PROVERBS

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



The fear of the LORD, the father's call to his son, two ways and two houses, and wisdom for our words, our work, our money and our homes

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the book of Proverbs. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

The best wisdom I was ever given is this: look for God in everything, and know that He has never left you. I have leaned on that in good seasons and bad. Proverbs is a father teaching his son. That is the lesson I would pass on.

Proverbs is the Bible's book of everyday wisdom. It speaks about the things we deal with every week: our words, our money, our work, our friends, our anger, our marriages and our children. It does not only tell us what is right. It shows us how to live well under God in a world full of choices, and it keeps bringing us back to one starting point, the fear of the LORD. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on Proverbs. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand His Word. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters in Proverbs too, even though much of the book is made of short sayings. Chapters 1 to 9 come first for a reason. They are long talks from a father to his son, and they tell us who God is, what wisdom is, and why we need it, before the single sayings begin in chapter 10. If we pull one proverb out by itself and forget the rest of the book, we can make it say something God never meant. If we read each saying in the light of the whole book, and of the whole Bible, it makes good sense.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written, and that means reading each book as the kind of writing it is. Proverbs is wisdom poetry, and its plain sense is the sense a proverb has. A proverb is a short,

sharp saying that tells us how life usually works under God. It is true, because God gave it, but it is a wise general truth, not a promise that covers every case without exception. When Proverbs says "The fear of the LORD adds days" (10:27), it tells us that a life lived God's way tends to be a longer and healthier life. It does not promise that no godly person will ever die young. When it says "Train the youth according to his way; even when he is old he will not turn aside from it" (22:6), it tells parents what training usually produces. It is not a guarantee that a child can never walk away, and it is not a verdict against every parent whose child has. The book itself shows us this. Two sayings stand side by side: "Do not answer a fool according to his folly" (26:4), and "Answer a fool according to his folly" (26:5). Both are true, and wisdom is knowing which one fits the moment.

Proverbs is also written in Hebrew poetry. Hebrew poetry does not rhyme sounds. It rhymes thoughts. A line says something, and the next line says the same thing in other words, or adds to it, or gives its opposite. This is called parallelism. In "A wise son makes a father glad, and a foolish son is the grief of his mother" (10:1), the second line gives the opposite of the first. Once you see this pattern, the sayings are much easier to follow, and you will not try to build a separate teaching on each half of a line. A note on the name of God: in the SLB, when you see "LORD" in capital letters, it stands for God's personal name, Yahweh (often written YHWH), which He made known to Moses (Exodus 3:14-15). Proverbs uses that name all through the book. Wisdom in Proverbs is never just good advice. It is wisdom that begins with knowing the LORD, the God of Israel.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Hebrew, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.

In chapters 1 to 9, where the father gives longer talks, I usually take two to four verses at a time in the Study section. From chapter 10 on, most proverbs stand alone in a single verse. I still cover every verse, but I keep each note short, and where several sayings in a row speak to the same subject, I take them together.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. Proverbs has 31 chapters, so here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: thirty-one weeks, or about seven months. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Background together.
- A faster pace of twenty weeks: take chapters 1 to 9 one at a time, since they are long talks that need room, then take chapters 10 to 29 two at a time, and finish with chapters 30 and 31 together.

Because Proverbs has 31 chapters, many believers also read one chapter a day for a month, matching the chapter to the date. That is a good habit for personal reading alongside a group.

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some parts of Proverbs touch painful subjects. Chapters 5 to 7 warn plainly against adultery. Some in your group may have been betrayed by a spouse, and some may carry the shame of their own unfaithfulness. The verses on the rod and the discipline of children (13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14) can stir up memories for anyone who was treated harshly as a child. Sayings about children, such as 22:6, can wound parents whose grown children have turned away. Sayings about wealth and long life can sound cruel to someone who is poor, sick or grieving, unless we read them as the general truths they are. Chapter 31 can leave some women feeling they never measure up. If you lead a group, read those sections ahead of time and be ready to listen. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through the book of Proverbs. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of Proverbs

Proverbs is the twentieth book of the Bible. In our English Bibles it stands among the poetic and wisdom books, which run from Job through the Song of Songs, right after Psalms. In the Hebrew Bible it belongs to the third section, the Writings. The wisdom books deal with how to live under God and with the hard questions of life. Proverbs teaches how life usually works under God. Job and Ecclesiastes look at what happens when life does not seem to work that way. We need all three.

Most of Proverbs comes from the reign of Solomon, the son of David, who ruled all Israel about 970 to 930 B.C. Those were the best years of Israel's kingdom: peace on every side, the temple built in Jerusalem, and visitors from other nations coming to hear the king's wisdom. When Solomon asked God for wisdom to govern His people, God gave it to him, and 1 Kings 4:29-34 says his wisdom was greater than all the wisdom of Egypt and the east, and that "he spoke three thousand proverbs." The book of Proverbs holds some of them. About two hundred and fifty years later, the men of King Hezekiah of Judah copied out more of Solomon's proverbs (25:1), and the book also holds the words of other wise men, of Agur and of King Lemuel.

The theme of Proverbs is wisdom: the skill of living God's way in the real world. The Hebrew word is hokmah. It was used for the skill of a craftsman, and in Proverbs it means a life well built. The book tells us where that wisdom starts:

Proverbs 1:7 (SLB)

"The fear of the LORD ***is*** the beginning of knowledge; wisdom and discipline fools have despised."

The fear of the LORD is not terror. It is the awe, trust and reverence that take God seriously and want to please Him. That is the first step and the foundation of everything else in the book. The same truth is said again at 9:10 and 15:33, and it holds the whole book together.

Proverbs has 31 chapters and 915 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: A Father's Call to Wisdom (chapters 1 to 9)

- Chapter 1: The Beginning of Knowledge
- Chapter 2: Searching for Wisdom Like Silver
- Chapter 3: Trust in the LORD With All Your Heart
- Chapter 4: Guard Your Heart
- Chapter 5: Drink From Your Own Well
- Chapter 6: Things the LORD Hates
- Chapter 7: The Way to Her House
- Chapter 8: Wisdom Calls Out
- Chapter 9: Two Invitations

Part Two: The Proverbs of Solomon (10:1 to 22:16)

- Chapter 10: The Proverbs of Solomon Begin
- Chapter 11: The Upright and the Treacherous
- Chapter 12: The Diligent and the Slack
- Chapter 13: Walking With the Wise
- Chapter 14: A Way That Seems Right
- Chapter 15: A Soft Answer
- Chapter 16: The LORD Directs His Steps
- Chapter 17: A Friend Loves at Every Time
- Chapter 18: The Name of the LORD Is a Tower of Strength
- Chapter 19: The Counsel of the LORD Will Stand
- Chapter 20: The Lamp of the LORD
- Chapter 21: The King's Heart in the LORD's Hand
- Chapter 22: A Good Name and the Words of the Wise (the words of the wise begin at 22:17)

Part Three: The Words of the Wise (22:17 to 24:34)

- Chapter 23: Do Not Envy Sinners
- Chapter 24: Do Not Fret Because of Evildoers

Part Four: The Proverbs Copied by Hezekiah's Men (chapters 25 to 29)

- Chapter 25: The Proverbs Copied by Hezekiah's Men
- Chapter 26: Fools, Sluggards and Whisperers
- Chapter 27: Do Not Boast About Tomorrow
- Chapter 28: The Righteous Are Bold as a Lion
- Chapter 29: Where There Is No Vision

Part Five: The Words of Agur (chapter 30)

- Chapter 30: The Words of Agur

Part Six: The Words of Lemuel and the Wife of Strength (chapter 31)

- Chapter 31: The Words of Lemuel and the Wife of Strength

Where this book points to Christ: Proverbs is not a book of prophecy, but it points to Jesus in more than one way. Jesus said that "something greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:42). Solomon taught wisdom, but he did not always live it, and his heart turned from the LORD in his old age (1 Kings 11:4). Jesus is the wise Son who lived every line of this book, growing "in wisdom and stature and favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). The New Testament calls Christ "the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24) and says He "became to us wisdom from God"

(1 Corinthians 1:30), the One "in whom all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge are hidden" (Colossians 2:3). When wisdom speaks in chapter 8 of being with God before the world was made, many teachers see a picture that points to Christ, as we will see in that chapter. The way of wisdom in Proverbs leads, in the end, to Him.

Background of the Book

Author: The book names its main author three times: "The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel" (1:1), "The proverbs of Solomon" (10:1), and "the proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied" (25:1). Solomon most likely gave the long talks of chapters 1 to 9 and the sayings of 10:1 to 22:16 and chapters 25 to 29. Two shorter collections come from wise men who are not named: "the words of wise ones" (22:17 to 24:22) and a short appendix that begins "These also are for wise ones" (24:23-34). Chapter 30 gives "The words of Agur the son of Jakeh" (30:1), and chapter 31 gives "The words of Lemuel the king, an oracle which his mother taught him" (31:1). We know nothing more about Agur or Lemuel than these chapters tell us. Some Jewish teachers thought Lemuel was another name for Solomon, but the text does not say so. Many modern scholars believe the book grew slowly over many centuries and was finished long after Solomon, and some think the sayings were credited to him only because he was famous for wisdom. I take the headings at their word. Scripture tells us Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs (1 Kings 4:32), and the book tells us plainly where the other parts came from.

