eyes are partially closed; the valve is pointed downward – an unanswered problem exists
The doors droop silencing the song, body language reveals one thing – concern
The “comely parts” are not comely, the “inner will” is seriously at work – conscience
The expressive parts send their messages to all around – clearly.*

*“Let the wicked forsake his way” – and the windows open wide – to light
“The unrighteous man his thoughts” – the doors open – to confession and praise
“Let him return unto the Lord” – the valve points upward – to God
“Abundantly pardon” – the confession, the forsaking of sin leads the way – to joy.*

“Father, I know each waking moment can be an opportunity to send a message to others, to me and especially to You. I wake and see the light and am made aware ‘God has given me a new day.’ I talk to Linda and then to others and am aware this is a new opportunity. I speak the words of the Gospel and people watch my face and hands, and listen and form opinions – and make decisions. Help me to send a good message through my face. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Proverbs 16

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY – FREE AGENCY

In living for God governed by divine principles of living that are given to us in the scriptures, there is a balance, a partnership if you will, between what I do and God's sovereignty. In His wisdom He has given us freedom of our will so we will not be mere robots, and yet maintains, in His infinite wisdom, the actual control, the final outcome of what He wants. He has given us the responsibility to use our minds, in order to plan ahead for actions to be taken. He has counseled us to seek advice from others who are more experienced in life or some area of expertise that will enable us to do His will. So, it is incumbent on us to plan as if things depended on us, and take action knowing the Lord knows what is best.

A man may ask what he wants, but God will give or withhold as He sees best. He gives us the ability to articulate and accomplish the plans we make. We ask Him for guidance as we make the plans, and when we act on those plans, we trust God to produce the desired, and best results. By nature, we think we know what is best for us, but we need unchangeable standards to make wise decisions, or pass judgments. Our inclination by nature is to justify ourselves. It is wise for us to make sure before taking any action, that what we do can be backed up by God's word. Are our plans meaningful, manageable and measurable? Is my attitude consistent with the Lord's will? He knows what is the motive behind the action and what is in my spirit.

Superficial commitment to the Lord's will really means, I will do what the Lord wants, if I want to and if it doesn't hurt too much or take too much of my time. Giving half-hearted or temporary submission to the Lord is not doing the will of God from the heart. Yielding everything I do to the Lord is commitment, and I will leave it to Him to make those plans succeed. The words of verse four do not mean that God created some people to be lost and some to be saved. “He will have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth.” That is His desire and that was His design. But man sinned. We have all sinned and are lost when we do not accept God remedy for sin. The Lord created everything for His glory. Everyone will receive the just reward that is determined by God, who is “just, and the justifier of them who believe in Jesus.” He has given ample reason for us to trust Him when we exercise our own free agency as people who make choices. We can accept by faith that which we know is right and please God. We can reject Him if we choose to. Even the evil choices people will make will not thwart the sovereign purposes of God.

Pride within makes a person think he or she knows what is best for them. Resisting divine direction and authority is a choice people make when they choose to be proud. That is detested by God, and He will carry out judgment on one whose pride keeps them from humbling themselves to the sovereign Lord. The love and mercy of the Lord has dealt

with the problem of sin. Sin has been dealt with in a just, righteous and legal way by the atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are accepted by our holy God "in the Beloved." There is a sense in which those characteristics of love and faithfulness have been imparted to a degree by those who have accepted Christ by faith and have been given a new nature. In our lives, we avoid sin by fearing the Lord and by being obedient to Him.

A characteristic of one who God has saved and wants to live "godly in Christ Jesus," is to make peace with enemies. That doesn't mean we will do anything to please them, but we will please God, and He takes over the situation by making it plain how that peace can be brought about if it is possible. The important thing is to please God who is the giver of peace, and the forgiver of those who confess their sin before Him and accept the responsibility for their own sin. It is plain that "little is much if God is in it." The point in verse eight has to do with how you got what you have, not how much you have. The individual and his or her character is of far greater value than the money they have. The plans we make, may or may not be carried out, because every step we take is known and ordered by the Lord. There is value in every step we make according to His will and plan.

"The powers that be are ordained of God." Leaders are "ministers" of the Lord. Headship has to do with delegated authority, with rule, and is passive because it is under submission to the sovereign Lord. Humility and recognition of who is the responsible one or ones, is involved in the teaching of headship. The head is what controls. It is the seat of authority. There are three areas of delegated authority from God. The man is the final authority in a home and is responsible legally before God and man for what happens in his home. Elders in an assembly have been delegated by God to guide the affairs of a local church. "Kings and those in authority" have been given public responsibility to function as God's representatives to the nation. He is expected to lead and judge the nation with good sense and justice. If he fails in that, he is responsible to the sovereign God for his failure. The Lord gives to those who lead, the insight needed to make wise decisions.

There are divine standards that do not deviate, even when men change laws to suit themselves and their constituents. No matter who a person may be, impartiality is to govern actions taken not only in business, but in assemblies and in the homes of wise parents. It takes courage to be honest and fair consistently in all areas of life. Honest leaders will detest wrongdoing in themselves and in those they lead. That attitude toward wrong is essential because of the place of authority they hold under God. If a leader doesn't make righteous judgments and fair decisions, his leadership will fail. He needs to get rid of bad counselors and never accept bribes. Honest lips in righteous advisors who commit themselves to tell the truth, will lead to right decisions. When citizens can be counted on to tell the truth to a truth-loving leader, there will be wisdom ruling in a nation.

The authority of an angry king can quickly deal with a person who is on the judgment seat. A wise man will seek to appease the king with thoughtful and wise statements in a cautious and respectful way like Daniel did in his day. If a king finds a reason to be pleased with a person, it is like essential rain on a planted field that needs the water to fill out the grain. That latter rain makes the difference between success and failure. A smile of approval is like a promise of good things to come. Material riches do not satisfy a person made in the image of God. All they do is provide "things," not meaningful relationships. We need wisdom to live holy righteous lives, and insight to be consistent in wise living. Then we can have fellowship with people who have similar interests, and with the Lord.

There are potholes in the road of life. Thorns and obstructions on the road of life, snare the wicked who love sin. For those who are upright in life, there is a plain path before them that has no real obstacles that cannot be taken care of. It is up to us to guard our own souls to avoid those hindrances to godly living. It is hard for proud people to think they don't have everything under their control. It is also hard for them to admit they have weaknesses. As far as they are concerned, "It will happen to them, but not to me." Everyone else knows and marks the proud person, but they think they are wise and skilled, – above other people. They don't want to hear what others say or think. In our relationships we are better to be involved and sharing in the lives of those who are "meek and lowly in heart," than to be hobnobbing with the successful in the world and sharing all the accumulated wealth of proud people.

By reading the word of God and acting on what it says, there are spiritual benefits and blessings that will come from the Lord who delights in those who put their trust in Him. A person of understanding and wisdom will be recognized by his prudence in words and actions. When he speaks, he will have something positive to say, and will say it in an appealing and gracious way. Those who listen to him and watch him, will learn from him. Wisdom from God's word is like life-giving nutrients to one who is a sensible. That person will experience and value the truths learned. It is a waste of time to try to teach someone who doesn't want to be taught, and will not listen to serious truth, because all they want is foolishness. It is important to think before speaking. What is in one's heart is what they will say. Our mouths will say what wisdom tells it to say – or not say. If it is spoken in an appropriate way, it will be instructive.

Constructive conversation is good. When one speaks with gracious words, they are speaking like the Lord Jesus. People marveled at "the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth" when He spoke. Grace brings delight to those who do not deserve its blessings. Gracious words can be delightful to both the hearer and the speaker. One is

getting benefit from what is being said, and the other knows that. Words that promote spiritual life and growth are not only considerate, but are healing to those who have been wounded or made sick from attacks within and without. The way of fallen mankind who is alienated from God, may seem right to him, but because it leads people astray, he not only endangers his own eternal future, but the others who follow him.

The fact that we get hungry and need food to keep going, motivates us to keep diligently at our work. What we need most is what we work hardest to get. Foolish people rush from one thing to another to try to fill their emptiness. Those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness” will be filled. Ungodly people sow discord by bringing up the past in someone’s life for some cruel reason. Evil gossip should be avoided like the plague. Someone always gets burned. Perverse people also cause strife with malicious intent and create division between people who were friends by his evil innuendo. Whatever his goal is by doing and saying such things, it creates lasting division. Violent men go even further by enticing people to join him in committing a crime. That road ends in a bad place, with bad circumstances and bad results. The insinuations indicated by the wink of an eye, at least in this context, may seem secretive between two persons, but the objective is not something that is good and is not likely to end well. Our face, eyes and the setoff our lips give expression to what is in our minds and sometimes in our intentions to carry out a planned plot.

If an older person with white hair has walked a path in life that has been respectful and honorable, their reputation is deserving of respect. A Christian life lived in the fear of the Lord and for the benefit of others, is commendable. If there has been no reason to be ashamed of ourselves, then we don’t have to be ashamed of being old and white-headed when people show a caring response to the aged people. Self-control even in times of tension and opposition is better than being a hero in a battle. Ruling one’s own spirit by self-discipline, accomplishes better things than defeating a city. It is harder to do, but has greater and longer lasting beneficial effects. Venting rage doesn’t solve problems. The way of making wise and effective decisions is to put the matter before the Lord rather than taking chances. He is the sovereign Lord and nothing is unknown to Him. He knows the outcome before the event takes place. The word of God and the Spirit of God are ours, so we can make decisions in ways that we know is right with Him. He allows us to experience the benefits of those decisions we make in fellowship with Him.

Proverbs 16:1. *“The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.”*

INNER READY.

*Perhaps in the dark, at one’s first waking thought
An idea arises that makes the mind call a halt
To focus on one thing that seems to have “Come out of the blue”
And in a very short time this plan seems what I must do.*

*At first ideas are scattered without an orderly plan
And then plans form and you realize you can
Take this plan beyond thought and then it will fit
Into your day or work, so you pray about it.*

*In your heart it found a need and a purpose to fill
Perhaps you asked advice and later the plan was there still
So, you wait upon God to know if this idea will last
And God adds His blessing to it and brings it to pass.*

*Some things are necessary as we move daily through life
Vision and a willingness to act in faith when it’s right
The Lord has the final say, the eventual outcome is His
But He wants our hearts and minds to move ahead with this.*

*The results of any work are under His divine control
He is willing to let me share with Him what started in my soul
When God takes my plan and guides it in His perfect way
His idea He began in me is good for He has the final say.*

*Preparations of the heart allows the Holy Spirit a fertile place
To begin a work in me that reveals God’s redeeming grace
Independent actions would pollute any act of a man
That can bring great blessing to others when it comes from God’s own hand.*

"This is a new day Father, when my waking thoughts have been on these Gospel meetings and some of the people that have been coming. We have connected with some but there are others that need to be awakened and convicted of their sin. If the ideas I have had are to be carried out, I await Thy guidance to direct the activities before us today. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Proverbs 17

AVAILABILITY

Every day we meet people of different personalities, from different walks in life and in different ways we interact with them as we share this journey of life. The way we choose to communicate with others reveals a lot about ourselves and what we think is important in them. Relationships are a two-way street that can be a blessing to both and can bring a benefit to many. Our Lord Jesus Christ when He was here was able to establish significant relationships with people quickly and effectively. It mainly depended on the first words He spoke. Sometimes it was a question. Other times it was an observation or a statement of fact. Many times, it was a short story, a parable, that caught the interest of people. We too need to consider how we can initiate meaningful relationships with people.

Meal times are a particularly good time to strengthen relationships, establish trust and enjoy fellowship in a family. It isn't the food that makes it so good. It is the people and the kind of conversations we have. A congenial conversation with simple food is better than a feast with arguing. Parents have the responsibility to guide and guard table conversations. A servant may be considered of less importance than family members, but if that servant is a person of good character, good morals, good manners, good speech with integrity and respect, he will have a greater responsibility given to him than to an out-of-control son. He may even be brought into the inheritance by his master. When a servant was adopted as a son in those ancient days, a public statement was made by the master: "Thou art my son. This day have I begotten thee," and he became a son legally.

The heat of trials proves what is genuine and will expose dross in the character of a man or woman. The dross will come to the top when gold or silver is heated. The heat of opposition, disaster, sickness and tough times in general are allowed by our Lord to refine us and remove anything that are negative traits, and expose anything that will hinder our growth in the Lord. It is His purpose that a child of God reflects the Person of our Lord Jesus. "The trial of your faith is more precious than gold that perishes." Strangely some people seem to feed on scandal, lies, innuendo and unfounded accusations, more than on the truth. Those people reveal more of who they are than the false report gives of the person they accuse. Wicked people feed on wickedness. Making fun of people because of their poverty or other misfortunes will lead to punishment for the mocker. God takes special interest in the poor, lowly and oppressed. To go up against them is to go up against God. Those who do, will lose. The attitude that makes people mock others is, "You should be like me. I'm better than you." What is needed by those who are down is compassion and assistance.

Young children often turn to fathers and grandfathers for help, guidance, comfort and even stories of the old days. Grandfathers love to have honorable grandchildren around them. It is one of the ways that makes living worthwhile to old people. When a child wants to be like his or her father, that is an honor to both of them. The expectations we have of friends or people of different positions in life are different in each case. If a foolish person starts talking like a high society person, or "taking off" on a preacher, we know it is mockery. If a leader of people lies, we know that is not right for one who is responsible to guide others in an honest way. Bribes are valuable, but to use them to manipulate people to get what you want, may work, but it is still wrong. The foundation of good relationships is not based on bribes, but on honesty and integrity.

Good lasting relationships will depend on a willingness to forgive when necessary. That doesn't mean covering up sin, but rather when not to expose something in another person that is unnecessary. There is a time to keep silent and not bring up past failures in another person. Forgiveness is a characteristic of God and it should be of His children. How a person takes correction and rebuke is a reflection on who he is and of his character. A wise person will accept and appreciate rebuke when it is necessary and will learn from it if there is benefit in it. If it is a spiteful rebuke, he will listen and keep silent. Relationships depend on how we react to difficulties as well as good things. To accept correction gracefully, is a way to benefit both the giver and receiver of the rebuke. A fool is hopeless when it comes to correction. He is going to keep on doing what he wants to.

Evil men are against everything that is right and pleasing to God because it interferes with, and condemns, their way of life. Rebellion is the set of a wicked person's mind against God's will, and challenging it with his own willful ways. There are consequences to be faced either by a hard and perhaps cruel messenger from the king, or from the last enemy – the angel of death. A bear robbed of cubs will attack and tear into a person with sharp claws and extreme rage. An out-of-control fool will say things, do things - even throw things to vent his rage. Some even in their anger and haste kill someone they think has belittled them or refused to do what the fool wanted. Such rage kills relationships permanently.

Strangely, some people will ruin a relationship by rejecting something done for them in good faith and caring friendship. An ungrateful person will not recover from the effects of his or her lack of appreciation, and the actions connected with that. The one rejected will from then on and find it hard to trust your intentions, and will likely think the relationship is not one they want to continue. Once contention gets started, it is hard to stop until it has run its course. Pride is the source of strife and it is evidence of the fleshly nature of an unsaved person. Unfortunately, it can surface even in Christian relationships, and so must be avoided. When contention comes close, turn and walk away.

Bribes, relationships and pressure have all been used to let guilty people go free and innocent people be condemned. This practice is totally wrong and detested by God because He is just, righteous and holy. Such ungodly practices are completely contrary to the character of our Lord, which is also expected in those who belong to Him. Some people send their children to private schools and pay a lot of money for them to go to a college or university even when they don't want to go. If the child doesn't want to apply himself to their studies, don't waste your money. A fool will not be wiser about anything if they don't want to.

There is a big difference between a true friend and an acquaintance. A true friend is loyal at all times, whether you are popular or shunned; sick or well; in trouble or successful. Even though they may not be getting a lot out of me at the times, they will come alongside to encourage and help. A brother is obligated by birth to help his siblings. A true friend chooses to be there. Friendship can be abused when one wants the other to guarantee a loan for something that is not a good investment or is questionable as to being completely legal. Financial assistance even to a friend, has to be looked at carefully from one's own perspective. Don't go out on a limb just because a friend wants you to. A person with a hot temper will find strife right there and sin takes over. If a person loves to fight, he will also love to sin. When a person brags about himself, he is going to have to make a bigger door to get his ego and exalted opinion of himself through to where he can get in your face. Smugness and pride go together.

By nature, the human heart is morally depraved and deceit is in it. A deceitful tongue will create problems for a proud person who is willing to deceive or demean others. It will ultimately be his own downfall after it ruins the relationship, he has had with those he used under the guise of friendship. What a grief it is to a father whose son mocks his guidance and words of wisdom and goes out and makes a fool of himself. Fathers sometimes ask themselves, "What did I do wrong? What did we not do that we should have done?" The disappointment and sorrow of a father in a foolish child is bad enough while they are alive. When they die in their sins and go into everlasting night is the full epitome of sorrow. A happy person with a cheerful disposition and optimistic outlook of life, is as good as taking a medicine when they come alongside of you. When a cheerful person sees others and gives a word of encouragement, a touch of compassion and a sincere smile of gladness, it has a good effect on others as well as on himself. By contrast, one who is depressed and unhappy, feels bad themselves and makes others feel bad.

Doing things under cover in order to get away with sin, "perverts the course (way) of justice." Bribes, secret promises are techniques wicked people use to get away with sin, and avoid punishment for sin. The wise person is realistic and has learned his limitations and how far he is able to go ahead and/or if he should. The fool has convinced himself or been convinced by other silly people that he can overcome all obstacles and get whatever he wants – except wisdom! It grieves a father who loves his foolish son, to watch him make a mess of his life. Attitudes change in the teen years, but patient parenting doesn't give up, and may eventually help the son get through if he will pay attention. When they fall for the fads that come and go, or the foolish fashions that are immodest, or the sullen short words and tone of voice that indicates, "Get out of my life. I am my own person, and I will get in touch with you when I want to," then the father and mother can only console each other and pray together in their grief with broken hearts.

To punish innocent people like Pilate did to Jesus, is completely and totally wrong, especially when an innocent leader (Prince of peace, King of kings) is actually physically beaten. To raise a hand against a fair leader is absolutely unjust. Some people are fined when they shouldn't be. Others are publicly condemned unfairly. The upright person seems to raise the "hackles" of unjust prosecutors and judges. When our Lord "was reviled, He reviled not again. When He suffered, He threatened not."

A wise person takes the time to think about what he is going to say if and when he speaks. His response to accusations or information will be controlled, calm and careful. If he has nothing worthwhile to say, he won't speak. He waits until he has opportunity to think about what he has heard before he replies. He considers what the results will be when he speaks before he opens his mouth. "It is better to close your mouth and be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt." No one knows you are a fool if you don't say anything. In fact, some people might think you are wise and understanding about a matter of which you don't have a clue. To be quiet and let others do the talking is a safe way to keep yourself from being considered a fool.

Proverbs 17:8. *"A gift is as a precious stone (stone of grace) in the eyes of him that hath it: Whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth."*

A STONE OF GRACE.

*Like a beautiful gem it is looked on with admiring adoring eyes
It has come to hand unexpectedly; it is not like some earned prize
A gift in the hand of the giver, is not really a gift at all
Until placed in the hands of the receiver and then will the blessings fall.*

*The gift one presents is looked on as a special gemstone of grace
It wasn't earned or deserved – the receiver has a special place
In the heart of the giver who wants to express some appreciation
And gives that "stone of grace" that brings such admiration.*

*Like a precious "stone of grace" an unexpected gift was given to me
When the grace-gift of God's salvation was received, all I then could see
Was the beauty of forgiveness and the on-going sense of peace
But now I know much more accompanied that gift of the "stone of grace."*

*Everywhere I now turn I can see that gift's amazing effect
When I pass on that grace, I receive far more than I ever could give
Brothers and sisters in Christ, express also the grace they received
And we share much together of God's wonders since we believed.*

*Together we meet to pass on the benefits of God's free gift
Sinners hear and believe the Gospel and spirits of saints we can lift
The reflection to that grace-gift is seen around me on every side
Bringing light and life to others and a joy we cannot hide.*

*I look at that "stone of grace" this morning and already the day is lighter
The load of concern for lost sinners is lifted and the flame inside burns brighter
Grace shines to me much clearer the more I focus on it
I recognize I am only passing on what God gave to me as a gift.*

"O gracious Giver of every good and perfect gift: I thank Thee for revealing such blessings that shine like precious stones in my life. Spiritual gifts are evident in so many different ways and places: in personal life and home life; in the work of the Lord we are privileged to be a part of; in the testimony of believers we interact with in a lot of different places – truly, 'Whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth.' Amen."

Proverbs 18

ACCEPTANCE.

Who has really won an argument if the good relationship between two people is lost? In a quarrel there is seldom any good that comes from it, even if in the end, those involved shake hands and go their separate ways. It is in our contact with other people, and hopefully building a lasting relationship, that we find satisfaction and joy. However, it is in broken relationships that we find sorrow and loss. Some people wait around for other people to approach them, and when it doesn't happen the way they had thought it should, they go away disappointed in other people for not showing any interest in them. Even if a person is shy and retiring by nature and personality, and finds social settings hard to handle, they are able to approach someone and show some kind of interest in others themselves. A road goes both ways.

The temperamental person who always insists on his own way, will soon isolate himself from friends and companions. He will find all the solitude he can handle if he is short-tempered and quarrelsome because he didn't get his own way. A person is a fool if the only person he wants to hear is himself. He is light-weight when it comes to common sense, because he doesn't want to hear any other opinions but his own which he airs when he tries to impress others. Actually, he just exposes his own ignorance and lack of spiritual understanding. The unfriendly self-centered person moves from being a quarrelsome "pain in the neck," to being a loud-mouthed speaker of nonsense. He becomes a wicked man who is contemptible to those he holds in contempt. By the time he wakes up to his own ignorance, nobody will have anything to do with him. There are people whose attitude and actions as well as their words, indicate they are holding back from honest open dialogue. Caution is needed when in conversation with that person. "He's too deep for me to trust," is very different from open frank conversation with a person of wisdom who is

“deep” in content and wisdom. What he says will give refreshment to others and be a help to them. He has no hidden agenda that hinders trust in a relationship.

Favoritism was condemned in the law, because it is a perversion of justice, and keeps it from being carried out and leads to bribery, lies and unfair decisions from judges. There is a sense in which it is very hard to be impartial with family and friends, but when it comes to moral sin, there is no way partiality can be considered, because partiality would actually be sin. People who pick fights will certainly get them and in their mouthy boasting and accusations, they will find they will get a lot more than they bargained for. A foolish loser never seems to know when to keep his mouth shut. What he says will bring no good to the corrupt fool, and will make him a marked man. When he opens his mouth, what he says will be what traps him. His own words will condemn him.

Gossip has a terrible appeal to most people. It starts out about something that seems like it should be heard, but when listened to right from the beginning, it is hard to resist getting all the scandal. Once gossip is paid attention to, it sticks in the mind, and seldom is ever let go. There is no way suspicion ever completely leaves even when truth is brought out and an apology is made. There is always a measure of damage to gossip. When it comes to you, right at the beginning, call for an impartial person to come and bear witness to what is said. Usually that is the way it is stopped before it really gets started.

Those who don't want to work much or very hard, are prone to talk a lot. The one who goes about to destroy things, and the lazy person have a lot in common. They don't want others to have what they don't have, or they want to get what others have without earning it. So, the lazy person leaves the work to be done by others, and the one who destroys things, both want to ruin what others have or do. When difficulties threaten those who live for God, when they are the object of gossip and slander, the Lord Himself is the One to go to. We can call on Him, lay the burden on Him, and trust Him for our security and safety.

It is not uncommon for wealthy people to think their money will keep them safe and secure in life. Money can buy a lot of things, but it also can be lost quickly and unexpectedly. It can never buy the protection trusted people in a trusted relationship share. It can't pay for our sins nor can it save our soul. Money can't keep a person out of hell. “They that are down need fear no fall, they that are low no pride. They that are humble shall ever have, God to be their guide.” The conceited haughty person will be brought down to where his pride will be taken away. The humble person of integrity and faith will ultimately be honored by God and man.

A wise person will listen to both sides of a matter before passing judgment. That is normal common sense, because there are two sides in every disputed matter. Get the facts. Listen to what both sides say and watch to see what they don't say. Hear both sides of an issues with impartiality. Come to a decision without prejudice and partiality. Then you won't be making a foolish mistake and be embarrassed later, when the truth is made plain. When the inward spirit of a person is strong in spite of pain, trials, losses and serious hardship, our trust in the Lord can sustain our spirit. If a person's spirit is broken, that kind of emotional hurt, can make a person physically sick or even lead to death. One thing about a wise person: he knows that there is a lot he doesn't know. And what he knows, he knows there is a lot more to know about what he knows than he knows. So, what he knows and knows he doesn't know, he will knowingly seek for, knowing that then he will know what he doesn't know now about the things he knows and doesn't know.

People in business and government, often bribe their way to see a great person, or attend a great event by putting money into someone's hands to open the way for them. That is common practice now as it was when the proverbs were written. Most people have a preference in one way or another. It may be because there is prejudice because of culture, nationality, social status, or gender. Both sides of every story need to be heard and considered before passing a judgment. Parents need to do this, and leaders in any place where people are inclined to take sides. This verse is a warning to judges to hear both sides: the prosecutors and the defenders, and make a decision based on the facts and the actual truth. Throwing dice or some other means of casting lots is impartial, but is not a fair way of coming to a decision. “Flipping a coin” is a popular way of settling a matter when it is insignificant. But grace and love go further in that it brings people together instead of keeping them apart by settling a matter by chance.

Family strife, whether in our natural family or God's family, is hard to deal with. When an offensive action is not right nor fair, and is not expected, reconciliation is very hard to bring about. If the matter is not settled, each becomes hard as the stone walls surrounding a castle or iron gates creating barriers into a city or home. What a person says he has to live with. Words can be helpful and satisfying or hurtful. In every conversation it is a wise person who deliberately speaks words that will build up and encourage others.

It is good to be married. That was God's intention although there are exceptions clearly taught in the scriptures. The relationship of a marriage enables two people to be fulfilled in body, soul and spirit by the joining of minds and hearts. What one knows may help the other to be a more effective person in their calling in life. The Lord can blend personalities who are linked by the common bond of faith, to be more effective in service for Him than would be

possible for the two as separate individuals. To insult others, especially the poor, is wrong. When a poor person asks for help in a courteous way and his need is legitimate, he has a right to be heard. To speak to him in an arrogant demeaning way by someone who trusts in their riches, indicates the rich man has been corrupted by his own riches rather than humbled by God's grace. Avoid companionship with those whose character and way of life is questionable. Instead, be friend to others and you will find people who will want to be your friend. Our Lord Jesus Christ is truly the Friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Proverbs 18:13, 15, 17. *"He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and a shame unto him...The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge...He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbor cometh and searcheth him."*

DECISION MAKING.

*There seems to be more here than meets the eye
This is a time to listen rather than ask them why –
Perhaps there are facts that now are unexpressed
To give an answer quick may make a greater mess –
No, give me some time to think, I need to pray about it
And my God who knows all the facts can give an answer fit
To keep me from some quick response that is extreme
For often much said is different than the facts have been.*

*Time spent gathering facts is not really wasted
Though others may pressure you to be hasty
Because the truth of a matter can be evasive
And new ideas may for the answer be inclusive
Into the big picture so the final decision will be found
And the knowledge you have gained will be sound.
The discerning person must take time to seek the truth
And his solution will be without some prejudice.*

*Questions are usually appropriate to ask –
Have an answer ready when you are taken to task
By a neighbor or someone with a different view
And they have a side far different than the one told you.
Generally, there are two sides to each and every story
And the one telling you will express his side only –
So, get both sides clearly set in your mind
And by God's guidance a solution you will surely find.*

*In God's Word principles and practices are told
That have been tried and proven in the New Testament and Old
By the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit –
Teaching is there for our learning if we seek and find it.
It is never wise to act with undue haste
Until through prayer and God's Word we trace
The line of teaching to its biblical end -
Then any answer or decision will be a "God-send."*

"O God, I know I must learn to not act in haste when it comes to decision making. It is hard at times to wait on real clear guidance from Thee when a need seems at the moment to be urgent. I am asking for a more thoughtful approach to the things that arise in our work and family life so that I don't have to go back over a matter and deal with it all over again. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Proverbs 19

SENSIBLE LIVING

To live a blameless life that is open and above board before the world is of greater value than to be wealthy. What we really value in life is not able to be hid from the eyes of people for very long, and is never hid from God. One who places value on wealth will do whatever he thinks is necessary to get it and keep it. There are quite a number of subjects addressed in Proverbs 19 that will help us to live life sensibly in the light of truth and holiness, even if one is

poor. There are also warnings given regarding the dangers and consequent actions taken when we don't lift our sights above and beyond the momentary circumstances of life in which we are found.

Poverty in life is of far greater value than to be wealthy and morally corrupt. The poor person can be trusted. His integrity is intact even if he has little to show for his life work as far as material things. One who sacrifices his integrity to increase his wealth, is a fool who cannot be trusted. His walk and talk expose who he really is. To rush ahead impulsively without taking time to consider a decision can easily lead to sin. People will sometimes make "snap" decisions regarding a business venture, a personal relationship or a move to another location without considering the possible outcome of that choice. Know what you are getting into before going into something, and be sure God is in the decision. Enthusiasm and zeal must be controlled by the Holy Spirit, the word of God and divinely imparted wisdom and knowledge. One has said, "Act in haste, repent at leisure."

People often act in haste but will have lots of time to regret a hasty, self-centered, God-forgetting choice. Careless actions are our own fault. To blame God for not getting us out of trouble we have made, is the action and attitude of a fool. People who win the lottery will suddenly find they have a lot of "friends." But they are not real friends. Rather they are like bees around a honey-pot, or parasites looking for some money from you. Sadly, the poor people are forgotten, ignored and avoided. When a person is under oath to tell the truth, and lies instead, there will be punishment when the truth comes out into the open and the effects of justice will fall on them.

There are some people who flatter and try to "get in on" those who are influential in society, government or even a church. There are honest needs some people have, and to give freely to help them is not wrong, but don't be surprised when they get all they can from you, and/or you stop or slack back on giving to them, they will not show up again. They may even "bad mouth" you for not giving them more and will say, "That's your Christian for you. I wouldn't darken the door of that Gospel Hall if that is where they go." Relatives and friends may abandon those in their family or circle of friends who are poor. Even if the poor person has to call on them for some help, he is cut off because there is no reciprocal benefit they can get from the poor person. Not only are the poor shunned, but those who could have helped, hide from them. There are dangers to both the poor and prosperous. The poor will have to struggle alone to get through this present danger. The prosperous who are morally and spiritually poor will have to face a more serious danger in the future.

When wisdom comes after learning the truth from God and His word, and wisdom is acted upon and is the guide for living and dying, that person "loves" their soul. They know what is important. What he learns, he keeps, and applies the principles of living through his whole life. Paul said in a particularly insightful statement, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." The statement in verse five is repeated with the exception of the last words. That indicates the first verse with the same words has to do with the present sphere of life and the other looks into eternity. People have become used to living way beyond their means, and this is really out of place for a person who has common sense. Not only is extravagant living out of his depth financially, but it is not suitable for a role of authority to be taken without the wisdom needed to fill that position. For a slave or servant to have the position of rule over the leader is like giving a novice, a new believer, leadership in an assembly.

A wise person keeps his composure even when those around him act foolishly. He will not retaliate against those who wrong him, but in a godly way will forgive or overlook wrong done against him without getting angry. By contrast, an angry king will not hesitate to attack those who oppose him, nor will he withhold showing favor to those who please him. Fear or favor; threats or devotion are tools some who are leaders will use to get their way. The dysfunctional home described was an awful place to live. A foolish child can ruin the father's reputation, disrupt the whole household and make life miserable for the whole family. A dissatisfied wife who is contentious and lets it be known that she is unhappy by continually "harping" on every little thing, is a constant irritation in a home.

Parents may pass on what they have to their children to the extent the offspring become wealthy people. But of far more value than a financial heritage a man receives, is the wife that God brings to him. A prudent wife knows how to live righteously, how to guide the family in a compassionate way with a firm hand, and uses family finances with a consciousness that wealth is a stewardship. In order to create something of benefit, or produce something of value to sustain one's life and the life of his family, a person must work. Laziness will keep a person in bed too long in the morning, and even then he thinks he needs more rest. A major problem with that attitude is a person will soon be hungry. He will not be able to provide for his own needs, let alone for his family and those for whom he is responsible. If a believer in Christ doesn't read the Bible, doesn't take time needed to understand divine truth, but only depends on what others tell him, that person will be "barren and unfruitful" in the things of God.

The commands of God and the instructions for living for God are in the Bible. When we obey what the scriptures teach us, we will be preserved by the Lord and for the Lord. If we do not respond to revealed truth, but treat holy things carelessly, we will shrivel up and die spiritually. God takes time to teach us. We must give our time and intelligence to learning what He teaches, or there will be consequences to pay. God is no respecter of persons, and

places equal value on every person. He identifies with the needs of the poor in a special way. We honor Him when we do not forget the poor, and we respond to their legitimate needs in the same way we respond to the Lord. To be able to lend to the Lord that which He gave us all we have in the first place, is an honor and a privilege. That is how He intends us to look on the needs of the poor.