Who it was written to: Over and over the book says, "my son." It was written first for young men in Israel, likely including the king's own sons and young men being trained to serve, to prepare them for life and leadership. It also speaks to "simple ones," people who are easily led, and to anyone who is willing to listen (1:4-5). The mother's teaching is honored next to the father's (1:8; 31:1). The wisdom in it is for every believer, young or old, man or woman.

Setting: The world of Proverbs is ordinary life in Israel: the home, the field, the market, the city gate where the elders judged cases, and the king's court. It speaks of farmers and merchants, servants and kings, neighbors and friends. That is why it still speaks so clearly to us. People have changed very little.

When it was written: Solomon spoke his proverbs during his reign, about 970 to 930 B.C. Hezekiah, king of Judah, reigned about 715 to 686 B.C., and his men copied more of Solomon's proverbs about 700 B.C. (25:1). The book was likely put into its final form in Hezekiah's day or not long after. We do not know exactly when the words of Agur and Lemuel were added.

How to read a proverb: A proverb is a short saying that packs a lot of truth into a few words. It describes how life usually works in God's world, not a promise that always comes true in every case. Wise people work hard and usually prosper, but some godly people stay poor, and some wicked people get rich for a while (Psalm 73). Proverbs knows this. It tells us that "Better is a little with righteousness than abundance of produce without justice" (16:8). So when a proverb sounds like a promise, I will stop and show the general-truth reading. Some sayings, of course, are true without exception, such as those about God's own character: He sees every heart, and He will judge every sin. Others are word pictures, and we read them as pictures. A proverb also needs to be used at the right time, in the right way (26:7, 9).

The people of Proverbs: The book introduces us to a cast of characters. The wise person fears the LORD and listens to correction. The "simple" (Hebrew peti) is the naive one, easily led and still able to learn. The fool (kesil, and sometimes 'ewil) is the one who will not learn and despises

wisdom. The scoffer or mocker (lets) laughs at correction. The sluggard is the lazy man who always has an excuse. Wisdom herself is pictured as a noble woman calling out in the street (1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-12), and folly is pictured as a loud woman calling people to death (9:13-18). Learning these characters helps you read the whole book.

Purpose: The book states its own purpose in the opening verses: "to know wisdom and discipline, to discern sayings of understanding" (1:2), and "to give to simple ones prudence, to a youth knowledge and discretion" (1:4). It is meant to shape character, starting with the fear of the LORD, so that God's people live well in the home, the marketplace and the nation, and so that the wise grow wiser still (1:5).

Chapter 1: The Beginning of Knowledge

Scripture

1:1-19 The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: to know wisdom and discipline, to discern sayings of understanding, to receive the discipline of wise dealing, righteousness and justice and uprightness, to give to simple ones prudence, to a youth knowledge and discretion. Let a wise ***one*** hear and increase learning, and let a discerning ***one*** acquire guidance, to discern a proverb and an enigma, the words of wise ***ones*** and their riddles. The fear of the LORD ***is*** the beginning of knowledge; wisdom and discipline fools have despised. Hear, my son, the discipline of your father, and do not forsake the instruction of your mother; for they ***are*** a wreath of grace for your head and necklaces for your neck. My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, "Come with us; let us lie in wait for blood; let us lurk for the innocent without cause; let us swallow them alive like Sheol, and whole, like those who go down ***to*** the pit; we will find all precious wealth; we will fill our houses ***with*** plunder; you will cast your lot in our midst; one purse will be for all of us," my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their path; for their feet run to evil, and they hurry to shed blood. For in vain the net ***is*** spread out in the eyes of every owner of a wing; and they lie in wait for their ***own*** blood; they lurk for their ***own*** lives. So ***are*** the paths of everyone who gains unjust gain; it takes the life of its owners.

1:20-33 Wisdom cries aloud in the street; in the squares she gives her voice; at the head of ***the*** noisy ***streets*** she calls out; at the entrances of ***the*** gates, in the city, she says her sayings: "Until when, simple ones, will you love simplicity? And scoffers have delighted for themselves in scoffing, and fools hate knowledge? Turn back at my reproof; look, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you. Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one ***was*** paying attention, and you neglected all my counsel, and my reproof you did not want, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes, when your dread comes like a devastation, and your calamity arrives like a whirlwind, when trouble and distress come on you. Then they will call me, and I will not answer; they will seek me earnestly, and they will not find me; because they hated knowledge, and the fear of the LORD they did not choose; they did not consent to my counsel; they spurned all my reproof. And they will eat from the fruit of their way, and from their ***own*** devices they will be filled. For the turning away of simple ones will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them. And he who listens to me will dwell ***in*** security, and will be at ease from dread of evil."

Chapter 1 Preview

Proverbs opens with a title and a purpose statement. These are the proverbs of Solomon, and they are given so that we may know wisdom, receive discipline, and learn to live rightly. The simple can gain prudence, the young can gain discretion, and the wise can grow wiser still. Then comes the motto of the whole book: the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.

The rest of the chapter gives two voices. First a father warns his son not to join a gang of violent men who promise easy money. Their plan sets a trap that will catch them in the end. Then Wisdom herself, pictured as a woman, stands in the busiest streets of the city and calls out to the

simple, the scoffers and the fools. She invites them to turn back. She also warns that those who refuse her now will one day call for her and not find her.

Chapter 1 Study

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

"The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel." The book begins by telling us who stands behind it. Solomon was the son God promised David would build His house (2 Samuel 7:12-13). When God offered him anything he wanted, Solomon asked for an understanding heart to judge God's people, and God gave him wisdom beyond anyone of his day (1 Kings 3:9-12; 4:29-34).

The Hebrew word for proverb, mashal, means a comparison or a saying that sets one thing beside another. Many proverbs work that way. They put two pictures side by side and let us see the difference.

We should also remember how Solomon's story ended. He wrote wise words, but in his later years his many wives turned his heart after other gods (1 Kings 11:1-6). Knowing wisdom is not the same as walking in it. The book itself will tell us that over and over.

1:2-4 *to know wisdom and discipline, to discern sayings of understanding, to receive the discipline of wise dealing, righteousness and justice and uprightness, to give to simple ones prudence, to a youth knowledge and discretion.*

Here is the purpose of the book, given in a string of words that overlap. "To know wisdom and discipline." Wisdom is skill for living God's way. Discipline, sometimes translated instruction, means training and correction, the kind a father gives a son. "To discern sayings of understanding" means learning to tell what is true and what is not.

"To receive the discipline of wise dealing, righteousness and justice and uprightness." Wisdom in Proverbs is never only clever thinking. It is moral. It shows up in how we treat people: being right with God, fair with others and straight in our dealings.

"To give to simple ones prudence, to a youth knowledge and discretion." The simple are the naive, the easily led, people whose minds are open in the wrong way. Prudence is the good sense to see trouble coming. Discretion is the ability to think a thing through before acting. Young people need this most, because they face the biggest choices with the least experience. This book was written with them in mind.

1:5-6 *Let a wise **one** hear and increase learning, and let a discerning **one** acquire guidance, to discern a proverb and an enigma, the words of wise **ones** and their riddles.*

"Let a wise one hear and increase learning." Proverbs is not only for beginners. A truly wise person is always still learning. The moment we think we know it all, we have stopped being wise (3:7).

"Let a discerning one acquire guidance." The word for guidance comes from a word used for steering a ship. Wisdom helps us steer through life.

Verse 6 says the book will help us "to discern a proverb and an enigma, the words of wise ones and their riddles." Some sayings are plain. Others make us stop and think. God did not give us a book to skim. He gave us one to chew on.

1:7 *The fear of the LORD **is** the beginning of knowledge; wisdom and discipline fools have despised.*

This is the key verse of the whole book: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; wisdom and discipline fools have despised."

What is the fear of the LORD? It is not the fear of a slave who hides from a cruel master. Scripture tells us God's people are not to be afraid of Him in that way (1 John 4:18). But it is more than respect. It is a deep awe of who God is: holy, all-powerful, the Judge of all the earth, and also loving and faithful to those who trust Him. It is the kind of reverence that takes God seriously, wants to please Him, hates what He hates, and trusts what He says. Later Proverbs tells us plainly that "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil" (8:13).

"The beginning" can mean the starting point, and it can also mean the first and most important part. Both are true here. You cannot begin to be truly wise without the fear of the LORD, and you never move past it. It is the first step and the foundation of every step after. The same truth comes back at the end of Part One: "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the LORD" (9:10). Job says it (Job 28:28), and so does the psalmist (Psalm 111:10).