There is a time to discipline children so their good behavior becomes habitual and normal to them. Parents need to do this with a kind, firm hand of control and guidance when the children are young. By doing this early in life, they will be preserved from serious mistakes that lead to an ungodly life and a destructive life, for themselves and those who follow them. A man with an out-of-control teenager, will suffer for it either personally or socially when others are negatively affected by his child. A person with a hot temper is very hard to help. Some people we will have to leave alone to learn the hard lessons of life themselves. How good it is to see what God's grace can do when a person is humbled in repentance, and becomes a "new creation" in Christ Jesus. If a person is willing to listen to those who care enough to give him advice and honest correction, he will become wise and the counsel he passes on which he learned from others will be a benefit to many after him. One prayed, "O Lord, don't let me die a wicked old man!"

When making plans for anything, consider what the Lord's plans are first. Take counsel from Him through His word. He knows what is right for you and He is willing to guide each one of us. Christian parents need to counsel their children under the counsel of God. That counsel will always be good and of lasting value. Loyalty, faithfulness and kindness are what God desires from us, and what most of us want from others to be toward us. It is better to be with a poor man who has these characteristics, then to have anything at all to do with a liar. The good habits and choices of one who fears the Lord, are good for a person in many different ways. It is good for our health. It is good for maintaining a moral lifestyle. It will keep a person out of trouble and maybe even out of jail. That person will not only be saved, but will be satisfied. He or she will be able to sleep at night with the rest of a contented person. Some people can have all they need right in front of them, but they are too lazy to reach out and take it because it takes effort on their part. That kind of person only wants a downward road in life because going uphill takes too much effort and energy.

A thinking person hearing a rebuke or seeing one who mocks what is right being punished for his mockery, will learn by observation not to do those things himself. Some people are naïve and others are simple, but they can learn quick when they see there are severe consequences for sin. Intelligent people learn when they are rebuked and are not likely to do the same thing again. To waste what your father has, and refuse to care for your mother when she needs help, is to disgrace both of them, yourself and your family name. Those who do show honest care for, and interest in, their parents, are respected by those who observe. Particularly, care-givers are impressed by the earnest caring attitude of a family who honors their father and mother.

Peer pressure is a problem in teen years for many people. The instructions given by many professors at universities or places of higher learning, are often very different or even contrary to what parents taught their children at home. Some instructors will deliberately contradict what you have been taught by godly, Bible-believing parents and teachers in your church-home. It is up to the child to remember what he or she learned at home, and what the kind of people those who raised them are, and the way they live. When challenged by others to abandon what has been tried and proven by those you have trusted all your life up until now, you may have to stand up against those who challenge you. Ask them what kind of home life they have, what their personal relationships are like, and have they found rest in their spirit, and satisfaction from what they are teaching you. Some people just love to make a mockery of justice. They want, and seem to enjoy, what is sinful and that will produce wickedness. There are serious consequences that can be expected for those who make jokes about God and righteousness, and who mock the lives of those who live godly. But there will come a time when those very people who mocked, will suffer the punishment of justice being carried out.

Proverbs 19:1. *"Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool."*

THE POOR.

*It is better to be a poor man living a life that is blameless,
Then a wealthy man whose evil talk is shameless.*

*It is better to be a poor man and lose your friends,
Than to be a wealthy man who loses his soul in the end.*

*It is better to be a poor man from relatives bereft,
Then a compromiser who from his integrity has left.*

It is good to help the poor thus honoring God,

And in the future from God comes His reward.

*A poor man who tells the truth is more esteemed,
For truth more than money is respected in the end.*

*To be poor and righteous is never a shame,
Such a person will not bring dishonor to God's name.*

*To be limited in things that you own is not bad,
It is covetousness and greed that makes people sad.*

*To be poor and free from debt is liberty,
To owe much and not pay is enslaving to me.*

"Gracious God, I am thankful to Thee that money has not been a big issue to me as far as claiming my time and energy to get it. I am grateful to Thee for abundantly providing for us all that we need to live comfortably and move about the world to fulfill our calling. Keep us I pray from setting our heart upon riches. The riches of Thy grace and mercy are the real wealth I desire. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Proverbs 20

HONESTY AND DISCIPLINE

Success in life means different things to different people. Some measure success by material things they are able to accumulate, either by hard work or by underhanded business dealings. What they have that is able to be seen by others is how they measure success. Other people who are famous or hold high positions believe that is the measure of their success. That usually comes from talent or the skillful manipulating of people to their personal advantage. To raise a family of children to be honorable citizens who use their intelligence for good purposes is success to some parents. To have influenced people for good is what other people consider success in life. All of these have one thing in common – discipline. A person has to learn how to say “no” to some things and “yes” to others. Discipline of one’s own self or imposed discipline by others is needed. There is a goal they have and to reach that goal, they must submit to discipline.

Personal discipline in social settings or when one indulges in self-pity, is seriously needed because any beverage with alcohol in it has a tendency to put a person under the control of a “spirit.” Stores even advertise “wine, liquor, spirits and beer.” When the brain is affected by alcohol, it has an effect on emotions, physical actions and reactions, self-control, speech and discernment. Another spirit takes control and deceives a person under its influence. Personal discipline is also needed when one is pulled over by a patrolman, when standing before a judge or called to testify or deal with some government official. To provoke them by some “smart” remark is a danger to yourself. Personal discipline will hold a person back from an argument or volatile situation in which a quarrel can result. Fools can start a fight but it takes a self-disciplined person who knows themselves to use their moral strength and spiritual wisdom, to avoid retaliating when wronged. Prove your strength by exercising restraint. That takes more courage than fighting.

Personal discipline takes action when it is right and needed, not when a person “feels like it.” To plow your ground at the wrong time, or leave it until a convenient time, will affect your harvest next year. If you don’t save money ahead of time, you won’t have it when you need it. If you put off studying until the last minute, you will probably fail the test. God provides for us, but He expects us to act wisely and prepare ahead of time. A man of experience and sensible judgment, doesn’t speak until he knows what is the real issue being discussed, what is at stake, and what a good outcome of the matter would be. He holds his counsel and understanding of the matter until asked for some advice. When he speaks, he doesn’t sound like a “know-it-all,” but is rather able to give sound biblical answers, or counsel based on scriptural and spiritual principles. He keeps his own words under control.

It is more important for people to know what God thinks of us, than for us to know what we think of ourselves. Most people today say of themselves, “I’m basically a good person. I make a few mistakes but really, I’m good.” A faithful honest man will not advertise himself. He knows what he is, what God thinks of him and he disciplines himself accordingly. A faithful father knows his own children are forming their character after how he speaks, what he does, how he loves and expresses his love for his wife, how he treats his children, how he acts in public and in private. His influence on his children will be known, and hopefully, practiced by them and their children. That man has to discipline himself.

Those in authority look carefully at those who are before them, and often make decisions by just observing body language. The expression of the eyes and mouth, the tilt of a head and the movement of fingers and feet pass on

messages as to the character of the person with whom he is dealing. With his eyes he is looking beyond words spoken to see the attitude. The attitude of deceit or truth; actions that indicate an attitude; are unspoken messages that produce those actions and determine whether a person can be trusted or not. No one is without sin. It is in the nature of man. "death has passed upon all men, for all have sinned." "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Kings and criminals both sin; but it is up to each person to take ownership and responsibility for their own sin. That comes when in honesty before God, we acknowledge we have sinned and need God's mercy. What we cannot do about our own sin, He is able and willing to do for us. This happens when there is repentance before God for our sin, and we put faith in our Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation from sin. "The blood of Jesus Christ His (God's) Son, cleanseth us from all sin."

There are unchanging standards of righteousness that God has established. To change those for any reason places us under the condemnation of our holy God. It is our responsibility to not make excuses for not doing what is right or doing what is wrong. The character of a person is evident by what a person does. There is a sense in which the character of parents is passed on to their children, but as time goes by, what a child does or is allowed to do, will add to or take from their strength of character. Imposed discipline by caring parents will enforce what is good and right, and expose what is bad and evil. In divine wisdom, God has given us ears and eyes as entrances to our soul to by which we build character when those two entrances are well guarded. Those two body parts are capable of bringing understanding in, and keeping evil out of us. Personal discipline is what is the deciding factor.

There are opportunities that are missed because of lack of personal discipline. To sleep late expecting you will get later what is available now is foolish. Manna fell in the wilderness by the tons to feed the children of Israel, but they had to get it before the sun was up. God used that time frame as a way to discipline His people to be prepared early for the challenges and blessings of the day ahead. A disciplined person knows ahead of time the value of an item. No matter why the buyer might say in a negative way, the worth of it is known by the seller and he has the choice as to what he is going to do, in spite of the way a buyer might put down its value in order to make a higher profit for himself. Some people say it doesn't really matter what you believe as long as you are sincere. Others are willing to compromise truth in order to be accepted by other people or to make what we know to be of high value acceptable to them. Truth never changes in value. A disciplined person does not "sell the truth" for any price. In contrast to what the buyer claimed was of little value, is gold and jewels that are considered of great value. And they are as far as this world system is concerned. But of far greater value are the words of understanding that comes from a person who has discernment and discipline. He won't "cast pearls before swine," nor will he demean or depreciate the worth of divine truth.

Carelessness in business happens when one is sentimental or hasty, rather than disciplined. Taking collateral for a loan is common sense, and the more personal the collateral, the better. Not everyone in business is reliable and honest, so we know that it has to be something they value to them personally that is suitable for security. An ample amount of security gives incentive to the borrower to discipline themselves as to how they use what they have borrowed. The appeal of getting away with something, soon becomes bitter when conscience starts to convict us and the consequences of deceit attack us. What seemed to be good at the first, seriously hurts in the end.

There is a common saying, "Two heads are better than one," and that is so true. It is not easy to differentiate between what we want and what we should have or what is right. We are almost always biased in our own favor, so by taking counsel with a wise person or two, we can determine if our plans are meaningful, measurable and manageable. If I cannot control by personal discipline one area of life by what I say, then it is not likely I will be dependable in other areas. A gossip cannot be trusted with anything if it is of a confidential nature. One who flatters isn't really telling the truth, so it is best to avoid both in others, and makes sure neither one of those evil things is in me.

Ignoring the counsel of your parents is bad enough, but to speak evil of them, disrespect them and curse them, means you are on a downward course that leads to premature death. Under the law of Moses, a son who did that could legally be put to death by being stoned. The future heritage of a family depends on the respect and honor given to those who are older. The prodigal son couldn't wait to get his greedy hands on his father's money. To get an inheritance early indicates deception or some covetous reason to get a share of inheritance before it can "bless" you as it should or could. You will never get back an inheritance once it is spent. To take matters into our own hands when we have been wronged is not right. Some things we must leave God to do, because He knows every side to every story. He makes impartial decisions because of His knowledge of every issue. When wronged, our response should be to show kindness that will overcome evil.

Dishonesty is not just a way business may be done which is condemned, but of greater importance is the fact that it reveals the kind of person we are dealing with. Shady dealing or dishonesty exposes the character of that person and we see them for what they really are. Deceit and dishonesty are sure ways to determine the lack of spiritual life in a person. No matter who a person is or the position they hold, a good and wise man looks to the Lord to guide him all

the way through his life. We may not know the reason behind the things that happen to us, but no sensible spiritual man will take credit to himself for what the Lord does.

Don't promise to do what you later find out you can't do. To act without thinking a matter through to its conclusion is a trap. Vows are to keep, not to try to keep. Great intentions don't excuse a person from the consequences of a vow not kept. "It is better not to vow, than to vow and not pay." Don't be afraid to ask pertinent questions and take counsel from wise people before taking a step into something from which there is no escape. The difference between right and wrong, innocence and guilt are able to be discerned by a wise person who knows how to apply the right amount of pressure to get the facts. When he has learned by careful means what is the right action to take, there will be no question as to the fairness of his judgment of a matter.

The Holy Spirit in the world today convicts people of sin, righteousness and judgment. Our own spirit is like a light that has been wired up by God, and in spite of what a person may want, we cannot hide from the law that is placed in every person by God. A believer in Christ has an advantage of "the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit." Our new nature gives us the desire to walk in the light, and be light and salt in the world. When a leader of people shows love to those for whom he is responsible, and is willing to demonstrate kindness and a trustworthy nature to those he leads, people will gladly accept his leadership and follow his counsel, because they know he is a man of truth, mercy and grace. These characteristics keep a leader as a balanced person in his guidance and in passing judgments. That in turn creates stability among those he leads.

There are a variety of ways for older people to show respect to younger people, and for the young to show respect for the older. Young people deserve the focused attention of those who are older when they have sincere comments and opinions. Questions that are not "loaded" deserve an answer or a promise to seek an answer if one is not readily available. Young people have strength that needs to be used in the furtherance of their calling as they look ahead. Older people have learned what they know by experience, training and repeated use over a long period of time as they look back to "all the way my Savior leads (led) me..."

Sometimes severe punishment is needed to correct bad behavior by making it hurt enough so a person won't do the same thing again. To make everybody "feel good about themselves," is a deception that has bad results. The actual physical punishment does affect the attitude of the soul of a person to the extent that they will seriously think about everything they do and the possible outcome of those plans. Every part of our being: body, soul and spirit, is affected by what happens to the other parts. Discipline of the mind has an effect on the body. What causes pain to the body, affects the spirit. Depression or joy can have an effect for good or bad on the whole person.

Proverbs 20:24. "Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?"

A MAN'S STEPS.

*We sat around a table just two nights ago
Some were old friends, others we just came to know.
Talking together we had a wonderful time –
Our accents were different but our faces did shine
With interest in others comments and families too
Our lives were blended because each of us knew –
Our steps were ordered of the Lord.*

*It didn't take long for us to understand
Our common ground wasn't planned by man.
From far and distant parts of the world we came
Gathered by God unto the Lord Jesus' name –
Not understanding on the day we had left to come
God would bring us together in that very home –
Our steps were ordered of the Lord.*

*A lot of times people may not understand
Why we meet in special places across the land
In Jesus' name we gather and find others there
Who love for Christ and the Gospel we all share –
But then we consider this was not a mistake –
Love for Christ is behind the choices we make –
Our steps were ordered of the Lord.*

*By faith we live and it often brings changes,
By faith we act when we learn what God's will is,
By faith we gather to offer our sacrifices,
By faith we tell others what we know God's truth is,
By faith we trust God when we don't understand,
By faith we place ourselves under His guiding hand –
Our steps are ordered of the Lord.*

*It brings a lot of joy when I meet new brothers
And find my convictions are held by many others.
Some have been led by God to leave family and friends,
Others lifelong home is just around that near bend.
When we are together there's a commonality we have –
We love the Lord Jesus and the truth to us He gave –
Our steps are ordered of the Lord.*

"O God who has guided the feet of millions in the past in Thy ways: guide me this day I pray in ways that will bring honor and glory to Thee. Keep me from making my plans without consideration of what Thy gracious will is. Order my goings this day in paths of righteousness for Thy own name's sake. Amen."

Proverbs 21

THE LORD EXAMINES OUR ATTITUDES

It is well for us to remember there is nothing hidden from the eyes of our all-present Lord. Actions, ambitions and attitudes; behavior, business and beliefs; commitments, comments and convictions are all an open book before the Lord. "For all people everywhere": kings and paupers; politicians and preachers; parents and children – people from every way in life and in all places are under the ultimate authority of our sovereign Lord. The attitude of my heart, the actions of my daily life, the connections I have with other people – and of particular concern, my attitude toward the Lord, is in no way hidden from Him.

The life and rule of kings and those in authority are no more than ditches, canals and rivers the Lord uses to direct the controlling power of God to where He wants it. Almost everyone thinks they are okay, and many will say they are good, but the Lord looks behind the outward veneer and the excuses we make for our sins, to the motives in our hearts. There is no substitute for righteousness. Sacrifices and offerings are not to be bribes we use to seek to please God and get Him to overlook our sins. They were given to the Jews to use as expressions of their devotion and obedience to the Lord. Sacrifices we might make to further the Gospel or help God's people do not take the place of a right relationship with God and His people.

Sin in a person is in our nature, passed on to us from the first Adam. But in our lives, it comes from the attitudes we have and choose to keep. Looking down on others, over-estimating ourselves, and self-centered conceit are not hard to understand as being sin. But the plowing of the wicked seems, on the surface, to be a stretch to be calling it sin if we think it means turning over the ground on a farm to get the land ready for seeding. Actually, it is a reference to my thoughts that I turn over in the fertile field of my mind, and they are what gives visual evidence to what lights my life – my motives. That is what really controls people and why they sin if they are not saved by the grace of God. Diligence and commitment are a result of self-discipline. Neither is natural, and needs to be taught to us in one way or another. They do produce solid character in people who are willing to think before they act. Wise, diligent people consider the possible outcome of a matter before they go forward. By patiently doing the little things that lead up to the big ones, takes both diligence and patience. In contrast to the prudent person is one who makes hasty decisions and takes actions that will lead to defeat and poverty.

Some people have made fortunes by lying, but there are the unmistakable and unavoidable actions of truth that will end in a person losing all they thought they had gained as well as their reputation and character. "To lose one's wealth is much, to lose one's health is more. To lose one's soul is such a loss, that nothing can restore." Evil thoughts lead to evil actions. Greed will never be satisfied and it will seek to get all it wants and everything it wants. Violence and its consequences will trap a covetous person and will "drag them away" like a prisoner to be locked up. There is a tension under which a guilty person has to live that cannot be alleviated, because they have to be guarded in everything they say and do, lest they be found out and convicted. A person who lives an honest and clean life, doesn't have to be afraid of being caught. Transparent lives are a very wholesome and comfortable way to live.

A small private room is a better place to live, than in a mansion with every convenience and a discontented and contentious wife. Conflict in a home leaves that house a cold, unhappy place to live for everyone under that roof. No matter what he has or doesn't have, a wicked person will want and go after, evil. Nobody will please him or her. A neighbor who tries to help him will be mercilessly rejected. The nature of such a person is to do evil and no one can change that person but the Lord. Some people are just unwilling to learn life's lessons, and so have the consequences of punishment that happens to a fool. It is a wise person who learns from the mistakes of others. Watch and listen for what you can learn by observation and paying attention to what is said to help or correct other people. A courtroom is a good place to learn the consequences of right and wrong.

"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." God knows what goes on in the lives of sinners. He is righteous and will have the final word, and take the final action against those who refuse His guidance. To ignore the needs of those who are poor is to ignore the Lord. Act in mercy and grace toward known needs of the poor, and protect their rights. We may need help ourselves someday. To bribe a person who is angry in order to get what one wants, will only increase the sin that created the anger. The bribe may pacify an angry person for a short time, but what one thinks is a secret deed, is open to the Lord, and He knows what the real motives behind it is.

Those people who do what is right, find joy when justice is carried out. They know the Lord is righteous and will do that which is right in every case when He rules in righteousness over all the earth. Justice to an evildoer means he has no place to hide. To wander through life in sin, and practicing sin instead of the in the way of understanding and wisdom, will bring a person down to hell. That is not just a short stopover, but is the gathering place of those who are dead to God and separated from Him forever. To choose to stay on the broad road, is to choose against the Lord. Lavish feasts, luxury and temporary pleasures have only poverty of spirit and empty dreams at the end. To have pleasure as a priority in life, is to have poverty as the result. Payday comes someday. The wicked will have the tables turned on them and will take the place of those who are losers before the Lord when the final account is settled. Thankfully, our Lord Jesus took the place of those who have trusted Him as their Savior, because He is the Righteous One who suffered to bring us to God. We are free in Christ!

The conditions of homelife in which an unhappy wife was making everyone unhappy went from sounding like a continual dripping of water that aggravates, to a room on a corner of the roof that isolates, and now goes to a far place on the desert that separated. It is not wrong to save money now for needs that we will have to meet in the future. This is not merely hoarding for the sake of keeping what we have, but is making sure we have what we will need in the future without borrowing or becoming burdensome because of spending it now. Foresight into the future, and restraint in the present go well together. There are some things it is wise to go after until we get them. Go after righteousness and love. They are guides that lead us to the kind of life that pleases our Lord, prosperity that provides for our loved ones now, and honor that will bring glory to God.

A wise person understands where spiritual weapons are to be found. So, he will go there first before taking aggressive action against false teaching and teachers, and the defenses of ungodly men. Wisdom from the word will bring victory over human speculation. Controlling our tongue is probably the greatest battle we will have. It resists control in many ways. The calamity it causes, is serious enough that it can ruin or negatively affect us for a lifetime. Deception, untruths, unfair accusations and gossip all come from the mouth. Truth, worship and praise that brings honor to the Lord also comes from the mouth. Mockery, scoffing at others, at the Lord, at the Bible and at the faith of believers are not uncommon today. Such people can get angry quickly for no reason at those who are Christians. Those arrogant people think they know everything, can tell everyone what they ought to believe and do, and are not able to be corrected. In pride they have no fear of God, and in many cases don't believe there is a God. Such a person considers himself above others.

A lazy person will not work but covets what others have and wants it for himself without working for it. Those self-centered laggards are covetous, greedy, lustful and wicked. He will have a list of things he wants other people or the government to give him, and complains when he doesn't get them. His demands are endless. The hard-working righteous man has enough for himself and his family, and can share what he has with others who are in real need. Counterfeit worship is no more than an attempt to bribe God into blessing those professed worshippers. But God rejects and hates that kind of display of religion. "To obey is better than sacrifice." Obedience, love, devotion and a thankful heart are things that please God.

The untrue things a person says will soon be exposed for what it is and will be stopped. A true witness is given a hearing and will be asked to continue to explain what is obviously true. The bold face of an adulterer and an adulteress have a hardness that is not welcoming to one who loves righteousness. In contrast, one who is morally clean and is happy to live in fellowship with God and man, has an appealing countenance. The sovereign Lord has His plans, and no plans of ours nor insight we think we have, will change the Lord. He is supreme in authority, power and justice. The Lord is sovereign over everything and everybody, even those who rule and make war. The outcome

is in His hands. We have our work to do, and our role to fill in life, but we must fulfill it in faith and obedience to the will of the Lord.

Proverbs 21:1. *“The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will.”*

THE KING’S HEART.

*It worried me a lot, all his talk about “change,”
He seemed so dissatisfied looking for people to blame
For the wrongs he perceived were going on in the nation -
And he had glib, slick answers for each situation.
But then I stopped for a time to consider this fact -
He couldn’t do a thing if God didn’t allow him to act.
Then my mind was at ease and again I learned to trust
In the One True God who made man out of dust.*

*The “king” like all others is a part of God’s plan
He puts down one and then finds another man
Who is under God’s control whether he knows it or not,
And all his pet projects can easily come to naught,
Because over every decision that affects a nation
Is the hand of the Lord God of our salvation
Who does what is right and will bring to pass,
An ultimate kingdom under God’s King that will last.*

*These seemingly hard times are only a glitch
In the life of a nation with a ruler in which
The heart of this leader is controlled by God
And nothing can happen even if an earthly lord
Raise himself so high in his own estimation
That he thinks his will is the will of the nation.
So, God then steps in with divine intervention
And brings pride to an end with severe condemnation.*

*I will trust in the Lord and will pray for the “king”
Asking for a peaceful life and God’s salvation to bring
An end to the evil in the heart of that man
Knowing God who gives life is willing, and can
Move the heart of the “king” to repentance and faith -
Can turn him from pride into a trophy of grace -
What a stir there would be if such a “king” would say,
“It is God’s grace we need to bring our nation a new day.”*

“O God of all nations and people: many do not even acknowledge Thee as existing, let alone the Supreme Ruler of the universe. Yet I know the nations are as a drop in the bucket to Thee, and the leadership of nations is set up or put down as Thou dost see the need. I am resting in confidence that what is happening our nation and to our people is allowed by Thee. I thank Thee in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Proverbs 22

LOOK AHEAD

“One day at a time” is a phrase often used by people who do not see the need of making plans or preparations for the future. Those words from a song on the other hand, are very supportive and helpful when one is suffering physically or is in a situation that is taking them through a particularly rough patch in life. As far as a principle for normal living, it can easily become an excuse to put off until tomorrow what should be done today. What I choose to do today can affect my family name and reputation for a lifetime and longer. Dangers inherent in decision making need to be carefully considered. How I respond to both good things and bad things that happen to me will have an effect on others around me.

For many people, “a good name” started generations ago in the lives of my forebearers in different countries of the world, and has followed me to this time and place. Now it is my turn to pass on to those who know me the value of my family name by committing myself to further that “good name.” That name and the impressions and reputation associated with it, is an important part of my heritage that was passed on to me, and should be passed on to my family. In the early church, people “took knowledge of them (the disciples) that they had been with Jesus.” A good name comes as a result of wisdom applied constantly in all areas of life. “Loving favor” is the impression a good name leaves on other people. Every human being, whether rich or poor, is the same to the Lord. One’s position, wealth or the lack of it, nationality and race does not add or take away the value of a person in the eyes of our Creator.

A sensible person knows when to keep his head down and when to run away from danger. He knows there is just judgment ahead of those who are careless in their sins, and who press on into the danger of living and dying without Christ. Even in life, to push ahead into that which is wrong has severe consequences from which one cannot escape. Looking ahead, the fear of the Lord which produces humility, has great dividends as a result. The approval of our Lord and His people, and a meaningful life, accompanies humility. There are unseen snares and traps for those who break laws, and bring disorder and evil. All they have to do to be caught, is to continue on the way they are going. The sensible and upright people will keep as far away as possible from them and what they do. Every Christian should avoid false doctrine like the plague, as well as compromising “Christianity” as they look ahead to the outcome of those things.

Every child in a family is different. Each one has different personalities and different likes and dislikes. They each have different abilities, different strengths and weaknesses. We call that uniqueness their “bent.” There are various interpretations as to what this verse means in regard to the child. The point of the verse is not the child, but the child-trainer. Training is done by repetition of those things that are right, and by the reinforcing of the good things as often as possible and in as many ways as possible. The opposite is true as well. When corrective discipline is needed, be consistent, and do it as often as is necessary to correct wrong behavior. Verbal discipline is the most common way to train because a “Yes” or “No,” or “Not that way, rather do it this way,” may have to be done over and over. Personal discipline, emotional discipline and physical discipline all have their place in child training. When a correct understanding of the wrong, and the kind of discipline suitable to the misdeed is determined, then have confidence in the word of God that the outcome in the future will be good.

Again, the rich and poor are connected, but in this verse, it is not what they have in common, but what is different. In this case, injustice is the point being made. Whenever you borrow money, remember, the lender has rule over you until the loan is repaid. Whatever we sow, we reap. We reap what we sow and we reap more than we sow. That is an unchanging principle. So, look ahead and see whether what you are doing or planning to do, will bring sorrow or joy. A person may unfairly use his power, authority and wealth with anger and fury, but look ahead at the end of the matter, because injustice always has serious consequences. To share what we have with others, doesn’t only reveal a person’s character, but shows that person is aware of the real needs of other people. It may be the need of food, need of the soul, or both.

Sometimes we will have to tell people to leave our presence when they mock God or scoff at the truth of God and those who are saved. When it comes to insults, quarrels and contention, a person like that cannot be allowed to spread his poisonous words and bad influence. In direct contrast to the mockery is the person of a pure heart and of gracious speech. Wise people like that are welcome almost everywhere, even by those who are in authority as leaders among people and nations. We may not realize how much we have learned from the Lord in the everyday lessons of life. Much of what we call “common sense,” comes from God arranging things so we can look ahead at what might happen before it happens and we are caught in sin or something compromising. Those who can’t be trusted will find out the same Lord who guides the use of knowledge, can overrule the plans and words they have, so they have no adverse effect.

Lazy people tend to exaggerate so they have an excuse to not do what should be done. Some people who are smart intellectually, do not look ahead at the effect of the ridiculous things they say. Urge them to go to work and fulfill their obligations and responsibilities before they have so much to say. Watch out when a woman flatters and uses suggestive words. There is a deep dark pit there that will bring you to ruin. Short-term pleasure brings long-term pain. Everyone is by nature, self-centered, self-seeking and selfish. Adults should know better than to allow that in themselves, but children have to be taught what is wrong as well as what is right. Physical discipline is the tried and proven way to effectively adjust a child’s behavior. Children generally are not able to be reasonable until they learn there are consequences to wrong doing. Look ahead and see what will happen to an undisciplined child, and compare that with one who is preserved by the “rod of discipline” administered by concerned and loving parents. They may rip people off to get a bargain, and after doing that enough times, may get rich. You may also try to get ahead by helping rich people get richer, but in the end everyone who is involved in those things will lose it all.

THE SAYINGS OF THE WISE

For the next two chapters beginning at verse seventeen and ending at the end of chapter twenty-four, there are thirty specific sayings that tell us what not to do, and the reasons for not doing those things. He begins by saying in essence, "Pay attention to what I am going to tell you." The first saying is, do what is told you because it is pleasant to be prepared for what is ahead. Pay attention to what is said and learn to always put your trust in the Lord. Pay attention because what is written are the counsels and knowledge from those who have tried and proven them. You can have confidence in what is written because it will establish truth in you, and you will be able to pass it on to others who depend on you.

The second saying is, don't rob the poor in any way. Poor people have little defense when you take them to court, and you may think you have won there. But just remember, if you think you have won, it is only temporary. God will take all you have won, and more, from you who think you are in the place of authority and have force behind you. The Lord is stronger than you are.

The third saying is, don't make friends of a hot-tempered person. And more than that, keep your distance from that person. If you hang out with him or her, you are in bad company, and you are in danger of doing the same sinful things. You are likely to get caught yourself and end up with the consequences a hot-temper brings.

The fourth wise saying: don't be liable for another person's debt. You may lose all your collateral. If the one you loaned money to can't pay what they owe, the creditor will come back on you. In the end you might lose everything you have, even the furniture in your house, including your bed.

The fifth saying: do not move property line markers. Those were put in place by people who were here long before you and those boundaries are established and recognized by the powers-that-be. There are a lot of different boundary markers that should never be changed beside the boundary of a piece of land. There are boundaries of conduct that are established in every culture and nation. There are moral boundaries established that are not changeable even though the laws of the land may ignore them and try to adapt boundaries more acceptable to the sins people want to commit. There are boundaries around what is acceptable attitudes toward other people, and even animals. There are boundaries around our speech, and even when cursing and swearing are to some people no more than a habit, that doesn't change the fact that wrong speech has consequences. There are doctrinal boundaries in the scriptures that are set, even though some people say they are not applicable now, or that is not really important to them as individuals. If it is in the Bible, we do not have the right to add or take away from the written doctrines of scripture. Boundary markers are to prevent chaos and confusion. Right and wrong does not change.

The sixth saying is, do a good job at whatever you put your hand to, and God and men will respect you. What you say and what you do in your work, or in anything you do, need to be consistent to each other. If you apply this saying in the right way, it will be noticed by those who really count in your life.

Proverbs 22:1. *"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold."*

A GOOD NAME.

*Over a hundred years ago my grandfather came to town.
He gathered information and soon bought a family farm.
It wasn't long until the neighbors knew he would be a friend to them.
He would help when they had a problem and what they needed he would lend.*

*My father learned from him, and as a family leader he was respected.
Neighborly and willingly he did more than folks expected.
He taught our family to honor those to whom honor was due –
To make sure our name was trusted, and what we started we carried through.*

*A good name is not made in a day but earned over the course of time.
Like learning from the Bible, it's made by living "line upon line."
More than the amount of money you have or what people think you're worth –
Is the reputation you gain that follows right through your life from birth.*

*Even though my ancestors are gone, the family name lives on;
And it will follow after me long after I am gone.
My children and grandchildren to my peers are known by me –*

What I have left behind for them is my personal legacy.

*So that is a good reason each day I need to remember my name
Is being established and will be borne by those whose name is the same.
I talk to the Lord in the morning and spend some time in His Word,
So, what I am when I mix with others will represent my Savior and Lord.*

*I must make a conscious effort to live up to what is expected of me.
What I take into my mind and heart, is what my character will be.
Riches are easily spent but a man's good name is here to stay –
May people be able to respect it, rather than in disgust they turn away.*

*It takes time to listen to what God says and to fellowship with Him –
But there is something that time makes, that challenges my soul within.
I must act through the course of a day in a way that honors my Father –
And His good name will be maintained and spoken with loving favor.*

"Father in heaven, I am soon going out to meet with people again this morning. I want to be able to maintain the honor of Thy name as I mingle with the people of this town. Help me to keep my lips that they speak no guile; to watch my tendency to humor and keep it under control; to give a good representation of what it means to be a child of God. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Proverbs 23

TAKE TIME TO THINK

Nine times in this chapter the "heart" of the reader is appealed to. This is not limited to the emotions that easily move a person, but rather to the whole personality. This includes the mind, that we might know God; the emotions, that we might love God; and the will, that we might obey God. Discernment does not come automatically. It requires careful considerate thinking. We need to count the cost of a choice or a matter before taking action. The discipline of the mind leads to the discipline of the whole person, which in turn leads to a disciplined and effective life. It all starts with a "heart" that is right toward God.