Why does knowledge start there? Because God is the One who made the world and gave it its order. If we leave Him out, we can know many facts and still get life wrong. A person can be brilliant and still be a fool in the Bible's sense of the word. The fool in Proverbs is not someone with a low IQ. He is someone who will not bow to God. "Wisdom and discipline fools have despised." The fool does not lack the chance to learn. He looks down on it.

This verse divides the whole human race into two kinds of people. Every chapter of Proverbs will show us the difference between them. So the question for us is simple: Do I fear the LORD? Does God's opinion matter more to me than anyone else's? That is where wisdom starts.

For us today, the fear of the LORD leads to Jesus Christ. Paul says that in Christ "all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge are hidden" (Colossians 2:3). To fear God rightly is to come to Him the way He has provided, through His Son.

1:8-9 *Hear, my son, the discipline of your father, and do not forsake the instruction of your mother; for they **are** a wreath of grace for your head and necklaces for your neck.*

"Hear, my son, the discipline of your father, and do not forsake the instruction of your mother." This is the first of many times the father says "my son." The home is the first school of wisdom. Notice that the mother's teaching stands right beside the father's. In Israel both parents taught their children God's ways (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

The father says his words will be "a wreath of grace for your head and necklaces for your neck." In that world a wreath or a chain around the neck was a sign of honor. Godly teaching, received and lived, makes a life beautiful. Not every reader had godly parents, and some had parents who taught them wrong. But God can be a Father to the fatherless (Psalm 68:5), and His Word can give what a home did not.

1:10-14 *My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, "Come with us; let us lie in wait for blood; let us lurk for the innocent without cause; let us swallow them alive like Sheol, and whole, like those who go down **to** the pit; we will find all precious wealth; we will fill our houses **with** plunder; you will cast your lot in our midst; one purse will be for all of us,"*

"My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent." The father knows his son will be tempted, so he warns him ahead of time. Notice the word "if." Temptation will come. The answer is short: do not consent. Say no.

Then he lets the son hear what the gang will say. "Come with us; let us lie in wait for blood." Their plan is robbery and murder of the innocent. "Let us swallow them alive like Sheol." Sheol is the Hebrew name for the grave, the place of the dead. These men speak of their victims the way death speaks of its prey.

Their pitch has two hooks. The first is money: "we will find all precious wealth; we will fill our houses with plunder." The second is belonging: "one purse will be for all of us." Many young people are drawn into sin less by the sin itself than by the group. They want to belong. The father knows that, and he names it.

1:15-16 *my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their path; for their feet run to evil, and they hurry to shed blood.*

"My son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their path." The best way to avoid falling into sin is not to walk down the road that leads to it. Psalm 1:1 says the same thing: the blessed man does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.

"For their feet run to evil, and they hurry to shed blood." These men are not slow about sin. They run to it. Paul quotes words very close to these from Isaiah 59:7 when he describes the sinfulness of the whole human race (Romans 3:15). What we see in this gang is what the human heart can become without God.

1:17-19 *For in vain the net **is** spread out in the eyes of every owner of a wing; and they lie in wait for their **own** blood; they lurk for their **own** lives. So **are** the paths of everyone who gains unjust gain; it takes the life of its owners.*

Verse 17 gives a picture from bird hunting: "in vain the net is spread out in the eyes of every owner of a wing." A bird that sees the net being set will not fly into it. The point is that these men are dumber than birds. They see the trap, but they walk into it anyway, because the trap they are setting for others is really set for themselves: "they lie in wait for their own blood; they lurk for their own lives."

"So are the paths of everyone who gains unjust gain; it takes the life of its owners." Greed eats up the greedy. Money gained by hurting others does not bring the life it promised. It takes life away. This is a general truth that history proves over and over. Paul says the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10).

1:20-21 *Wisdom cries aloud in the street; in the squares she gives her voice; at the head of **the** noisy **streets** she calls out; at the entrances of **the** gates, in the city, she says her sayings:*

Now a new voice speaks. "Wisdom cries aloud in the street; in the squares she gives her voice." Wisdom is pictured as a woman, a teacher, calling out in public. This is a word picture, called personification, where something that is not a person is described as if it were one. The Hebrew word for wisdom is feminine, which fits the picture.

Where does she call? Not in a hidden temple or a classroom for the few. She calls "at the head of the noisy streets" and "at the entrances of the gates." The city gate was where business was done, cases were judged and people came and went. Wisdom is not hidden. God's truth is offered openly to everyone. No one can say they never had the chance to hear.

1:22-23 *"Until when, simple ones, will you love simplicity? And scoffers have delighted for themselves in scoffing, and fools hate knowledge? Turn back at my reproof; look, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you.*

"Until when, simple ones, will you love simplicity?" Wisdom names three kinds of people. The simple (peti) love being naive. The scoffers (lets) delight in mocking. The fools (kesil) hate knowledge. Each one is a step further from God than the last. The simple can still learn. The scoffer laughs at learning. The fool hates it.

Then she pleads: "Turn back at my reproof." To turn back means to repent, to change direction. If they do, she promises, "I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you." God is always ready to give more light to those who respond to the light they have. Jesus said something similar: to the one who has, more will be given (Matthew 13:12).

1:24-27 *Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one **was** paying attention, and you neglected all my counsel, and my reproof you did not want, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes, when your dread comes like a devastation, and your calamity arrives like a whirlwind, when trouble and distress come on you.*

Now the tone changes. "Because I called and you refused," wisdom will laugh at their calamity. This is hard to read. Does God mock people in trouble? We need to read it as the poetry it is. Wisdom is showing the folly of those who mocked her. They laughed at her warnings; now the warnings have come true. The laughter is the laughter of being proven right, not cruel delight in pain. God Himself says He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11).

The calamity comes "like a devastation" and "like a whirlwind." Judgment that seems slow for a long time can come suddenly at the end. That is why the time to listen is now.

1:28-30 *Then they will call me, and I will not answer; they will seek me earnestly, and they will not find me; because they hated knowledge, and the fear of the LORD they did not choose; they did not consent to my counsel; they spurned all my reproof.*

"Then they will call me, and I will not answer; they will seek me earnestly, and they will not find me." This is one of the most sobering verses in the book. There can come a time when it is too late. The cry in verse 28 is not repentance. It is the cry of people who want to escape the consequences, not people who want God.

Why? "Because they hated knowledge, and the fear of the LORD they did not choose." Notice the word "choose." The fear of the LORD is a choice. These people made theirs. God's grace is wide and His patience is long, but it is not wise to treat it as if it will always wait. "Look, now is a well-accepted time; look, now is a day of salvation," Paul writes (2 Corinthians 6:2).

1:31-33 *And they will eat from the fruit of their way, and from their **own** devices they will be filled. For the turning away of simple ones will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them. And he who listens to me will dwell **in** security, and will be at ease from dread of evil."*

"And they will eat from the fruit of their way." This is how God's world works. Those who sow folly reap it. Often the punishment for sin is simply getting what we chose (Galatians 6:7-8).

"For the turning away of simple ones will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them." The word for complacency means being careless and at ease, sure that nothing bad will happen. That false comfort is deadly.

Then the chapter ends with a promise: "And he who listens to me will dwell in security, and will be at ease from dread of evil." Wisdom does not only warn. She invites. The one who listens is safe. That does not mean nothing hard will ever happen to him. It means he does not live in dread, because his life is built on solid ground (Matthew 7:24-25).

Chapter 1 Summary

Proverbs opens by naming Solomon as its author and stating its purpose: to give wisdom, discipline and understanding, to make the simple prudent and the young discerning, and to help the wise grow wiser. The key to it all is verse 7: the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, and only fools despise wisdom. A father then warns his son against joining violent men who promise wealth and belonging, because their trap will catch them in the end. Wisdom, pictured as a woman, calls out in the city streets to the simple, the scoffers and the fools, urging them to turn back. She warns that those who refuse her will one day seek her and not find her, and will eat the fruit of their own way. But the one who listens to her will live in security.

Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. What reasons does Solomon give for writing the book? (1:2-6)

2. What is the beginning of knowledge, and who despises wisdom? (1:7)

3. In your own words, what does it mean to fear the LORD? How is it different from being afraid of God? (1:7; 8:13)

4. Whose teaching is the son told to hear, and what is it compared to? (1:8-9)

5. What two things do the sinners offer the son to draw him in? (1:11-14)

6. How does the picture of the bird and the net show the foolishness of the gang? (1:17-19)

7. Where does Wisdom call out, and what does that tell us about how available God's truth is? (1:20-21)

8. What three kinds of people does Wisdom speak to, and how are they different? (1:22)

9. Why do some people call to Wisdom and not find her? What does that teach about putting off a decision about God? (1:28-30)

10. The gang offered money and a place to belong. What pressures to "go along" do you face, and what would it look like to hold back your foot from that path? (1:15)

Chapter 2: Searching for Wisdom Like Silver

Scripture

2:1-22 My son, if you receive my sayings and treasure my commandments with you, to make your ear attentive to wisdom, ***if*** you incline your heart to understanding; for if you call out to discernment, ***if*** you give your voice to understanding, if you seek her like silver and search for her like hidden treasures, then you will discern the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth ***come*** knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; ***He is*** a shield to those who walk ***in*** integrity, to guard the paths of justice; and He preserves the way of His faithful ones. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and uprightness, every good course. For wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you; understanding will preserve you, to deliver you from an evil way, from a man who speaks perverse things, those who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who are glad to do evil; they exult in the perverse things of evil, whose paths ***are*** twisted, and ***who are*** devious in their tracks; to deliver you from a strange woman, from a foreign ***woman who*** has made her sayings smooth, who forsakes the close companion of her youth and has forgotten the covenant of her God; for her house sinks down to death, and her tracks to the shades; all who go in to her will not return, and they will not reach the paths of life; so that you may walk in the way of good ***ones*** and keep the paths of righteous ***ones***. For upright ***ones*** will dwell ***in*** the land, and blameless ***ones*** will remain in it; and wicked ***ones*** will be cut off from the land, and treacherous ***ones*** will be torn away from it.

Chapter 2 Preview

Chapter 2 is one long sentence in Hebrew, built like a chain of "if" and "then." If the son will receive his father's words, listen for wisdom, call out for understanding and search for it like hidden treasure, then he will find the fear of the LORD and the knowledge of God. Why? Because the LORD Himself gives wisdom.

The second half of the chapter shows what wisdom does for those who find it. It guards them. It delivers them from two dangers: evil men who walk in darkness and twist the truth, and the strange woman whose smooth words lead to death. The chapter ends with two pictures of the future: the upright will stay in the land, and the wicked will be torn from it.

Chapter 2 Study

2:1-2 *My son, if you receive my sayings and treasure my commandments with you, to make your ear attentive to wisdom, **if** you incline your heart to understanding;*

"My son, if you receive my sayings and treasure my commandments with you." The chapter starts with a big "if." Wisdom is a gift, but it is not forced on anyone. We must receive it. To "treasure" the father's commands means to store them up like something valuable, hidden away so it cannot

be lost. Psalm 119:11 uses the same idea: the psalmist hid God's word in his heart so he would not sin against Him.

"To make your ear attentive to wisdom" and to "incline your heart to understanding." The ear hears, and the heart leans in. It is possible to hear words without taking them in. The father wants more than attention in class. He wants a son whose heart is turned toward the truth.

2:3-4 *for if you call out to discernment, **if** you give your voice to understanding, if you seek her like silver and search for her like hidden treasures,*

The "if" grows stronger. "For if you call out to discernment, if you give your voice to understanding." This is not a quiet, casual interest. It is a cry, like someone calling for help. James 1:5 tells us that if anyone lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously.

"If you seek her like silver and search for her like hidden treasures." Think of how hard men have worked to find silver and gold: digging deep, moving tons of rock, giving up comfort for years (Job 28:1-11). The father says to search for wisdom that way. How much effort do we give to God's Word compared to the effort we give to earning money? Wisdom is worth more, but most of us dig harder for silver.

2:5 *then you will discern the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.*

"Then you will discern the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God." Here is the "then." The prize of all this searching is not just good advice. It is the fear of the LORD and the knowledge of God Himself. Wisdom, in the end, is personal. It is knowing God.

Notice that the fear of the LORD is both the beginning of wisdom (1:7) and the reward of seeking it. That is not a contradiction. The more we know God, the deeper our reverence for Him grows. We start with a little fear of the LORD, and seeking Him gives us more.

2:6-8 *For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth **come** knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; **He is** a shield to those who walk **in** integrity, to guard the paths of justice; and He preserves the way of His faithful ones.*

"For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding." This is why the search succeeds. We do not find wisdom by our own cleverness. God gives it. And it comes "from His mouth," that is, through what God has spoken. For us, that means the Bible.

"He stores up sound wisdom for the upright." God has wisdom laid up and waiting for those who walk with Him. "He is a shield to those who walk in integrity." Integrity means being whole, the same on the inside as on the outside. God protects such people.

"To guard the paths of justice; and He preserves the way of His faithful ones." The word for faithful ones is related to hesed, steadfast love. These are people who are loyal to God because He has been loyal to them. God watches over their road.

2:9-11 *Then you will understand righteousness and justice and uprightness, every good course. For wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you; understanding will preserve you,*

"Then you will understand righteousness and justice and uprightness, every good course." Wisdom does not only teach us about God. It teaches us how to live: what is right, what is fair and what is straight. A "good course" is a well-worn path, a track a wagon wheel can run in.

"For wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul." This is a lovely promise. At first, learning God's ways can feel like hard work. But when wisdom comes into the heart, it becomes a pleasure. What once felt like a duty becomes a delight.

"Discretion will watch over you; understanding will preserve you." Wisdom is like a guard posted at the door. When we have it inside, it protects us from making choices we would regret.

2:12-15 *to deliver you from an evil way, from a man who speaks perverse things, those who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who are glad to do evil; they exult in the perverse things of evil, whose paths* ***are*** *twisted, and* ***who are*** *devious in their tracks;*

Wisdom protects us first "from an evil way, from a man who speaks perverse things." The word perverse means twisted, turned upside down. These men twist the truth. They call good evil and evil good (Isaiah 5:20).

The father describes them clearly. They "forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness." They once knew a better way and left it. They "are glad to do evil; they exult in the perverse things of evil." They do not just slip into sin. They enjoy it. Their "paths are twisted," and they are "devious in their tracks."

Jesus said that people love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). Wisdom helps us see these men for what they are, even when they are charming or successful, and it keeps us from following them.

2:16-19 *to deliver you from a strange woman, from a foreign* ***woman who*** *has made her sayings smooth, who forsakes the close companion of her youth and has forgotten the covenant of her God; for her house sinks down to death, and her tracks to the shades; all who go in to her will not return, and they will not reach the paths of life;*

The second danger is "a strange woman." This is the first time in Proverbs we meet her, and we will meet her again in chapters 5, 6 and 7. "Strange" here does not mean odd. It means someone outside the bounds, another man's wife or a woman who lives outside God's law. She is also called "a foreign woman." She may or may not have been from another nation. The point is that she lives as an outsider to God's covenant.

Her weapon is her words: she "has made her sayings smooth." Flattery is her tool.

Verse 17 tells us she "forsakes the close companion of her youth and has forgotten the covenant of her God." The close companion is her husband. She has broken her marriage vows. And she has

forgotten that marriage is a covenant made before God (Malachi 2:14). A covenant is a solemn, binding agreement. Adultery breaks faith with a spouse and with God at the same time.

"For her house sinks down to death, and her tracks to the shades." The shades are the dead in Sheol. "All who go in to her will not return." This is strong language. The father wants his son to see past the smooth words to where the road ends. Sexual sin promises life and pleasure, but it leads to ruin. There is forgiveness for those who repent (1 Corinthians 6:9-11), but the scars can last, and many never turn back.

2:20-22 *so that you may walk in the way of good **ones** and keep the paths of righteous **ones**. For upright **ones** will dwell **in** the land, and blameless **ones** will remain in it; and wicked **ones** will be cut off from the land, and treacherous **ones** will be torn away from it.*

"So that you may walk in the way of good ones and keep the paths of righteous ones." Wisdom does not only keep us from bad company. It leads us into good company.

"For upright ones will dwell in the land, and blameless ones will remain in it." For Israel, "the land" was the land God promised to Abraham. Living in it was the sign of God's blessing (Deuteronomy 30:19-20). "And wicked ones will be cut off from the land." Israel's later history shows this came true. When the nation turned to idols and wickedness, God sent them into exile, first the northern kingdom to Assyria in 722 B.C., then Judah to Babylon in 586 B.C.

Jesus echoed this promise in the Sermon on the Mount: the gentle will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5). In the end, God's people will live in a renewed earth, and the wicked will have no part in it.

Chapter 2 Summary

The father tells his son that if he will receive his words, listen for wisdom, cry out for understanding and search for it like silver and hidden treasure, then he will find the fear of the LORD and the knowledge of God. The search succeeds because the LORD gives wisdom from His mouth, and He shields and guards those who walk in integrity. Wisdom will become pleasant to the son's soul and will guard him. It will deliver him from evil men who speak twisted things and love darkness, and from the strange woman who has left her husband, forgotten God's covenant, and leads to death. The upright will remain in the land, but the wicked will be cut off from it.

Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. What four things does the father ask his son to do in verses 1 to 4? (2:1-4)

2. What does the son find if he searches for wisdom like silver? (2:5)

3. Where does wisdom come from, according to verse 6? (2:6)

4. What does God do for those who walk in integrity? (2:7-8)

5. How are the evil men described, and what do they enjoy? (2:12-15)

6. What has the strange woman forsaken and forgotten, and where does her road lead? (2:16-19)

7. Why do you think marriage is called a covenant before God? (2:17; Malachi 2:14)

8. Compare the time you give to work or money with the time you give to searching God's Word. What would it look like to dig for wisdom like silver? (2:4)

9. Has there been a time when wisdom you learned from Scripture kept you from a bad choice? (2:11-12)

10. Verse 10 says knowledge will become pleasant to your soul. What would help God's Word become a delight to you and not only a duty? (2:10)

Chapter 3: Trust in the LORD With All Your Heart

Scripture

3:1-20 My son, do not forget my instruction, and let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Do not let steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them on your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart, and find grace and good insight in the eyes of God and mankind. Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and on your ***own*** understanding do not lean. In all your ways know Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your ***own*** eyes; fear the LORD and turn aside from evil. Let it be healing to your navel and refreshment to your bones. Honor the LORD from your wealth, and from the first of all your yield; and your storehouses will be filled ***with*** plenty, and your wine vats will burst open ***with*** new wine. The discipline of the LORD, my son, do not reject, and do not loathe His reproof; for whom the LORD loves He reproves, and like a father a son ***in whom*** he is pleased. How blessed ***is*** the man ***who*** has found wisdom, and the man ***who*** obtains understanding! For better ***is*** her profit than the profit of silver, and her yield than gold. She ***is*** more precious than jewels, and all your desires do not compare with her. Length of days ***is*** in her right ***hand***; in her left ***hand are*** riches and honor. Her ways ***are*** ways of pleasantness, and all her paths ***are*** peace. She ***is*** a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and those who hold her fast ***are*** called blessed. The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; He established the heavens by understanding. By His knowledge ***the*** depths were split open, and ***the*** clouds drip dew.

3:21-35 My son, let them not depart from your eyes; keep sound wisdom and discretion, and they will be life to your soul and grace to your neck. Then you will walk your way in security, and your foot will not stumble. If you lie down, you will not dread; and you will lie down, and your sleep will be pleasant. Do not be afraid of sudden dread, and of the devastation of wicked ***ones*** when it comes; for the LORD will be your confidence, and He will keep your foot from capture. Do not withhold good from its owners, when ***it*** is in the power of your hand to do ***it***. Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give ***it***," and ***it*** is with you. Do not devise evil against your neighbor, and he ***is*** dwelling in security with you. Do not contend with a man without cause, if he has not dealt evil to you. Do not be envious of a man of violence, and do not choose any of his ways; for an abomination of the LORD ***is*** a devious ***one***, and His intimate counsel ***is*** with upright ***ones***. The curse of the LORD ***is*** in the house of a wicked ***one***, and the dwelling of righteous ***ones*** He blesses. Surely He scoffs at the scoffers, and to humble ***ones*** He gives grace. Wise ***ones*** will inherit honor, and fools ***are*** lifting up shame.

Chapter 3 Preview

Chapter 3 holds some of the best-loved verses in the Bible. The father calls his son to remember his teaching, to keep steadfast love and faithfulness close, and above all to trust in the LORD with all his heart rather than lean on his own understanding. He calls him to honor the LORD with his wealth and not to despise the LORD's discipline, because God corrects those He loves.

Then the father praises wisdom. She is worth more than silver, gold or jewels. She is a tree of life. The LORD Himself used wisdom to found the earth and the heavens. The chapter ends with

practical commands about how to treat a neighbor, and with a contrast between the house of the wicked, which is under the LORD's curse, and the dwelling of the righteous, which He blesses.

Chapter 3 Study

3:1-2 *My son, do not forget my instruction, and let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.*

"My son, do not forget my instruction, and let your heart keep my commandments." The word instruction here is torah, the same word used for God's Law. A father's teaching, grounded in God's Word, was meant to be kept in the heart, not just in memory.

"For length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you." Is this a promise that every obedient son will live a long life? Read as the general truth it is, it says that a life of wisdom tends to be longer and more peaceful. Wise choices avoid much of the violence, disease and ruin that cut life short. But godly people sometimes die young, and the Bible knows that (Isaiah 57:1). The word peace is shalom, which means much more than the absence of war. It means wholeness and well-being.

3:3-4 *Do not let steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them on your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart, and find grace and good insight in the eyes of God and mankind.*

"Do not let steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you." Steadfast love is the Hebrew word hesed, God's loyal, covenant love. Faithfulness means being true and reliable. These two words are often used together of God Himself (Exodus 34:6). The son is to show the same qualities to others.

"Bind them on your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart." Like a necklace, these qualities should be worn where everyone can see them. Like words carved on a stone tablet, they should be written deep in the heart. God promised that in the new covenant He would write His law on His people's hearts (Jeremiah 31:33).

The result is to "find grace and good insight in the eyes of God and mankind." Luke says almost the same of the boy Jesus: He grew in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52).

3:5-6 *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and on your **own** understanding do not lean. In all your ways know Him, and He will make your paths straight.*

These two verses are among the best known in the whole Bible, and they deserve a slow reading.

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart." To trust is to lean your whole weight on someone, the way you would lean on a strong wall. The object of trust is "the LORD," God's own name. We are not told to trust in trust, or in a good feeling, or in our own faith. We are told to trust in a Person who has proved Himself faithful. And it is to be "with all your heart." In the Bible the heart is not just the feelings. It is the center of a person: the mind, the will and the desires. God does not want part of our trust while we keep a back-up plan in the other hand.

"And on your own understanding do not lean." This is the other side of trust. Our understanding is not worthless. God gave us minds, and Proverbs wants us to use them. But our understanding is limited, and it is bent by sin. We do not see the end from the beginning. God does. To lean on our own understanding is to make our view of things the final word. To trust the LORD is to let His Word have the final say, even when we cannot see how things will work out.

"In all your ways know Him." Some translations say "acknowledge Him." The Hebrew word is the simple word "know." It means more than nodding to God now and then. It means to know Him, to recognize Him, and to bring Him into every part of life: work, money, family, plans, leisure. "All your ways" leaves nothing out. Many of us bring God into the big decisions and leave Him out of the small ones. This verse does not allow that.

"And He will make your paths straight." To make straight means to make level and clear, to remove the obstacles, and to bring a path to its goal. It does not promise that the path will be easy or that we will always understand it. Joseph's path went through a pit and a prison before it reached the palace (Genesis 37-41). But God makes the path go where it should. The one who trusts Him will not be lost.

So what does this look like day to day? It means praying before we decide, not after. It means reading God's Word and doing what it says even when our own reasoning argues the other way. It means admitting when we do not know, and being willing to wait. It means believing that God's way is best even when it costs us. That is not blind faith. It is faith in a God who has never failed.

3:7-8 *Do not be wise in your **own** eyes; fear the LORD and turn aside from evil. Let it be healing to your navel and refreshment to your bones.*

"Do not be wise in your own eyes." This is the danger of verse 5 put another way. The person who is wise in his own eyes is the one who leans on his own understanding. Pride is the enemy of wisdom (26:12).

"Fear the LORD and turn aside from evil." The fear of the LORD shows itself in turning away from sin. Job was described this way (Job 1:1).

"Let it be healing to your navel and refreshment to your bones." The navel and the bones stand for the whole body, inside and out. Humble, God-fearing living is good for us, body and soul. Pride, worry and sin wear a person down. Trust and obedience bring rest.

3:9-10 *Honor the LORD from your wealth, and from the first of all your yield; and your storehouses will be filled **with** plenty, and your wine vats will burst open **with** new wine.*

"Honor the LORD from your wealth, and from the first of all your yield." Israel was commanded to bring the firstfruits of the harvest to God (Exodus 23:19; Deuteronomy 26:1-11). Giving God the first, not the leftovers, said that everything belonged to Him. The same principle holds for believers today. We honor God when our giving comes off the top, cheerfully and with thanks (2 Corinthians 9:7).

"And your storehouses will be filled with plenty, and your wine vats will burst open with new wine." Is this a promise that giving to God will make us rich? It fits God's covenant with Israel, which promised blessing on the land for obedience (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). As a proverb, it tells us the general truth that God honors those who honor Him, and that generous people are not made poor by their generosity. But it is not a formula to get money from God. Paul knew how to be hungry and how to have plenty (Philippians 4:12), and the poor widow who gave two small coins was praised by Jesus while she stayed poor (Mark 12:41-44). The blessing God gives may be in our barns, or it may be in our hearts and in eternity.

3:11-12 *The discipline of the LORD, my son, do not reject, and do not loathe His reproof; for whom the LORD loves He reproves, and like a father a son* ***in whom*** *he is pleased.*

"The discipline of the LORD, my son, do not reject, and do not loathe His reproof." Discipline here means training and correction. Sometimes God corrects us through His Word, sometimes through other people, and sometimes through hard times. We are tempted to resent it or to give up. The father says not to.