The seventh saying in the list of thirty is a warning on two counts. Eating too much may be a personal disgrace, and secondly, it may be a way you are being tested. Your own self-discipline indicates whether you can be bribed or manipulated by influential people who will undermine your known convictions. When you are at a table like that with people like that, generally no real good will come from it. The conversation that is made to flow easier by tempting specialty foods and drink that you may not have had before, can supple a person up to where they say things that are unguarded. So, don't take too much, and don't eat too much. In that way you are sending a silent message yourself to the "higher up" person, that you know what he is doing. Deception comes from many directions and in many ways. Watch out for tricky, and likely evil, schemes.

The eighth saying is a warning to those who want to get rich to the extent of wearing themselves out with overwork. Then there are people who don't take change at a store but they buy lottery tickets instead, hoping to get rich quick. The desire for riches can ruin a person's spiritual life and soon will ruin physical and emotional life. If you focus your attention on money, remember, it will all be gone soon. The big problem with the love of money is that it is the root of all evil. Instead of having treasure laid up in heaven, you will lose out both here on earth and in heaven. Even your children will take everything for granted that you give them. If you hold back on what they think they are entitled to because of your wealth, they will end up losers too.

The ninth wise saying has to do with being alert as to how to deal with stingy people. Even though they may have lots of everything, they put a value on every bite of food they eat. If you eat at his table, he will begrudge every mouthful you eat. Even if he urges you to eat more, there will be an underlying resentment and criticism. Just don't go there if you are invited, and you won't be taken in by his flattery or apparent kindness. Know who you are dealing with whether in secular or spiritual things. His real attitude will soon be evident.

The tenth saying is that it is a waste of your time to try to reason with a fool. Such people close their ears to wisdom, and don't really want to know what is right; especially if correction is needed. It is likely the wise person will have a lot of verbal abuse dumped on them, and the foolish person may even spread false information or downright lies.

Number eleven is a plain statement that boundary lines are to remain unmoved. There may not be a fence there but the markers are in place and do not move them. If a person buys the land, even the original plot plan is on record. If

you try to take advantage of orphans and widows regarding trying to get their land, or for any reason; you are up against God. The Lord is the Redeemer-Defender as the close relative of the fatherless and widows. He is the Father of the fatherless. Like Boaz was the kinsman-redeemer of the land in the book of Ruth, so our Lord is for the helpless.

The twelfth saying is about people who are willing to pay attention and listen to instruction in order to gain knowledge. They know they need to grow in maturity through their whole lifetime. There will always be more than we can learn, especially from the Bible when we take time to think and meditate on what is taught.

The thirteenth wise saying is given that we seriously consider the need of discipline for children and their well-being. In this passage there is a sterner tone to the words of instruction in verses thirteen and fourteen, that are qualified by the tone of affection in verse fifteen. For some reason many parents are reluctant to discipline their children. That is really unfair to both parents and children. Discipline has not done its work until the behavior of the child is changed. By consistent correction that is suited to the reason for punishment, the child is preserved from ruining their life and going to hell, if they heed and learn from the discipline. The point of discipline is to help children understand there are people more important than they are who have greater authority. A child's world is about three feet around themselves. The major objective of discipline is a positive one that changes behavior in a positive way. This will need to be explained to children.

The fourteenth wise saying puts the onus on the son to act on the wise instruction and correction he received from his parents. What joy it is to a father to see evidence of wisdom in his children. That wisdom indicates his wisdom is from his heart because he believes what he was taught. Now when he speaks, that which is inside in his character and convictions, comes out through his words.

The fifteenth wise saying: Don't envy those who get ahead in this world and prosper in spite of their wickedness. When we see what other people have, and they still get more without any spiritual restraint from their evil, we may be passing through a test to see whether we truly fear the Lord. Our hope is in the future, not here in this passing scene called life. This is only the beginning for a believer. It is the end of all hope for those who remain in their sins.

The subject of the sixteenth wise saying, goes to the listener himself. The material things have been addressed. Now it is the person who is the point of concern. He is called upon to listen to advice for his own personal good. People who drink too much wine and eat too much food, are on a dangerous path in life. To spend time with those who get drunk on alcohol, or show lack of self-restraint when it comes to food, are associating with those who will corrupt them with the same habits. Both sinful problems lead to poverty, and if one is not careful, they will become a homeless person on the street looking for another drink and some cast-off food.

The seventeenth saying urges adult children to give honor to their father who provided for them when they were growing up. They are also to give full respect to an aged mother who can't do anything for you now, and very little for herself. The truths we heard from them should become our own by applying ourselves to the wisdom we get from the Bible, the discipline we get from practicing wisdom, and the understanding as to how to use both wisdom and discipline effectively. Everything we have come from the Lord, so always give Him the glory for anything good that is done. A father who can see the skill, the honor and the righteous life of his own flesh and blood, gets great joy from that person. The best thing a mother could want from a family is the joy of honorable children being successful for the Lord and for their own families. Both parents will share that joy when they are alone.

The eighteenth saying of wisdom is when a son is asked for his heart. He is being asked, not commanded, to follow his father's advice and instruction. If he does, he will avoid the sinful temptations that are all around him. A deep pit is very difficult to escape from and a narrow well captivates one who is unfaithful to God and family, when he succumbs to the wiles of a woman who is unfaithful to her husband. Such a woman, schemes and plans to seduce unsuspecting faithless men, who will be easy to blackmail and be taken advantage of for her own dark sinful purposes.

The nineteenth saying goes again to the deception of strong drink. The warning begins with a series of questions that describe the physical condition of one who is drunk. The reason is very plain. They are under the influence of alcohol in their blood stream and it has taken control over their common sense. There is a fascination with wine and strong drink because it loosens the tongue and removes normal inhibitions. But before long a person becomes addicted to its effects, and then to the substance itself. A person who drinks alcoholic beverages of any kind is inclined to take chances they would not normally take. Then they tend to lose visual and depth perception – and then their life, or someone else's. Unfortunately, those under the influence of another "spirit," are more susceptible to losing control of themselves. Their head seems like it is spinning and some even start hallucinating. The person who is under the influence of alcohol may lose control of their speech so that they say things they may regret for a lifetime. Some lose control of their ability to walk and their sense of direction. Their senses are so dull that they don't even hurt until they sober up. Then they want another drink to dull the pain. That is the cause of such self-indulgence and self-centered

living that caused this in the first place. It should be identified, faced, and dealt with first. Then the problem itself is partially fixed before starting rehabilitation by the power and help of the Lord.

Proverbs 23:26. *“My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.”*

THE HEART-ROAD.

*The way to the heart starts in my head
Actually, that pathway starts in my face –
For the impressions that come from around me
Move quickly from place to place.
Some start in my eyes when I see a thing –
Others reach to heart through my ears
With dark sayings or songs people sing
Bringing to heart depression or cheer.*

*Into my heart go new thoughts
Hiding there waiting to be expressed.
My heart is the unseen part of me
That usually is verbally confessed.
If eyes and ears send impressions to heart,
It is important what mouth has to say –
For what passed through my face at the start –
From heart comes back through face to stay.*

*People will be blessed or cursed
With how heart uses information given.
Face doesn't know which is worse –
Heart is the intelligent one chosen.
My eyes are not discerning
If heart and mind do not work,
Ears can't stop their hearing
But heart filters out the dirt.*

*So, if I pass over my heart to the Lord
(Heart one time was most deceitful) –
The cleansing power of His blood
Makes heart a member that's faithful.
And the members of my face are still there,
But heart thinks a different way –
Looking at the impressions with care
So, mouth has a good message to say.*

“O God of my salvation, I thank Thee for letting me hear Thy Word, and read it with my own eyes. I am thankful that my darkened heart and mind was awakened and enlightened by the truth of Thy Gospel. Now may I speak Thy Word even this night through my mouth and may they be truths that have reached my heart first. I do not want to speak of unfelt truth. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Proverbs 24

REPEATED LESSONS

In the book of Proverbs, many of the same subjects are repeated in quite a number of places throughout the book. Most of these sayings are given early in the book. The context or general theme in each chapter is likely the reason for this because the same principles of living apply in the different areas of personal, family and public life. The early part of the book was directed to an individual for his personal instruction. Other times the proverb is given in social

settings like families. It seems like the repetition in this part of the book is to remind us of what the general public sees of our lives and activities.

The twentieth wise saying: Envy and jealousy are close cousins. The discontent envy brings, is often the desires to have what gives another person perceived is an advantage over us. Jealousy is how it affects me. Jealousy gives mental uneasiness that comes from suspicion. The best way to deal with it is to not be around those who cause it in me. There is a good reason for staying away. Those people want to cause trouble. They have evil intent behind their actions. As they plot violence, they talk about what they are going to do and why. Stay away from such people.

Saying twenty-one: In contrast to the previous saying, this one is positive. Plan ahead as to how to accomplish anything that is important. Building a house, establishing a home, doing the work of the Lord – think it through. Use your God-given wisdom. If you do, the knowledge and wisdom you applied to the matter will bring all you hoped for and more beside. Things of value come by knowing the Lord's will, doing the best you can, and with patience, prayer and perseverance, the result will be good.

The twenty-second saying is that wisdom and spiritual strength go together. When we take the “yoke” of our Lord Jesus Christ upon us, all the accumulated wisdom and knowledge we have gained from Him, and other spiritual counselors, are available to us. In any decisions we make, it is a strong, not weak, person who takes the counsel of others to heart before going forward in some activity. It is better to be wise than strong. It is by wisdom we are able to prevail in the course of life.

Number twenty-three: We learn that wisdom is beyond the ability of fools to grasp. A fool, lives only for the moment. Don't pay attention to his many words when he talks in a gathering of people. He has nothing of any value to say. He should really be silent and stay silent.

The twenty-fourth saying follows along the same line of warning regarding those who scheme and plan evil. Not only are they fools for what they are planning, but they are sinning by planning it. Intention to sin is sin in itself. “Whoso looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Such people are fools for what they plan to do, and they are a bad influence and an irritation to everyone around them. They, or anyone who scoffs at those who live godly, or at God, make those who want to live for God avoid them, no matter who they are.

The twenty-fifth wise saying begins with a challenge to stick with what is right, even though it is tough going. Adversity can be useful by revealing a person's character, and increasing strength. Rather than complaining about our problems, we should face them by faith and love for the Lord, and personal resolve not to quit. We can be a help to people in helpless situations. There are a lot of lost souls we need to reach out to. There are believers in crisis times and difficulties that find it too much to handle without help. Don't turn a blind eye or deaf ear to those in need, or say it is none of my business. God knows what we know. His compassion is evident through His people. It is God who keeps the true balance of things. He is the one who is going to give or withhold as He sees the reality of every situation.

The twenty-sixth saying is another encouragement for us all to seek wisdom. No germs can live in honey. Its purity is a healing balm, and a little of its sweetness satisfies our craving for something that is sweet to our taste buds. Wisdom also enables us to look ahead with confidence and hope when the days are dark. There are some things happening at the present time in our lives that we cannot change. But beyond death's door, there is waiting for the believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, all we could hope for – and more. Wisdom from God gives us assurance in the present, in regards to the future.

The challenge of the twenty-seventh wise saying is a warning to the wicked not to mess with a good man. Even if you make him fall once, he will get up again and again because God is on his side. God will give him all the staying power he needs. When the wicked fall, they have no help. They are on their own and they will be down for the count. A righteous man can get up and go on after seven calamities, but for the ungodly, one fall and he is defeated.

The twenty-eighth saying is a reminder to us that when a person falls, be he an enemy or friend; to gloat over that fall and say, “He got what he deserved,” is an attitude of pride and vindictiveness on our part. God hates that. The law of love rejects that. The Lord may even turn away His righteous wrath from the enemy, and turn it on the proud who gloat over the misfortunes of others. The Edomites are an example of that attitude, and the results that can be expected.

The twenty-ninth saying gives two important principles: Don't envy the wicked, and don't be taken in by passing fads. The prosperity of the wicked is only temporary because their judgment will come, and all they lived for will be gone, and they will be lost. They have no future hope. Neither will his family because of what his choices were.

Number thirty of the sayings has to do with appropriate respect and response to those in authority over us. Leaders are God's ministers for a reason. However, if those who lead insist that we obey them rather than God, that is where we have to personally draw the line, and take whatever consequences that will come from that decision. To rebel against authority is active resistance and I should not be associated with riots or coups that seek to wrest power from "the powers that be." They have been placed in that position to deal with wickedness. How they choose to lead, for good or bad, will bring consequences on them. For me to be part of an attempt to overthrow governments or leadership in assemblies, is to invite calamity and retribution on my own head.

There are additional wise sayings that follow the original thirty, which were likely added by Solomon himself. Showing partiality in passing judgments is not good. To overlook the evil of the wicked by saying from your position as a judge, "You are innocent," when guilt is evident, the people over whom you are supposed to govern will hate the judge and he will be despised by honest leaders. A wise judge who is not afraid to make just judgments, will be approved by the people, and will have their respect for him and the position he holds. Honest and fairness will establish honor to the judge, will cement your friendship with others, will make your reputation solid among people, and will make you a person to be trusted. To speak the truth and yet do it in the right way, will bring a great relief and an expression of appreciation that is as intimate as a kiss.

Don't expect to get everything your parents worked a lifetime for, without going out and working hard. A house to live in doesn't produce what you need in order to live. Be content with little at first until you can afford a place of your own. "Owe no man anything," is a principle for living. Don't mislead, deceive or testify against a neighbor in order to get even for some reason. No matter what a neighbor may have done, leave it alone. Don't even try to get even. Revenge is not our right. God does that because He alone is cognizant of all that surrounds the mind and actions people take.

Do not neglect the heritage you have been given. To be lazy, or not both with important things is evidence of a person without sense, or one who has a self-centered pride of themselves that no one else could even recognize. Do all diligence to maintain what you have received, and pay attention to the little things as well as take care of the important things that are needed to keep your family safe. When there are lessons to be learned by observation, be wise and take them for yourself. In that way you will avoid going through what others have, because you learned from their mistakes.

A short nap now and then can become a habit. That has a tendency to become an excuse for not working. When that happens, a half-hearted mindset takes root and poverty follows. Those things that are important will be left undone. You will become useless to yourself, others – and most of all, to God. In the public sphere of life, you will be recognized as a self-centered lazy bum. Excuses don't put food on the table, nor does poverty pass by a man who will not work. It walks around like an armed robber ready to overtake and bring down those who are self-centered to total impoverishment.

Proverbs 24:27. *"Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterward build thine house."*

TIMING.

*The fields are fallow and untouched the - sky is red in the evening –
The foundation is laid ready for the walls - building materials lie in piles –
The seed is ready, winnowed twice and is clean ready for planting –
The family sleeps soundly and well fed in a temporary shelter –
What is a man to do?*

*The machinery lies idle waiting to be used to plow and plant –
The tools are there ready to be picked up to build the walls and roof –
The sun rises in the east and the fields lay waiting to be stirred –
Light shines across the unfinished building project that is undone –
What should I do first?*

*The field needs sun and rain, instant, hands-on attention and long anticipation –
The house needs labor and skill, each individual piece needs my hands –
The field may or may not produce a crop, my labor may seem wasted –
The house will be closer to completion with each day's effort – no wasted labor –
Which one is a priority?*

*The field needs the warmth and damp – and my labor – and most of all, God –
The house needs my mind, my skill, my labor, my attention –
The field will provide for me food, finances, raiment, provisions –
The house will provide for me shelter, comfort, pleasure, family contentment –
Why should I not build first?*

*The field will be a source of life to me for its fruitfulness comes from God –
The house will be a source of pleasure and pride to me for I built it with my hands –
Each one has a place and purpose to fulfill and in each one I have a work to do –
The stewardship that depends on God for ultimate success has the priority –
"Do your work in the field – afterward build your house!"*

"The fields are ripe, ready to harvest around me Father God, and other fields lie fallow without being disturbed by the message of the Gospel. I find it a concern today as to whether I should be putting the effort into harvesting as we are seeking to do here and now, or should I be promoting the tillage of new ground by committing myself to assisting strong young men in the outreach of the Gospel. If there is some area of outreach I can be involved in, in the year ahead, I would like to be ready and available and I will wait upon Thee for this. Meanwhile Father, bless this effort in the salvation of souls and the one we will soon be involved with in St. John's. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Proverbs 25

LESSONS FOR LEADERS

The northern ten tribes of Israel had been conquered by the Assyrians, and were no longer an entity. The people had been dispersed throughout the Assyrian empire so they wouldn't attempt a rebellion like might happen if many of them were in the same place. A young king named Hezekiah was on the throne of Judah and wanted to honor the Lord under whose authority he knew he was reigning as king. His father had no time for the Lord and had even nailed the temple door shut, but this young leader began right at the beginning of his reign to restore the kingdom to the fear of the Lord. He read the proverbs of Solomon, and had his scribe copy them. Many of them in the last part of the book are repeated from the first part. But this doesn't mean the Holy Spirit didn't use these men. When things are repeated, that emphasizes their importance. How marvelous it is to think that a king 3000 years ago was reading and meditating on the same words that I am this morning. How good is God!