Why? "For whom the LORD loves He reproves, and like a father a son in whom he is pleased." God's correction is a sign of His love, not His rejection. A father who never corrects his son does not love him well. Hebrews 12:5-11 quotes these verses and tells believers that God disciplines us as His children, for our good, so that we may share His holiness. It does not feel good at the time, but it yields "the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11).

Not every hard thing in life is God's punishment for a particular sin. Job's suffering was not. But every hard thing can be used by God to train us, if we will receive it.

3:13-15 *How blessed* ***is*** *the man* ***who*** *has found wisdom, and the man* ***who*** *obtains understanding! For better* ***is*** *her profit than the profit of silver, and her yield than gold. She* ***is*** *more precious than jewels, and all your desires do not compare with her.*

"How blessed is the man who has found wisdom." Blessed means truly happy, well off in God's eyes. Psalm 1 begins the same way.

Why is the one who finds wisdom so well off? "For better is her profit than the profit of silver, and her yield than gold. She is more precious than jewels." The father compares wisdom to the most valuable things in the ancient world. "And all your desires do not compare with her." Think of everything you could want. Wisdom is worth more. Riches can be lost, stolen or left behind at death. Wisdom shapes who we are, and the wisdom that comes from God lasts forever.

3:16-18 *Length of days* ***is*** *in her right* ***hand****; in her left* ***hand are*** *riches and honor. Her ways* ***are*** *ways of pleasantness, and all her paths* ***are*** *peace. She* ***is*** *a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and those who hold her fast* ***are*** *called blessed.*

Wisdom is pictured as a woman holding gifts in both hands: "Length of days is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor." Again, these are the usual fruits of a wise life. Wisdom does not guarantee them in every case, but it tends to bring them, while folly tends to destroy them.

"Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." God's way is not a grim road of misery. It is the good way, the way we were made for.

"She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her." The tree of life stood in the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9). After the fall, man was barred from it (Genesis 3:22-24). Proverbs uses the picture several times (11:30; 13:12; 15:4). Wisdom gives back some of what was lost: real life as God meant it. In the end, the tree of life appears again in the new Jerusalem for all God's people (Revelation 22:2, 14).

3:19-20 *The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; He established the heavens by understanding. By His knowledge **the** depths were split open, and **the** clouds drip dew.*

"The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; He established the heavens by understanding." The same wisdom the father offers his son is the wisdom by which God made the world. That is why wisdom works. It is not a human invention. It is built into creation itself. When we live wisely, we live with the grain of the universe God made. When we live foolishly, we go against it, and it hurts.

"By His knowledge the depths were split open, and the clouds drip dew." From the deep waters below to the dew from above, everything runs by God's wise design. Chapter 8 will say much more about wisdom's part in creation.

3:21-24 *My son, let them not depart from your eyes; keep sound wisdom and discretion, and they will be life to your soul and grace to your neck. Then you will walk your way in security, and your foot will not stumble. If you lie down, you will not dread; and you will lie down, and your sleep will be pleasant.*

"My son, let them not depart from your eyes; keep sound wisdom and discretion." Keep them in view. Do not let them slip away.

"And they will be life to your soul and grace to your neck." Again, wisdom is life inside and beauty outside.

"Then you will walk your way in security, and your foot will not stumble." The wise person walks steadily because he can see where he is going. "If you lie down, you will not dread; and you will lie down, and your sleep will be pleasant." Many people lie awake with guilt, worry or fear. A clear conscience and trust in God bring a kind of rest that money cannot buy. David wrote that he could lie down and sleep in peace because the LORD made him dwell in safety (Psalm 4:8).

3:25-26 *Do not be afraid of sudden dread, and of the devastation of wicked **ones** when it comes; for the LORD will be your confidence, and He will keep your foot from capture.*

"Do not be afraid of sudden dread, and of the devastation of wicked ones when it comes." Disaster can strike suddenly, and wicked people can bring ruin. The father does not say these things will never come. He says not to be afraid of them.

Why? "For the LORD will be your confidence, and He will keep your foot from capture." Our confidence is not in our own cleverness or in our circumstances. It is in the LORD. The picture is of a trap set for an animal's foot. God keeps His people from being snared.

3:27-28 *Do not withhold good from its owners, when **it** is in the power of your hand to do **it**. Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give **it**," and **it** is with you.*

Now the father turns to how we treat others. "Do not withhold good from its owners, when it is in the power of your hand to do it." The "owners" of good are those to whom it is owed: a worker who has earned his wages, a neighbor we promised to help, someone in need we are able to help. If we can do good, we should.

"Do not say to your neighbor, Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it, and it is with you." Putting off a neighbor when we have what he needs right now is a quiet kind of selfishness. James says faith that sees a brother in need and says only "go in peace" is dead (James 2:15-16). Delayed kindness is often no kindness at all.

3:29-30 *Do not devise evil against your neighbor, and he **is** dwelling in security with you. Do not contend with a man without cause, if he has not dealt evil to you.*

"Do not devise evil against your neighbor, and he is dwelling in security with you." It is especially wicked to plot against someone who trusts you and lives beside you without suspicion.

"Do not contend with a man without cause, if he has not dealt evil to you." Some people love a fight. They pick quarrels for no reason. Wisdom does not. Paul says that, as far as it depends on us, we should be at peace with all people (Romans 12:18).

3:31-32 *Do not be envious of a man of violence, and do not choose any of his ways; for an abomination of the LORD **is** a devious **one**, and His intimate counsel **is** with upright **ones**.*

"Do not be envious of a man of violence, and do not choose any of his ways." Violent men sometimes seem to get ahead. They take what they want and no one stops them. It is easy to envy them. Psalm 37 and Psalm 73 deal with this same temptation.

Why not envy them? "For an abomination of the LORD is a devious one." An abomination is something God finds disgusting and hates. "And His intimate counsel is with upright ones." God shares His friendship and His secrets with those who walk straight (Psalm 25:14). The violent man may have power for a while, but the upright have God's friendship. Which would you rather have?

3:33-35 *The curse of the LORD **is** in the house of a wicked **one**, and the dwelling of righteous **ones** He blesses. Surely He scoffs at the scoffers, and to humble **ones** He gives grace. Wise **ones** will inherit honor, and fools **are** lifting up shame.*

"The curse of the LORD is in the house of a wicked one, and the dwelling of righteous ones He blesses." The difference between the two houses is not their size. A wicked man may live in a

mansion and a righteous man in a hut. The difference is whether God's curse or God's blessing rests on it.

"Surely He scoffs at the scoffers, and to humble ones He gives grace." Both James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5 quote this verse in the Greek form: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." God resists the person who sets himself up against Him, but He pours out grace on the one who bows low.

"Wise ones will inherit honor, and fools are lifting up shame." In the end, the wise receive honor as their inheritance. Fools hold up only their shame for everyone to see. The chapter closes where Proverbs often closes: by showing us the end of two roads.

Chapter 3 Summary

The father calls his son to keep his teaching in his heart, and to hold on to steadfast love and faithfulness. He tells him to trust in the LORD with all his heart, not to lean on his own understanding, to know God in all his ways, and to trust God to make his paths straight. He warns against being wise in his own eyes, and calls him to honor the LORD with the first of his wealth and to accept the LORD's discipline as a sign of a Father's love. Wisdom is worth more than silver, gold and jewels; she is a tree of life, and by her the LORD founded the earth. The wise walk safely and sleep in peace, trusting the LORD. The chapter ends with practical commands to do good to neighbors, to avoid needless quarrels and not to envy violent men, because the LORD curses the house of the wicked, blesses the righteous and gives grace to the humble.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. What do steadfast love and faithfulness mean, and where should they be bound and written? (3:3)

2. What are we told to trust, and what are we told not to lean on? (3:5)

3. What does it mean to "know Him" in all your ways, and what does God promise to do? (3:6)

4. What does the father tell his son to give the LORD, and why the first and not the leftovers? (3:9-10)

5. Why does the LORD reprove His children, and how does Hebrews 12 use these verses? (3:11-12; Hebrews 12:5-11)

6. What is wisdom compared to, and why is she called a tree of life? (3:14-18)

7. How did the LORD use wisdom in creation, and what does that tell us about living wisely? (3:19-20)

8. What do verses 27 and 28 teach about helping a neighbor right away? (3:27-28)

9. Is there a decision in your life right now where you are leaning on your own understanding? What would it look like to trust the LORD with it? (3:5-6)

10. How do you usually respond when God corrects you? What could help you see His discipline as love? (3:11-12)

Chapter 4: Guard Your Heart

Scripture

4:1-9 Hear, sons, the discipline of a father, and pay attention to know understanding; for good teaching I have given to you; do not forsake my instruction. For I was a son to my father, tender and an only ***one*** before my mother. And he taught me, and he said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments and live. Acquire wisdom; acquire understanding; do not forget, and do not turn from the sayings of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. The beginning of wisdom ***is***: acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring acquire understanding. Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you when you embrace her. She will put on your head a wreath of grace; a crown of beauty she will bestow on you."