What a wonderful blessing it is when leaders have the fear of God in them. Results of that are they will exercise the kind of self-control needed to not act in haste about a matter. When it has been carefully thought through, its effect on those he leads, or the precedent it will make, will be established. He will ask for, and experience, assurance from the Sovereign of the universe for wisdom to be given to His chosen servant. The conclusion of the matter will be such that those he leads will wonder at the insight of their leader. A king, or any leader, seeks out good advisers to help in decision making. But not all civil servants are good people. They all need to be tested to see if there are wicked people in places of influence. Some may have come into responsible positions as good people with needed skill. But when temptation associated with power, or money is there to take, they turn to self-advancement or being manipulated by other people instead of the leader. Periodically they need to be put to a test to see where their allegiance is and what they are really like in character and wisdom.

One of the character traits needed in those who are advisers to the leader, is humility. A quiet faithful adviser is one who can be trusted. He will not be seeking a place for himself. He can be counted on to support the leader, with dignity and honor given to the one he serves. We serve the Lord Christ. It is our privilege to do what we are called to, "as unto the Lord" no matter what that might be.

Don't rush to judgment by taking a matter to court to get what you think are your rights. Disputes are not really settled if you win your case. It may be later you will find out that you are the one who acted on gossip that was passed on, not reality. Settle disputes outside of court if possible because you may end up the loser. Not only will you lose the case, but you could lose your reputation as a fair and just person who can be trusted.

Advisers to leaders, and leaders themselves, need to always be conscious of the power of words. Some people use words to comfort. Generally, in such times, the less said the better. Too many words are not "fitly spoken." Make sure the words you say are suited to the reason for them. Be sensitive and gracious when comfort is needed. The same is true when correction and rebuke is called for. Too many words cloud the real issue. Appropriate words from the scriptures stand out as an answer from God as a fundamental principle that suits the need. When a wise leader carefully rebukes and corrects another person in the fear and fellowship of the Lord, both the one reproving and the one being reproved will benefit. One, because they give heed to what is said, and the other because of his wisdom being evident.

It is not easy to find a person you can really trust with things that are important. A trusted employee, a faithful messenger, gives those who lead a sense of relief and gratitude. Divine truth has been given to us. Let us make our Master glad that he can trust us. Pretense and dishonesty are basically the same. Boasting and deception are close together. False teachers and apostates are like "clouds without water." If a pledge of support is made, or a certain amount of money is designated to a cause or a work, make sure that pledge-promise is kept

If a leader is stubborn, don't be discouraged. Carefully and patiently state your case, and take your time. With respect for him, and a sense of dignity in yourself, use wise and gracious words to explain what you want to say and why. Take it easy. Take your time. If the end justifies the means, it will happen, "Lord willing." Don't take too much of a good thing. Excess in anything has a tendency to "turn your stomach," or that of those around you. Be moderate in everything. Be a balanced person by your own choice. Don't wear out your welcome by showing up too often at someone's house. Hospitality is good, but don't abuse the hospitality of people by going too often and staying too long. Learn to be sensitive to other people, not self-centered.

To lie about someone is as bad as attacking him with a weapon. The effect of a lie told about a person, will never go away. It will remain as a barrier between people, and the perjurer will have a reputation that will follow him everywhere he goes. Don't trust people you don't know, or those you know who are not trustworthy. An undependable person is going to not only hurt you, but will let you down when you need him. Some things people do just don't fit the situation. If someone is suffering, a quiet word of sympathy and empathy, a verse from the Bible read with a clear tone, and a short prayer are better than singing a "cheer up" song. Avoid the frothy stuff that is like vinegar and soda, but say what is appropriate for the need.

It is not natural, nor is it easy to retaliate against evil done to you in the way that God intends. Our Lord Jesus said we are to pray for our enemies, and give good for evil. We are to let God take care of the accounting by whatever means He chooses. Whatever "coals of fire are:" conscience, judgment or shame – the point is that it is doing what is good and right in the sight of God that is important. Taking vengeance is His work, not ours. Slander may come unexpectedly. There will be consequences that follow when slander is made against another person. Lesson: be very careful about what you say, and/or what is said about you.

Verse twenty-four is a repeated proverb that indicates its importance when it comes to using words. Slander in verse twenty-three and quarrels in a home cause the breakdown of friendship and harmony. Before getting married, take time to observe ways in which a person's character is revealed. The Gospel is like a refreshing drink of cold water to a troubled soul. Such an offer to an enemy may change his attitude of hostility into gratitude. We get great joy in hearing of the triumphs of the Gospel in all parts of the world.

The standards we live by as children of God, are a fundamental part of our testimony to those around us and to the grace of God. It creates confusion, distortion and disgust when one who could and should be counted on, abandons what he believed and taught, in order to please others. To be accepted by the ungodly as one who had been separated unto the Lord, is a very hard thing to see when one we trusted to teach us the Bible truths, now turns away from those same truths.

For a person who has been looked up to and honored, to think he deserves that in himself, is sickening. In the quest to get what you don't deserve; you will miss out and lose what you already have. Walls are restrictive it is true. But that is a good thing. It is because of walls we can rest in safety and security. An out-of-control person is like a house

or a city without walls. A person who exercises self-control, deliberately limits themselves, but that limitation is necessary in order to avoid attacks that come as a result of an out-of-control tongue. Self-control is also a safety measure when it comes to driving, eating, drinking and sharing life with others in a contented way. When self-control is missing, all kinds of problems will come and fill up that space.

Proverbs 25:6-7. *“Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: for better it is that it be said unto thee, ‘Come up hither;’ than that thou shouldst be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen.”*

THE SOURCE OF HONOR.

*To demand honor is to never get it, by its nature it has to be earned.
It is not yours until it is given by those who know you have learned
To be faithful in the call God gave you, quietly working until the task you finish –
And your credibility is established as God’s will through you is accomplished.*

*From within a person then comes character traits and from them true humility.
God has trusted you with gifts above and beyond your natural ability –
Others recognize by reputation you are a person that can truly be trusted
And some may want to honor you as one by whom they have been uplifted.*

*The “rule of thumb” is very clear; don’t look for the highest place –
An important person will come in and to save yourself from redness of face
Find an obscure location; settle in quietly without making a fuss –
Let attention be given to others – consider true honor has God as its source.*

*If you are asked to come up from a low place to a position somewhat higher
Quietly rise with dignity and carefully take time to think and consider
This honor from men is temporary so don’t linger longer in full view –
Be gracious when honor is given and remember God is the source – not you.*

*When leadership is obviously needed, look at the role as coming from God.
He has placed a heart in you to care for His people, those saved by the Lord.
Don’t demand from the saints, recognition and they do exactly what you say –
Your honor and leadership will be effective only by what you’ve earned day by day.*

“O God of grace, in Thy wisdom it pleases Thee to take at times lowly people and place them in positions of leadership. I am one of them. I am afraid of making serious blunders when it comes to receiving honor. It happens – people seem to put us in a higher place than some others and I don’t want to dishonor Thee in any way by not recognizing Thee as the source. Help me to always give Thee all the glory. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Proverbs 26

DISQUALIFIED

Not every intelligent person is smart. There are those who are mentally qualified, who should be able to live normal and productive lives. But by lacking parental training or having gotten away with things that were wrong or inappropriate so often and never been caught, they grow up thinking they can “work the system.” Such people may have brains to use but they don’t use them; strong bodies but they don’t do anything with them; intellectual capacities but they are dormant. They become a problem to themselves and all who are around them. It is in that context this chapter of Proverbs deals with fools, unlike leaders in the previous chapter.

To give honor where honor is not due is both deceptive and misleading. Some things don’t go together. Those who excel are given places of honor. Fools in the place of honor are an embarrassment to those who put them there, and the fool is misled into something that can bring damage to himself and dishonor to others. A curse on an innocent person doesn’t have any real effect. Some superstitious people pronounce curses on others in order to seek to control them. It is really a form of blackmail, especially when it is laid on simple people. God knows what is

undeserved and so those curses are meaningless. Some people are like animals. They will not pay attention when spoken to by words. Like a whip used to make a horse move faster or a bridle to control the movements of a donkey, a fool will need a rod on the back to get his attention. A physical blow will get him out of bed in the morning, get him moving when he is sulky and correct his lazy and arrogant behavior.

Don't demean yourself by answering a fool when he will not listen to common sense, let alone real wisdom. Remain in control of a situation by calmness and courtesy, but ignore stupidity. When the fool needs to be rebuked and corrected because he thinks he is wise, give a pointed and clear reply that will expose, and perhaps, correct his foolishness. Don't ever have a fool represent you personally or in your business. Don't let him use your name to identify himself with you. What he is, and does, will be applied to you, and your reputation will suffer. What you had hoped to be a help to you will bring you harm. A fool is not smart enough to get the wisdom needed to apply a saying or proverb right. They will quote something really useless and senseless, and inappropriate. Those who want to gain wisdom will be able to understand what is meant and how to apply it to a given situation.

To give authority, or even responsibility to a fool is not going to accomplish anything and will likely come back and hurt you. You may think if you give him a chance, he will become loyal and productive in some way, but the truth is, that action will not help the fool. It is not right nor fair to give a fool something that he is not able or willing to do. Fools who quote scriptures and proverbs hurt themselves as much as those they are attacking. It is always wise to consider the source when a point is being tried to be made. As a lesson to myself, I must make sure I pay attention to what I say to others and what I ask them to do. To give responsibility to just anyone who is around: strangers, lazy people, those who I am not sure they can handle what I ask, is not wise. Wisdom from God is how we make right decisions as to who to hire, because He knows all there is to know about them.

Fools don't learn from their mistakes. Wise people do. For some self-centered reason, fools will not change their behavior and their attitude. Some people profess to be Christians, but they go back to doing what they always did. They are self-deceived fools. There really are some people who are so conceited and arrogant, they think they have wisdom and it will die with them. In their mind "no one is as smart as me." There is more hope for a real fool to change, than for that kind of person. A lazy man is a fool. He makes silly excuses for not taking responsibility for himself and those to whom he is obligated. He rolls from side to side in bed because he is too lazy to get up. He wants to do less than the little he does. He is so lazy that he wants breakfast in bed and then someone to feed it to him because it takes too much effort to lift the fork to his mouth.

A fool thinks he is wise because he can get people to do for him what he won't do for himself. Even though seven sensible people try to talk sense into him, he thinks he is smarter than they are. Do not interfere with disagreements other people have unless you are asked. To "stick your nose in where you have no business," is going to come back and bite the one who meddles. Once you have a wild dog by the ears, you are stuck. If you let go, he will bite you. Foolishness and foolish talking and joking, does damage. Once you say something bad, it is out in the open and the consequences are dangerous and harmful. If we can't trust what a person says, it is hard to trust that person with anything. When some tasty piece of gossip comes to your ears, refuse to accept it or discuss it. Even if it upsets you, stop the innuendo and talebearing by not paying any attention to it or the person telling it.

The man who is a troublemaker wants to create strife and tries to keep it going like a hot fire. Avoid that man like the plague. Both gossip and strife have to be stopped or it will get to the place it will never be forgotten. When it comes to your ears, make it plain to the gossip that you will not listen to it, nor will you speak of it – and walk away. Words coated like silver on dirt to make it look good, or that sound sticky sweet like honey, are a great danger to one who listens to them. Don't take flattery seriously. Deception has many attractive coverings, but it is still deception. Flattering words of deception have the hatred of an enemy behind them. Don't believe a word they say. Charming speech has behind it all kinds of evil intent. Those who speak like that have planned and carefully thought through the plan to defeat or bring down another person. Those who speak like that are not to be trusted and underneath are wicked. Such a person may be able to fool some of the people, some of the time, but not all the people all of the time. He will be exposed for what he really is. God will do what is needed to expose his guilt.

The trouble people try to bring on others will backfire on them. Whatever the intent a person has against another to want to trap them like an animal, that person needs to consider, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." He will reap what he sows, and more than he sowed. The reason people lie about others is because of hatred in their heart that is set on fire from hell. Flattering words have as the intention the ruin of someone. That kind of ruin is what a fool can expect in the end.

Proverbs 26:17. *“He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.”*

MEDDLING.

*It happened again yesterday, I was asked to take a side
Of a problem issue that has been for years, one that men cannot decide
Which side is right or what is really wrong so a solution is yet to be made,
To settle this matter which I refused to address directly knowing it I must evade.*

*Some problems are based on emotion; not really on what is God's intent
Consequently, valuable time on useless speculation is spent.
The end result of some things will someday seem so small
We will wonder at the attention it received or why discuss it at all.*

*I am opposed to sin in all forms knowing the end of sin is death.
The only way to deal with it is to learn what the scriptures have said.
Then go from there to apply myself to what problems I know are mine
And leave the solution of their problems to them – if they seek God, answers they'll find.*

*Any man who holds stray dogs by the ears, usually ends up with a bite.
Meddling in the strife of others will often make them to unite
Against the one passing by who put his opinions where they shouldn't have been –
And then the one who did the meddling will find both turn against him.*

*So, I will only answer what's asked if I can without having to interfere;
The opponents need to solve the problem with help from those who live near here.
I can give a general reply that is based on a principle or doctrine –
But a stranger taking sides creates a larger problem by his interfering.*

“O God who knows the hearts of all men: I believe Thou art able to make me understand what I should when a need arises. I also believe I should use common sense to know when not to speak or give an opinion. Still, I know I must rely on Thy wisdom to be dispensed to me in any situation that arises. I trust Thee to make me aware of Thy mind in all of these things. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Proverbs 27

MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS

In normal human life, we interact with a lot of people every day, but on very different levels of communication and intimacy. Our day starts with families and our spouse is hopefully the best friend we have. The ties of nature certainly give us meaningful relationships, and to varying degrees, friendships. In the workplace we have fellow-workers, and occasionally a casual friendship develops with certain people. In our church life there are those we know better than others for a variety of reasons, although we love them all. But occasionally, a person comes into our life who is a “kindred spirit.” There is some kind of friendship that is nurtured, and is one in which there are very few secret parts of life in which that friend does not share.

In a way it is normal to think that tomorrow will be more or less as we had planned. However, in the things we do and plan to do, we need to remember and state, “Lord willing,” because only God knows what tomorrow will bring. A further observation at the beginning of this chapter is, do not take your friends and relationships for granted. They have to be cared for and nourished as much or more than any other part of our lives. A good way to hinder or stop a significant relationship is to talk about yourself and praise your own exploits and preconceived virtues. To form a relationship with a fool will be an awful burden because fools don't know when to keep their mouths shut. They will spout off in unpredictable anger and nonsense over insignificant things. That kind of anger is senseless and cruel. It generally is an expression of jealousy. Teenagers and children are particularly vulnerable to this if someone else happens to show special interest in a friend.

Correction given when needed, even when other people are around, is evidence of someone who really cares for you and your reputation. The fact that a friend is willing to risk your friendship to spare you from some evil, is proof of a relationship that is solid and faithful. Kindness doesn't always make one feel good. Because a friend has your well-being in his heart, he will tell you what you need to hear, rather than what you want to hear. He does not want to be deceitful with "kisses" of deceit like Judas was to our Lord Jesus. Love does and says what is necessary to preserve the integrity of a friend. Habitual covetousness will make people go too far and pay attention to everything people say, to get or maintain a friendship or a relationship. When one is confident and satisfied, he doesn't need any more assurances. If one person in a relationship rejects what is good, and the other person takes whatever he can get, both of them are not only unwise, but the relationship is in jeopardy.

When a person doesn't appreciate where he is placed by the Lord, and doesn't want to face up to his responsibilities, he will fall for temptations. Some people are never satisfied, so they go from one place to another hoping to get some place or position, for which they are not qualified. There is something very special when you can receive counsel from a friend and know it is given in good faith and real concern for you. It is also meaningful in a relationship when you know any advice, counsel and help you give, is accepted and recognized as the real care you have for that person. We need close friends who live close by who can be counted on in hard times. That relationship has been cultivated and nurtured over time. Such people know us well enough to say what needs to be said, and to do what needs to be done. We don't despise family members who are far away, but they can't help like a friend who is close by.