4:10-27 Hear, my son, and receive my sayings, and the years of life will be many for you. In the way of wisdom I have taught you; I have led you in tracks of uprightness. When you walk, your step will not be hampered; and if you run, you will not stumble. Take hold of discipline; do not let go; keep her, for she ***is*** your life. Do not enter the path of wicked ***ones***, and do not walk straight on in the way of evil ***ones***. Avoid it; do not pass over on it; turn away from it and pass on. For they do not sleep unless they have done evil, and their sleep is taken away unless they make ***someone*** stumble. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and the wine of violence they drink. And the path of righteous ***ones is*** like the light of brightness, going on and shining until the day is established. The way of wicked ***ones is*** like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble. My son, pay attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they ***are*** life to those who find them, and healing to all his flesh. More than all guarding, guard your heart, for from it ***are*** the outflows of life. Remove from yourself crookedness of mouth, and put deviousness of lips far from yourself. Let your eyes look straight ahead, and let your eyelids look straight before you. Make level the track of your foot, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn right or left; remove your foot from evil.

Chapter 4 Preview

In chapter 4 the father speaks to his sons, and he tells them where his own teaching came from. When he was a boy, his father taught him to get wisdom above everything else. Now he passes that teaching on. Wisdom is worth whatever it costs, and she will honor and protect those who love her.

The father then sets two paths before his son. The path of the wicked is dark, and those who walk it stumble without knowing why. The path of the righteous is like the dawn, growing brighter until full day. The chapter ends with one of the most important commands in the book: guard your heart above all else, because everything in life flows from it. Then the father speaks of the mouth, the eyes and the feet, calling his son to keep each one straight.

Chapter 4 Study

4:1-2 *Hear, sons, the discipline of a father, and pay attention to know understanding; for good teaching I have given to you; do not forsake my instruction.*

"Hear, sons, the discipline of a father." This time the father speaks to more than one son, perhaps his own children, perhaps the young men he was training. "And pay attention to know understanding." Listening is the first step in learning.

"For good teaching I have given to you; do not forsake my instruction." The father is confident that what he teaches is good. He is not passing on opinions. He is passing on what he learned from God's Word and from life. Every parent who teaches children the Scriptures can say the same.

4:3-4 *For I was a son to my father, tender and an only **one** before my mother. And he taught me, and he said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments and live.*

"For I was a son to my father, tender and an only one before my mother." The father was once a boy himself. If this is Solomon speaking, his father was David, and his mother was Bathsheba. Bathsheba had other sons too (1 Chronicles 3:5), so "only one" likely means dearly loved, the way a mother treasures a child as if he were the only one.

"And he taught me, and he said to me, Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments and live." What a picture: David, the man after God's own heart, teaching his young son. We see some of that teaching in 1 Kings 2:1-4 and 1 Chronicles 28:9, where David charged Solomon to know the God of his father and serve Him with a whole heart. Faith is passed from one generation to the next by parents who teach their children. That is God's plan (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Psalm 78:4-7).

4:5-7 *Acquire wisdom; acquire understanding; do not forget, and do not turn from the sayings of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. The beginning of wisdom **is**: acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring acquire understanding.*

The grandfather's words go on. "Acquire wisdom; acquire understanding." The word acquire means to buy, to get. Wisdom is worth paying for. "Do not forget, and do not turn from the sayings of my mouth."

"Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you." Wisdom is pictured as a woman again, a faithful companion who protects those who stay with her.

Verse 7 is short and strong: "The beginning of wisdom is: acquire wisdom." In other words, the first step to wisdom is to decide you want it, and to go after it. "And with all your acquiring acquire understanding." Whatever else you get in life, get understanding. Even if it costs everything you have, it is worth it. Jesus told of a merchant who sold all he had to buy one pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45-46). Some things are worth everything.

4:8-9 *Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you when you embrace her. She will put on your head a wreath of grace; a crown of beauty she will bestow on you."*

"Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you when you embrace her." The picture is of a man who loves and honors his bride. Wisdom returns honor to those who honor her.

"She will put on your head a wreath of grace; a crown of beauty she will bestow on you." The son who embraces wisdom will be crowned with grace and beauty. This is the end of the grandfather's speech. The father has handed down what his own father gave him.

4:10-12 *Hear, my son, and receive my sayings, and the years of life will be many for you. In the way of wisdom I have taught you; I have led you in tracks of uprightness. When you walk, your step will not be hampered; and if you run, you will not stumble.*

Now the father speaks in his own words again. "Hear, my son, and receive my sayings, and the years of life will be many for you." Like 3:2, this is a general truth about the fruit of wisdom, not a promise that no wise person will ever die young.

"In the way of wisdom I have taught you; I have led you in tracks of uprightness." The father has not only told his son what to do. He has walked ahead of him and shown him the way. Our example teaches as much as our words.

"When you walk, your step will not be hampered; and if you run, you will not stumble." Wisdom frees us. The person who lives wisely does not get tangled up in the mess that folly creates. He can move forward with confidence.

4:13 *Take hold of discipline; do not let go; keep her, for she **is** your life.*

"Take hold of discipline; do not let go; keep her, for she is your life." Hold on tight. The picture is of someone grabbing a rope and not letting go. Discipline here means instruction and correction. It is not something to tolerate. It is life itself.

4:14-17 *Do not enter the path of wicked **ones**, and do not walk straight on in the way of evil **ones**. Avoid it; do not pass over on it; turn away from it and pass on. For they do not sleep unless they have done evil, and their sleep is taken away unless they make **someone** stumble. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and the wine of violence they drink.*

"Do not enter the path of wicked ones, and do not walk straight on in the way of evil ones." Then the father piles up commands: "Avoid it; do not pass over on it; turn away from it and pass on." The best way to deal with the path of evil is to stay off it altogether. Do not even step onto it. Do not stand at the edge and look. Turn around and walk the other way.

Why such strong words? Because of what the wicked are like. "They do not sleep unless they have done evil." Sin has become their habit and their hunger. They cannot rest until they have hurt someone. "For they eat the bread of wickedness, and the wine of violence they drink." Evil is their daily food. When sin becomes what we feed on, it takes over.

4:18-19 *And the path of righteous **ones is** like the light of brightness, going on and shining until the day is established. The way of wicked **ones is** like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble.*

Here is one of the most beautiful pictures in the book. "And the path of righteous ones is like the light of brightness, going on and shining until the day is established." Think of the dawn. First the sky grows a little gray. Then there is light at the edge of the world. Then the sun rises, and the light grows until it is full day. That is the life of the righteous. It is not perfect at the start, but it grows brighter and clearer as they walk with God, until the full day when we see Him face to face (1 John 3:2).

"The way of wicked ones is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble." The wicked keep falling and do not even know why. They blame bad luck, other people or God, but the real reason is that they are walking in the dark. Jesus said that whoever follows Him will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life (John 8:12).

4:20-22 *My son, pay attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they **are** life to those who find them, and healing to all his flesh.*

"My son, pay attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart." The ear, the eyes and the heart all take in the father's words. Hearing is not enough. We must keep looking at God's Word and keep it inside.

"For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all his flesh." God's words are not a burden. They are medicine.

4:23 *More than all guarding, guard your heart, for from it **are** the outflows of life.*

"More than all guarding, guard your heart, for from it are the outflows of life."

This is one of the key verses of Proverbs. In the Bible, the heart is the inner control center of a person: what we think, what we love, what we choose. The father says that of all the things you guard in life, your money, your house, your reputation, guard your heart most of all.

Why? "For from it are the outflows of life." Like a spring that feeds a river, the heart is where everything else comes from. Jesus said the same thing: out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries and all the rest (Matthew 15:18-19). And He said a good man brings good things out of the good treasure of his heart (Luke 6:45). If the spring is poisoned, the river will be too.

How do we guard the heart? By watching what we let in: what we watch, what we read, what we listen to, the company we keep and the thoughts we dwell on. By filling it with God's Word (Psalm 119:11). By confessing sin quickly, before it takes root (1 John 1:9). And by asking God to do what we cannot do ourselves, to create a clean heart in us (Psalm 51:10). Only God can make a heart new, and He does it through faith in Christ (Ezekiel 36:26; 2 Corinthians 5:17). After that, guarding it is our daily work.

4:24 *Remove from yourself crookedness of mouth, and put deviousness of lips far from yourself.*

From the heart the father moves outward. "Remove from yourself crookedness of mouth, and put deviousness of lips far from yourself." Lying, twisting words, flattery and gossip all start in the heart and come out of the mouth. Put them far away. James says the tongue is small but can set a whole forest on fire (James 3:5-6). Proverbs will say a great deal about words.

4:25-27 *Let your eyes look straight ahead, and let your eyelids look straight before you. Make level the track of your foot, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn right or left; remove your foot from evil.*

"Let your eyes look straight ahead, and let your eyelids look straight before you." Keep your eyes on the road. Many of us fall because we look to the side, at what someone else has or at a temptation we should not be looking at. Hebrews 12:2 tells us to fix our eyes on Jesus.