Wise children, either natural or spiritual, are a strong testimony to other people of the effectiveness of your mentoring. Time taken to instruct others in scriptural truth, and to be able to present that truth in a way people can understand and pass on, builds a strong relationship between the one who teaches and the one who is the learner. A sensible person looks ahead and can see dangers that could happen in a relationship, and avoids the potential pitfalls. Those who take each other for granted, carelessly go ahead thinking all is well, and will suffer the consequences of foolish ignorance. There are dangers in any relationship, but probably the greatest comes when borrowing and lending money. Even in a close relationship, when it comes to being asked for a loan, take a careful look ahead. Ask for the assurance of collateral, not interest. That assurance is a commitment to the loan being repaid. If you don't do that, both of you will find it hard to overcome the barrier unpaid debts erect between people – even friends.

Not everyone is a "morning person." It will not impress them positively in any way if you are thoughtless in waking them with a loud voice by saying the right thing at a wrong time. The implication is, "You should be like me, and get up and at it like I do." That is a good way to lose a friend or damage a relationship. The closest relationship we usually will ever have is with our wife or husband. Let every husband be kind, not contentious, and every wife remember that arguing and nagging doesn't do anything positive to strengthen or maintain the marriage relationship. Don't demand getting your own way. Rather, look for ways to get through to your spouse as to what is best for both of you. Show love. Be patient. Choose carefully those with whom you form a relationship. Usually there will be some difference that need to be expressed and considered before getting to close to a person. Sometime "sparks will fly." But the outcome of iron sharpening iron is good because it makes one stop and look at things from another point of view. It will help development in areas of life we may have taken for granted. It will likely add strength to one's character if they take the process of the "file" working to take off the rough edges, in the right way.

A farmer who tends to his orchard with diligence will enjoy the fruit of his efforts. In the same way, when we work and guard our relationships, beneficial results will come. A servant who cares for his master's interests will be honored by that master. In the same way relationships recognize there are boundaries between people that should never be crossed. That friend will recognize your insight, and will honor you for it. What we are inside is reflected outwardly in our countenance. The things we see in another person are often a reflection of what is in us. Death and destruction have insatiable appetites that will never be satisfied. That we can understand. One reason is that we know death has passed upon all men, "for all have sinned." Even everlasting destruction, we can grasp, at least to a degree because those will not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, make God out to be a liar. They will not believe God is telling the truth in the Bible. So those people are eternally lost to God. It is harder to understand why human beings are never satisfied. For some reason, no matter how much a person has, they want more.

How people handle praise is a test of character. Some people crave it, thinking it gives them more significance. Others fish for it, by saying something like, "How did you like what I said?" Others feed on praise and flattery, or else they feel like they are a failure. People of integrity and humility are gracious enough to say, "Thank you for your kind words. Please give God all the praise for any benefit you have received." The test of praise, or lack of it, should not change us, nor should it seriously affect that for which we have been called to do for the Lord. Some people can't be helped no matter what you do for them or what happens to them. They refuse to make any change from their foolish

ways. We should always hope and pray that they will attend to the truth of the Gospel and become a new creation in Christ Jesus.

Day to day living requires diligence and commitment to maintain the affairs of life in a way that preserves the lives of those who depend on us. Leaders of assemblies need to know what is going on among the Lord's people and the condition of their spiritual life. We need to be responsible for those things that are eternal, because wealth and position in life will not last. A farmer knows when his hay is ready to cut, dry and harvest. If he does that at the right time, he will get a second cutting from his grass and the field will continue to produce. The blessings of God make rich. Well-tended animals will produce well and provide enough for you to live on, and also to expand your property. Not only will a diligent person have plenty to meet his needs and expand his enterprise, he will also have full and plenty to supply the needs of others who are less fortunate.

Proverbs 27:17. *“Iron sharpeneth iron: so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.”*

SHARPER.

The two met together, not by chance but deliberate intent.

Each one aware of the issues; each with a different bent.

*More important than being together was a meeting of their minds –
What needed to be discussed was serious; they need a solution to find.*

*Each friend trusted the other, over years each tested and proved
Faithfulness and reliability were in them and the matter today behooved
They act in concert knowing the outcome would be important –
Especially because it required of them and others, real commitment.*

*Discussion led them each to gain from their friend new insights –
And to face clearly the conclusion without waiting for hindsight.
Each friend could see things different, and on the issue shed new light,
Putting thoughts together as one brought answers to the present plight.*

*They had left their egos behind knowing the need would affect others.
God has given to them the work of helping guide their sisters and brothers.
All the facts were stated and all the alternate choices were covered.
By disagreeing with thoughts, not the thinker, the truth they could discover.*

*Mental sharpness is not by chance when you share things with good people;
The needs and objectives we face, especially with friends we know are equal,
Challenge and stimulate thought with good intentions – not with evil;
And conclusions are drawn with reason – not acted on by what we feel.*

*Each person needs a good friend who is not afraid to say to you
What needs to be said in a way you know the things he says are true.
But the friend doesn't leave after saying his piece; he's there to help you through
To the right conclusion knowing God's will – and your friend rejoices too.*

“I thank you Father, for giving me the blessing of good friends. Just by being around them keeps me from stepping out of line and acting on independent thoughts that come from my own set of biases. Thank You for each of them, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Proverbs 28

RIGHTEOUSNESS VS EVIL

Doing what is right according to the laws of the land for most people is what they seek to do. They don't want to take chances because of the consequences of law-breaking. There are fines for traffic violations and other infractions of the law. There are jail sentences when some laws are broken. So, the fear of the consequences of breaking the law

keeps order in society. However, many people break the moral law of God and think nothing of it. Because justice isn't immediate in coming, they think it will never come. If it weren't for the grace and mercy of God, every living human being would already be in hell for the evil we have done. Those who God saved should be as committed to moral righteous living as to legal righteousness.

A person committed to living for God, can live in confidence with a good conscience before God and men. One who chooses to do what he knows is wrong, is afraid of the consequences of getting caught. They have to keep looking around and behind themselves, and running in fear and the nagging worry that won't go away. Hezekiah knew the consequences of Israel's rebellion prohibited a stable society, and caused the change of leadership often. Wise leaders are needed in every part of life, but they are hard to find. When selfishness is in leaders, anarchy prevails. When anarchy prevails, instability is inevitable. When there is instability in leaders; businesses, assemblies and governments fail. Sound judgment and knowledge – the right information, are necessary for righteousness to prevail.

When a poor person is given a position of authority over his peers who are in the same condition as he, that person often becomes aggressive because of the power he can exert over those in the same condition. He is like a huge downpour of rain that destroys a crop rather than nourishes it. His actions of evil overwhelm the potential good he was in a position to give. To ignore the laws of God, people lose their sense of right and wrong. A righteous person knows enough about morality to stand against evil-doers whose inner character is exposed by their lack of integrity. Discernment is lost when God's standards are lost or rejected. God's character is revealed in His moral law. Those who do evil are blind to what real justice is. Justice not only makes sense to righteous people; they pursue it in life and in that way carry it out in practical ways. Integrity and righteous living are a far better way to live than to be a rich, deceitful, crooked man who has a lot of things, but is nothing in himself.

A son who has learned to do what is right, either by respecting the law, or respects the law by learning from his parents; is a wise, discerning credit to his family and himself. A son who throws off restraint and has evil people for his companions, disgraces his parents and the family name. Getting rich at the expense of other people, either by charging high interest rates or illegal means, is always wrong. Eventually what he has accumulated in this way, will end up where it belongs. If a person refuses to do what is right, he can pray all he wants, but God detests his prayers. One can say the right words in prayer, but if he doesn't intend to do right and to seek to do the Lord's will, he will not find grace or mercy from God. Prayer must be honest communication with God.

Evil plots against people, or traps set to catch them for sinful gain, will catch the person who plans and sets those deceitful things. A person who maintains his integrity and good character, can expect good to come. Not all rich men are wise. A rich man may think he is clever, but a poor honest man can see right through him. A poor man of righteous character has riches that are not in fleeting, failing finances.

Public policy affects the whole population. A wise righteous leader gives reasons for joy in those who are under his leadership. A wicked leader makes good people want to escape and hide from his evil plans. To try to cover our sins and overlook what we have done wrong, is normal but wrong. Mistakes are often our best teachers. To cover our sins will leave a person with emotional guilt, a bad conscience – and those can even bring physical problems. To admit mistakes and learn from them will make us wiser, as long as we don't do them again. Be specific in making any confession to God or people. To fear and honor the Lord in reverence and respect will bring blessing to us. To be hardened against God, and indifferent toward evil, will bring trouble.

A public leader who does not control his anger, temper and actions, is a danger to himself and those he leads. His leadership of oppression, his greed for gain he does not deserve, will soon bring his leadership to an end. A leader who is fair and righteous will be leading his people for a long time because people will respect him. A person who is tormented by guilt, will not be able to escape the pangs of remorse and a guilty conscience. Repentance or death are the only solution to deal with a terrible evil act. To try to make a guilty person "feel good about themselves," is no kindness to him. There are costs for sin that must be paid and cannot be avoided. A blameless person is not perfect, but he maintains a normal consistency of righteousness. He commits himself to doing what is right, and repents and forsakes sin when he does wrong. In contrast the evil person will suffer the consequences of his perverse ways.

It takes work to do what is right, but there are great benefits as a result. To live in a fantasy world of pleasure and neglect of responsibility, will leave a person poverty stricken. God blesses a trustworthy, faithful person who is obedient to Him and follows His word. The person who wants to get rich quick with illegal schemes, will pay the consequences of his actions. Partiality is wrong, even if it is shown for something that is common or trivial. Bribes for

any reason are wrong. One who craves riches is a stingy person with what he has already, and he still wants more. It is the generous soul that prospers in contrast to the stingy person who is likely to lose everything.

A faithful friend will rebuke and/or correct whenever it is needed. He will be appreciated for it because he obviously cares enough about the friendship to preserve a friend from being demeaned. The person who flatters deceptively, usually has an ulterior motive behind his words. Some children think it is their right to claim for themselves that for which their parents have worked for a lifetime. When he takes it, he destroys any trust they have in the child as well as the peace of mind he might have been able to give them. A proud greedy person who is self-centered and covetous, creates strife. The person who trusts the Lord is generous, diligent and contented with whatever he has. He has a satisfied mind.

Bold, self-reliant people trust in themselves, but they limit themselves to the bare essentials they can provide. A wise person has learned to "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not on thine own understanding." Wise people acknowledge their need of God and have confidence in Him. Generosity in meeting needs of others will make them want to help us in our time of need. If I ignore the needs of those around me, the only thing I can expect is for them to curse me. When wicked leaders become prominent in any area of leadership, people will hide from them and the evil things they do and promote. Citizens will be glad when that leader dies. Then they will come out in the open and will do good for the whole group.

Proverbs 28:17. *"A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him."*

TORMENTED.

*He walks among his neighbors as one of them – a friend
He works his daily shifts like others – a fellow worker
He persuades and succeeds in winning another's affection – a husband
He is allowed the privilege of having children – a father*

*No one knows but him alone the darkness deep inside – fear
He cannot confide to anyone the gnawing feelings – guilt
Doctors cannot heal his disquiet – music does not help – joylessness
The wrong seems deeply submerged but it is there, alive – by conscience*

*The news shared by others brings deeper anguish – from the past
The loving words and deeds do not help to alleviate – the loss
No one can help nor should they try to lift the burden – still buried
Guilt, fear, loss – the relentless conscience all have a reason – repentance*

*The natural consequence of an act that has to be faced – God knows
The repentance necessary for real change has to happen – face the guilt
The confession of the hidden evil act has to be heard – consequences
The wrongs have to be made right and whatever cost has to be paid – retribution*

*The price for sins committed cannot be overlooked – justice
The results of evil acts can never be undone – irrecoverable
The rejection that is inevitable will bring hurt and loss – unavoidable
But the torment of covered sin can finally be set aside – by confession*

"O God, it must be a terrible burden to have covered sins of the past that has not been faced up to and dealt with. If such a person has that and it is keeping him or her from salvation, please by Thy Spirit convict them and lead them to repentance. If the joy of the Lord is evading a believer because of something that needs to be set right, then give them the grace and wisdom to deal with that matter before it becomes too large and leads to bitterness that defiles many. Give them each the needed help I pray, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Proverbs 29

NEEDED – SELF-DISCIPLINE

Passing on leadership responsibilities without guidance and instruction in personal discipline, as well as how to adapt one's life to the responsibilities of the role, is a great disservice to any person. Parents should do this with their children to prepare them for living a righteous life. Assembly leaders should do this to prepare young men for what is needed to guide God's people in biblical practices that are essential for fellowship and public testimony. Government leaders should do this so that those who are responsible to maintain social justice and a prosperous peaceful society are ready to take responsibility. There are parameters for conduct that must be taught in a way that will promote self-discipline in children, assembly leaders and social order.

Last chances in living are not advertised, like in buying things. Good advice given over and over is important in families. Warnings given over and over to the lost by those who preach the Gospel, will not be given forever, even though they are often repeated. Seldom is there a countdown to the last opportunity in the normal practice of living. When a change is needed, do it immediately. It might be the last opportunity. Citizenry thrives under righteous leadership. People enjoy peace and contentment when they trust their leaders. Evil leaders foolishly impose insecurity, uncertainty and grief on the people with their self-centered leadership.

A disciplined child becomes a self-disciplined adult who knows how to apply wisdom to his principles of living. An undisciplined wicked son wastes all his father gave him, for his own personal, short-lived immoral satisfaction. What a grief that person is to his father. Justice and stability go together. Bribes and self-interests make a whole society unstable. Flattery is very unkind. First of all, it lacks sincerity by being a lie that sets a trap for another reason. Secondly, dishonest comments are deceitful. Some people will actually think the flattery is true. Praise is not. Sooner or later the dishonest wicked flatterer will be snared by his own dishonesty. A righteous person who is disciplined by their own conscience and wisdom, can go on their way singing, and will not stumble over the temptations that are all around.

God is concerned about the poor and we should be also. Fairness toward those who are truly in hard times is our responsibility. We can't expect the wicked to do anything for them. Worthless troublemakers only cause unrest and riots, and they mock at those who know the value of discipline. Wise people who have learned the value of self-discipline, can often show the way to restore peace in living to a troubled community. The impact of the Gospel has affected many communities in a positive way. To try to talk sense to a fool is in vain. To attempt it is frustrating because they don't pay attention. A person who is without self-discipline will shout, mock and rage against the person who had tried to help him – and he still remains a fool.

A murderer hates those who do what is right and will seek to do to the righteous what Cain did to his brother Abel. Out-of-control fools vent their inward rage without any restraint. They may throw things, break things, and even hurt themselves before they stop. The self-disciplined wise person controls what they say by thinking first, calming themselves down and then they are able to calm the situation. A leader who listens to lies, will soon have his cabinet full of lying advisors. They will follow their leader. Rich and poor, oppressors and oppressed all live in the same world, even though they are in a different social class. It is the Lord who gives sight to both, so they have this in common – life for both classes depend on the Lord. Everyone is ultimately dependent on Him and responsible to Him.

A leader who is fair will rule for a long time. What he is in character will affect his constituents and how they live. Children need the training of wise parents who lead them well. By controlling them and their behavior, they teach them how to control themselves. If a child does not feel the pain of wrong doing, they will bring disgrace on themselves and their parents. They will likely face the ire of a teacher and then the law if parents fail to train them up in the ways of the Lord. Values are taught and learned at home. When wicked undisciplined people thrive, sin abounds, crime rates increase and danger is rampant in many different forms in society. All those who are righteous are able to do in that setting, is to live by faith, rejoice in the Lord and remain faithful to the Lord and His word. Trained children will have learned how to control and discipline themselves. That will give their parents peace in their own lives, and joy in watching their children grow and prosper in their personal lives.

Prophets brought the people messages from God. When there was no message and no vision, the lawlessness of the people became their downfall. They were living without restraint; they were uncontrolled and undisciplined. When we know what God says and wisely do it, there is confidence and happiness. Words don't always have the desired effect on those who are willful, and who refuse to do what they should. Employees may have to be fired if they will not do what is justly expected of them. Unreasonable, thoughtless words spoken in an emotional outburst, has a great potential for bad results and failure. Even a fool can be helped better than a thoughtless person. Showing favoritism

enables employees to think they are able to do what they want. The position a person has, and is able to fill depends on how he was trained. If there was no discipline expected when mistakes were made, there will be no self-discipline when he is doing his work.

There are some people you must stay away from. They are those who get angry quick and their anger is out of control. Others have no control over their temper and will create trouble wherever they go, just because they like to cause trouble. There is generally sin when one is angry because of lack of self-discipline. The arrogant man thinks mainly of himself and his self-perception is far from reality. His pride will ultimately be his downfall. In contrast, a person of humility has an honest and realistic evaluation of himself. He will be exalted because he can be trusted. His self-discipline makes him one who has real discernment as to his strengths and weaknesses and he can discern much of another person's character.

An accomplice to a thief, who perjures himself under oath, will face charges himself. He has not learned how important morality is in his own life, and how it is expected of him to tell the truth. To be afraid of what people will do to you is a snare. It will affect all you do. Some people are afraid to witness for the Lord. Others won't take a job for fear they won't be able to do it. Others won't venture out to take a chance on anything for fear they will make a mistake. When there is reverential fear of the Lord, we are set free to do what we know is right by faith, and that is pleasing to our Lord. That is good for us and for others.

A lot of people want justice, but those who work for the leaders in government will often do and say what they think is expedient for them, not necessarily right. It is only from the Lord real justice comes. He may use a leader, but real justice comes as an answer from the Lord through prayer. There is a gap between those who live righteously and have respect for others, and those who detest the upright people. Such a barrier is as impossible to cross and it is to have light and dark at the same time. Believers in our Lord Jesus Christ need to understand there is no common ground between right and wrong. Good and evil by their very nature remains separated. In this day of tolerance and wishy-washy "Christianity," true believers will find themselves more and more separated from the mainstream of society because they refuse to accept changing social practices and man-made laws that are contradictory to divine standards.

Proverbs 29:1. *"He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."*

NOT AGAIN!

*The little baby had learned early on
Loud cries will bring the mother running.
But if he keeps doing that it won't be long
Before he learns mother will be slower in coming.*

*A child who is corrected but continues to do
The things parents tell him are wrong –
Will find it's not wise – and behavior change is due
Or soon he'll sing a much different song.*

*A teenager who is rebuked by parents who love
Him and want him to behave right by choice –
Makes a big mistake if he complains about what they have
And ignores their reproof and the firm tone of voice.*

*For when the same mistake is made over and over
There is bound to come some serious disaster.
Refusing to change can have consequences that forever
Will leave you destitute and following the evil master.*

*Even old men who won't accept sincere correction,
And step out of God's will and commands –
Will find they and followers going the wrong direction*

For not submitting to righteousness' demands.

*A stiff-necked person whoever they are
Is a reproach to themselves and the Lord;
Such a one may not realize they've gone too far
And in the end, they will be turned away by God.*

"I have given quite a lot of reproof in these last few weeks Father, as I have sought to warn and entreat people to come to repentance. Probably that is enough for now but if I should give further warnings, may I be led by the Holy Spirit to reprove in such a way as to make people willing to listen and act. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Proverbs 30

MAN IS VERY LIMITED

Quite often books open with an introduction to the subject and close with a summary, like in chapter twenty-nine when the collection of proverbs by Hezekiah ends. Occasionally books have an appendix to clarify some things referred to previously, or to add some salient points. The last two chapters of Proverbs are like an appendix. Some subjects previously referred to are given more thought by a different person in a different style of writing. In this chapter, the writer, Agur, is an unknown person except for his name and his father's name. He must have read the previous proverbs and was used by the Holy Spirit to make some observations as to how what he had read, had affected him.

So, in words of deep humility, he confesses his ignorance and lack of understanding of God. His attitude indicates he is a man of wisdom. He knew God is infinite. People still are seeking to unfold secrets of nature in their efforts to explain God and all He has made and does. How futile is such an effort! Humility is never out of style for a wise person who has a realistic appraisal of himself. And yet, man is made in the image of God, and so is not entirely incapable of knowing God and being holy. Our minds, emotions and will all reveal God to an extent to us, in terms which are suited to our limitations.

The questions asked in verse four faces the distance between heaven and earth that cannot be crossed by man. Mankind obviously cannot control or bind up the winds and waters. There is no end to the earth so that man can say I have reached it. These rhetorical questions are answered plainly by one Person, God, who has a Son of equal power and authority. The answer to the questions is obviously, God in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. This man knew he was limited, but that was the reason he was wise. He knew the great gap between the infinite wisdom of an infinite God, and the limited wisdom of limited man, was revealed by the revealed word of God. He gave expression to what He wants us to know. Faith in Him comes through faith in His word. Limited humans dare not add to what our infinite God has given us. What he wants us to know and practice, He has given expression to in ways we can understand. His word is unchangeable.

In this prayer, which is the only one in Proverbs, he requests to be saved from any kind of falsehood, and secondly, that he has enough food to live on each day. These two requests are the basic needs of human life. One is to preserve the soul from sin, and the other is to preserve the body from premature suffering and death. Sensibly, he knew that too little food would tempt him to steal, and too much would tempt him to be proud. He was conscious of his need of physical health and of spiritual health. Even more wisely, he admitted that he needed God to do for him what he was incapable of doing for himself. He was dependent on God and did not want to dishonor or blame God.

Just because the position of a servant is lower than that of his master, or one who would slander the servant, does not mean he can say what he wants about him. That would be a dishonor to both the employee and the employer. If a person would do such a thing, the consequences of slander would fall on him and would be effective in exposing the him as the one who laid the charges.

The next section of the chapter addresses a generation of people who have corrupt characteristics. A life of arrogance and pride begins with lack of appreciation for parents while at home. To reject what parents taught then and now, disrespects those who are older and more experienced in living, and so is ignoring of wisdom. Self-righteousness is found even in prisons, where inmates often say the reason they are in prison is someone else's fault. They claim to be pure, but are really filthy. Pride makes them think they are higher than others, and are more important even though inside they are self-centered and impure. This ruthless generation of people think they are

above the law, so they take from the poor and use their power to oppress the oppressed. They are cruel, degraded and hateful people.

Modern advertising is geared to make people dissatisfied. It is like the two names, "Give and Give." Those two entities are never satisfied. There are some things that feed on dissatisfaction. Greed for more is a moral deficiency in people. By comparison, this list of four objects illustrate dissatisfaction. The grave will never be satisfied until there is no capability of death. The barren womb wants a child to give meaning to its created purpose. The ground beneath our feet constantly needs and wants more water to meet the demands of growing plants. In order for fire to exist, it needs fuel. The four things cover all of life as we know it. The beginning of life in the womb, and the end of life in death. The nurturing of plants for food to sustain life, and the destroying of plants by fire.

The haughty arrogant person who distains his father and mother, will have his payday someday. He will be so despised and disgraced that no one will bury him. Four things leave no lasting trail to follow so they are not easy to understand, even though there is a unique beauty to each one. What keeps a large bird in the air with nothing around it that can be seen? How can a snake move in any controlled direction without legs? What makes a loaded ship move forward and there is nothing powering it that can be seen? What makes a man and a woman love each other? The only answer is divine power and wisdom.

In contrast to the beauty of love between a man and a woman, is the brazenness of adultery. When a conscience is hardened by perversion of what should be beautiful, it becomes base, coarse, valueless and meaningless. It is no more to an adulteress to sin in this way than to take a bite of food. Four things that are completely out of order, throw the course of life off kilter. A servant should serve, not lead. A fool should starve, not be rewarded for what he didn't earn or deserve. A shrew of a woman shouldn't have children, because she looks down on them with meanness and a patronizing attitude. A servant girl who takes the place of her mistress in her husband's bed, creates deep-seated, unsolvable problems. She becomes overbearing in her attitude like Hagar and Sarah. All that maintains order in society is shaken by this kind of people.

In contrast to the sinfulness of humans is the wisdom of small creatures who seem helpless but they do what God created them to do. Weakness is not a hindrance to doing the will of God when we do what He intends. The weakness of ants is more than compensated for by the wisdom inherent in their created nature. Without demands, they prepare for their need well ahead of time, and cooperate with others of their own kind. They are wise in making preparation ahead of time. The small conies wisely live in rocky areas where they can be safe from predators which they are not able to fight. They are wise in building a safe place. Locusts are by nature, organized even by groups, and overcome all obstacles by their unity of order and direction even though there are no leaders. They know their own group and go forward in those "bands" in an orderly way that is like an army. Their wisdom is evident in an ordered and organized cooperation. The spider, more likely a lizard, is another small creature referred to. It is able to climb vertical walls, walk upside-down on ceilings and can move quickly because of the "hands" (feet) it has. Even though these creatures are small, they are fearless and can be found in kings' palaces. Their wisdom is in their confidence and fearlessness.

The writer, Agur, contrasts the weak creatures of nature that hide and yet effectively survive, with four creatures that are just the opposite. A lion moves forward with stately measured steps that exude confidence and awareness of his position in his realm as king of beasts. The greyhound is a sleek fast running dog, but in this context, the animal referred to is probably a strutting rooster who moves among the flock of chickens with his head high, looking in every direction, and ready to take on anything or anyone who comes against his flock. He doesn't back down from anything. The he-goat has the same haughtiness about it. He looks at a potential danger without blinking and with surefootedness no matter where he is. He takes slow forward steps indicating he is ready to go on the offensive to protect his interests. A king surrounded by loyal troops, dares enemies to attack him. He knows he can overcome the enemy with the courage and power of his soldiers and with his power and authority over them.

As a response to those creatures, to which God has given wisdom and authority, the writer gives a warning to people who are lifted up with pride. Forget about any evil you are planning. Clap your hand over your mouth and don't say a word. Change your attitude quickly. If you want to keep living, get down off your "high horse." If you keep on stirring up trouble, you will get more trouble than you can handle. If you keep provoking others, it will be you who bleeds. If you make someone angry, you will be the loser. Whoever Agur was, he knew how to put a lot of instruction in a few choice words and illustrations.

Proverbs 30:24. *“There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise:”*

THE OBSERVER.

He watches with delight the things around him. . . .

He learns by what he has followed with careful observation

The power of wind to make a great eagle soar

The heat from the rock that prepares the snake for action

The movement of a ship in a stormy sea –

“Take advantage of the environment around you!”

He learns at the funeral – death awaits each one implacably

He learns looking at the face of a woman – fulfillment is waiting anxiously

He learns in a time of drought – the staff of life is waiting thirstily

He learns from watching the fire – the destroyer is waiting aggressively

“Some things will never be satisfied!”

He watches the ants making busy preparation for hard times are coming soon

He watches the conies find a safe place of shelter for danger is coming

He watches the locusts marching in the same direction overcoming obstacles coming

He watches the spiders (lizards) fearlessly hanging on ceilings and wall safe from everything coming –

“Take advantage of the benefits around you!”

He learns from the bold steps of the lion to never fear when going

He learns from the greyhound to have strength controlled when moving

He learns from the guarded movements of the goat to be watchful when feeding

He learns from the dignified acts of the king to be thoughtful when ruling –

“Be deliberate with caution in every action!”

“There is no doubt Father God, I can learn by observing things going on around me. Lessons are on every side waiting to teach me and guide me in ways that find their origin in Thee. I am asking for an observing eye to claim these lessons and learn from these teachers placed around me by Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Proverbs 31

THE IMPACT OF VIRTUE

The book of Proverbs begins with a young man being told by his parents his need of “the fear of the Lord.” It ends with a description of a virtuous woman and her impact on others because she fears the Lord. A consciousness of God with us all through the experiences of life is fundamental to living life as it should be. The reverential respect of our Lord is what makes this possible. Lemuel’s mother knew what she was talking about when her inspired instructions to her son were given. She knew her son, but she also knew people. Her example provides good spiritual instruction, and the common sense needed by any leader. The husband who wrote about a virtuous, noble wife, described ideal womanhood as the last message of the book of Proverbs.

Lemuel’s name means “devoted to God.” That gives a bit of insight to the motivation behind the teaching his mother gave him. She obviously loved her son, had nurtured him and sacrificed for him. But even more, he was the object of her prayers to the extent there were vows made concerning him similar to the vows of Hannah in regard to Samuel. The relationship she had with her son, gave weight to what she warned him about. Sexual excess was common to kings and leaders in those days, and perhaps still is today. Those immoral actions will bring a leader down to where he is ruined and even despised because of his self-indulgence.

She also knew that leaders who are drunkards are not to be trusted. Decision making and leadership responsibilities are compromised when a leader loses his moral compass. His judgments will be colored by his activities in which he may think he is above the law. Justice is perverted and those who have been burdened down by oppression are further oppressed by a drunk leader. There is some justification for a person who is dying in physical pain to seek

relief in alcohol to deaden the pain. Alcohol deadens the senses to a degree, and can relieve stress but only should be used in those medicinal ways. A leader's responsibility is to promote justice and equality for those who can't speak for themselves. His balanced judgment is needed to do what is needed to maintain order in a nation where there are all classes of people.

Whoever was the husband who wrote the last part of this last chapter, he took the time needed, guided by the Holy Spirit, to make this poem using the Hebrew alphabet in a poetic way, to describe everything of worth in this word picture of the ideal woman and wife. The wisdom she has is above the value that is visibly seen. In fact, her visual appearance isn't even addressed here. Her beauty was deeper and far more attractive that meets the eye. Her character is lofty. Her virtue gives her husband full confidence in her to pass over to her the checkbook, credit card and everything else of value they shared in common.

She is consistent in all her ways and her motivation is to bless people rather than demand. Her family and husband know she is absolutely trustworthy. She doesn't settle back and let things come her way, but steps out and makes things happen. She uses both her head and her hands. She thinks intelligently and positively. She takes initiative in work and accomplishes what she sets out to do. This industrious lady doesn't need classes in time-management. She is organized and knows when she has to start each day in order to fulfill her plans and responsibilities.

When the opportunity comes to get ahead, she thinks about it before acting, and yet is resourceful to the extent she can visualize what can be done profitably. Knowing what needs to be done, she is not afraid to go to work and do it rather than depending on others. The more she labors, the stronger she gets in every way. When something is going good and is profitable, she doesn't quit at quitting time. She finishes her task even if she works into the night. She is satisfied with her work and makes enough profit to keep her lamp burning through the night for safety and testimony.

There are times when it is enough to use your intelligence, and there are times when you need to use your hands. This wise woman saw a way to make a product that could be used to help meet the needs of her family and also help meet the needs of others. So, she made cloth to sell. She doesn't wait for the poor to come to her in shame and embarrassment with hands held out. She goes to them and offers what she has from her hands to theirs. This ideal wife looks ahead to the needs she knows are ahead, and prepared two layers of clothes for the cold weather that she knew would come. At the same time, she makes the family home a place of special beauty and comfort. Home and all that happens there, is important to her, and likely her children and husband too.

This noble woman knows who she is and her role and responsibilities in life. She also knows who her husband is and his role and responsibilities in life. She supports him, but doesn't try to take his place in his leadership in the community. Her skills are used to supply home needs, and also to sell for income to meet the family's needs with a home-business. That gives her opportunity to connect with the business community and also establish and reinforce the reputation of her husband and herself as prudent people. Strength and honor are opposite to moral weakness and disgrace. She doesn't compromise her character, but when she sees people wearing clothes made from the cloth she produced, she will have satisfaction and maybe some joy. Her conscience is clear and her principles for living a righteous life are intact.

A conversation with this woman would be enjoyable because she has something to say that is wise, useful and helpful. She doesn't have a sharp tongue with a cutting edge, but speaks the truth that is needed at the moment. To be a career house wife is probably one of the hardest jobs there is, and in the long run is the most rewarding. When one has invested themselves in the life of living people, especially your own children, there is great satisfaction. Our children don't stay in the rebellious teen years forever. They day comes when they will appreciate their mother. All she did for them will be worth the effort when they tell her how much they appreciate her investment in them. The husband of such a woman will openly express his appreciation of her and will tell her she is the best wife of all.

This remarkable woman has beauty of character that far surpasses any and all outward appearances of beauty. The outward passes away because it is fleeting by nature. The inward beauty grows and keeps growing more beautiful as the years pass. We marry a person, not a face, and a person who fears the Lord will have our highest respect and reputation. Real praise for such a person will be because of who she is and what she does through industry, humility, integrity, ingenuity, and spirituality. That is how and why lasting honor will come and last.

Proverbs 31:1. *"The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him."*

MOTHER – TEACHER.

*Don't compromise yourself – you are much better than them
You have strengths "God-given", unique for reasons known to Him
Unknown as yet to you and others, but not to God
You are not your own, a price for you was paid –
"Be the person God wants no matter what others do and say!"*

*Some people do what they feel pressured to do because of others
Listen to advice based on long life and the concern of mothers
Stand up for righteousness – commit yourself to loyalty
And honor, self-respect, turn away from considered popularity –
"Away with wine – dark judgments and speak the truth!"*

*Do not rush into a decision irreversible – take time
Consider the reputation you and she will live with
For life – you will be linked by name as one
And known for the rest of life by each other –
"You will be 'one' in body, soul and spirit!"*

*The example is there for your learning and wisdom
Read and learn – act with care and concern
Take the necessary time to consider and to pray
True wisdom comes from God who knows and cares –
About practical things, and kindness, and self-respect!*

"Father in heaven, my prayer today is that Thou wilt preserve the mothers that are willing to teach their sons and give sensible reasons to insensible people. Help them to never give up even when their sons don't seem to pay them much heed. Give them the special grace to maintain their courage even when they are discouraged by the foolish decisions the young make. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."