"Make level the track of your foot, and let all your ways be established." Think before you take a step. Plan your path so that it is smooth and sure. "Do not turn right or left; remove your foot from evil." This was the same charge given to Joshua (Joshua 1:7). Stay on the road God has set. Do not drift off to either side.

Notice the order of this last section: the heart, the mouth, the eyes and the feet. The whole person is to be kept for God. It starts on the inside and works its way out.

Chapter 4 Summary

The father calls his sons to listen and tells them how his own father taught him to get wisdom above everything else, even at the cost of all he had. Wisdom will guard, honor and crown those who love her. The father warns his son to stay completely off the path of the wicked, who cannot sleep until they do evil. The path of the righteous is like the dawn, growing brighter until full day, while the way of the wicked is deep darkness. The father's words are life and healing. Above all else, the son must guard his heart, because everything in life flows from it. He must put away crooked speech, keep his eyes looking straight ahead, plan the path of his feet and turn neither right nor left from the way of good.

Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. Who taught the father when he was young, and what did he tell him to get? (4:3-5)

2. What does verse 7 say is the beginning of wisdom? (4:7)

3. What does wisdom do for those who love and embrace her? (4:6-9)

4. What commands does the father give about the path of the wicked? (4:14-15)

5. How is the path of the righteous different from the way of the wicked? (4:18-19)

6. Why are we told to guard the heart above all else? What did Jesus say comes from the heart? (4:23; Matthew 15:18-19)

7. Which parts of the body does the father name in verses 23 to 27, and what does he say about each one? (4:23-27)

8. Who passed faith on to you, or who are you passing it on to? What would you want the next generation to remember? (4:3-4)

9. What are you letting into your heart through your eyes and ears that you may need to guard against? (4:23)

10. Is there a "right or left" turn you are tempted to take right now? What would it look like to keep your eyes straight ahead? (4:25-27)

Chapter 5: Drink From Your Own Well

Scripture

5:1-23 My son, pay attention to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding, to keep discretion, and your lips will guard knowledge. For the lips of a strange ***woman*** drip honey, and her palate ***is*** smoother than oil; and her end ***is*** bitter like wormwood, sharp like a double-edged sword. Her feet go down ***to*** death; her steps take hold of Sheol. Lest she make level the path of life, her tracks wander; she does not know. And now, sons, listen to me, and do not turn aside from the sayings of my mouth. Keep your way far from her, and do not draw near to the entrance of her house, lest you give your splendor to others, and your years to a cruel ***one***; lest strangers be satisfied ***with*** your strength, and your toils ***be*** in the house of a foreigner; and you groan at your end, when your flesh and your body waste away, and you say, "How I hated discipline, and my heart spurned reproof! And I did not listen to the voice of my teachers, and to my instructors I did not incline my ear. I was almost in all evil in the midst of ***the*** assembly and congregation." Drink water from your ***own*** cistern, and flowing ***water*** from the midst of your ***own*** well. Should your springs be scattered outside, streams of water in the squares? Let them be for you alone, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a doe of loves and a mountain goat of grace; let her breasts satisfy you at all times; in her love may you be lost continually. And why should you be lost, my son, with a strange ***woman***, and embrace the bosom of a foreign ***woman***? For before the eyes of the LORD ***are*** the ways of a man, and all his tracks He makes level. His iniquities will capture him, the wicked ***one***, and by the cords of his sin he will be held. He will die without discipline, and in the greatness of his folly he will be lost.

Chapter 5 Preview

Chapter 5 is the first of three chapters that warn plainly against adultery. The father speaks to his son as a man speaks to a young man about to face real temptation. The strange woman's words are as sweet as honey, but where she leads is as bitter as wormwood, and her road goes down to death. The father tells his son to stay far away from her door, and he paints a picture of the man who did not listen: his strength wasted, his wealth gone to strangers, his body worn out, and his heart full of regret.

Then the father turns to the good gift God has given. He tells his son to drink water from his own well, to rejoice in the wife of his youth and to find his joy in her love. Marriage is not the enemy of pleasure. It is the place God made for it. The chapter ends by reminding us that the LORD sees every path a man takes, and that sin ties up the one who will not be taught.

Chapter 5 Study

5:1-2 *My son, pay attention to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding, to keep discretion, and your lips will guard knowledge.*

"My son, pay attention to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding." The father begins again with a call to listen. What follows is too important to miss.

"To keep discretion, and your lips will guard knowledge." Discretion is the good sense to think before acting. The father wants his son's own words to be guarded by wisdom, so that when temptation speaks, his answer is ready.

5:3-4 *For the lips of a strange **woman** drip honey, and her palate **is** smoother than oil; and her end **is** bitter like wormwood, sharp like a double-edged sword.*

"For the lips of a strange woman drip honey, and her palate is smoother than oil." As in 2:16, the strange woman is an adulteress, a woman outside the bounds of marriage. Her mouth is sweet and smooth. She flatters. She makes sin sound attractive and harmless. That is how temptation always comes. It never shows its true face at the start.

"And her end is bitter like wormwood, sharp like a double-edged sword." Wormwood was a plant with a very bitter taste. It became a word for grief and bitterness (Lamentations 3:15, 19). What begins sweet ends bitter. What feels smooth at first cuts like a sword in the end. Adultery wounds a marriage, children, families, churches and the one who commits it.

5:5-6 *Her feet go down **to** death; her steps take hold of Sheol. Lest she make level the path of life, her tracks wander; she does not know.*

"Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold of Sheol." The road she walks leads down to the grave. In the ancient world adultery could bring a death sentence under the Law (Leviticus 20:10), or the rage of a husband (6:34). Even apart from that, it brings the death of trust, of a home and of a good name.

"Lest she make level the path of life, her tracks wander; she does not know." She does not think about where she is going. Her steps wander here and there, and she does not care. A person caught in sexual sin often stops thinking about the end of the road. That is why the father makes his son think about it now.

5:7-8 *And now, sons, listen to me, and do not turn aside from the sayings of my mouth. Keep your way far from her, and do not draw near to the entrance of her house,*

"And now, sons, listen to me." The father pleads again. Then he gives the most practical advice in the chapter: "Keep your way far from her, and do not draw near to the entrance of her house."

Notice what he does not say. He does not tell him to go near her and be strong. He tells him to stay far away. Do not even walk down her street. Paul gives the same command: "Flee sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18). Joseph did just that when Potiphar's wife grabbed him. He ran (Genesis 39:12). For us today, this may mean ending a friendship that is going the wrong way, not being alone with someone, staying off certain websites or putting a filter on a phone. The wise man does not test how close he can get to the fire. He stays away from it.

5:9-11 *lest you give your splendor to others, and your years to a cruel **one**; lest strangers be satisfied **with** your strength, and your toils **be** in the house of a foreigner; and you groan at your end, when your flesh and your body waste away,*

Now the father shows the cost. "Lest you give your splendor to others, and your years to a cruel one." The best years of a man's life, his strength and his honor, can be thrown away on sin and on people who do not care about him.

"Lest strangers be satisfied with your strength, and your toils be in the house of a foreigner." Adultery can bring financial ruin. The money a man worked for can end up in someone else's house, through payments, lawsuits, a lost job, divorce or the cost of a double life.

"And you groan at your end, when your flesh and your body waste away." This may refer to disease, to the toll of a life of sin on the body, or simply to growing old full of regret. The man who did not listen ends up groaning.

5:12-14 *and you say, "How I hated discipline, and my heart spurned reproof! And I did not listen to the voice of my teachers, and to my instructors I did not incline my ear. I was almost in all evil in the midst of **the** assembly and congregation."*

Here we hear the man himself, looking back. "How I hated discipline, and my heart spurned reproof!" He knew better. He had been taught. "And I did not listen to the voice of my teachers, and to my instructors I did not incline my ear."

"I was almost in all evil in the midst of the assembly and congregation." He came close to complete ruin, and it was public. Everyone knew. The assembly was the gathered community of Israel, where cases were heard and shame was made known.

These are some of the saddest words in Proverbs. The pain is not only in what he lost, but in knowing he had been warned. The father lets his son hear this now so that he will never have to say it himself.

5:15-17 *Drink water from your **own** cistern, and flowing **water** from the midst of your **own** well. Should your springs be scattered outside, streams of water in the squares? Let them be for you alone, and not for strangers with you.*

Now the father turns from warning to the good gift. "Drink water from your own cistern, and flowing water from the midst of your own well." In a dry land, a cistern or well was a precious thing. Water meant life. Here it is a picture of a man's wife and the joy of married love. God made a man and his wife to satisfy each other's desire for love and closeness. Drink from your own well.

"Should your springs be scattered outside, streams of water in the squares?" Should a man's love, meant for his wife, be poured out on the streets for anyone? Some take the springs as a picture of children born outside of marriage. Either way, the point is that married love is precious and should not be wasted.

"Let them be for you alone, and not for strangers with you." Marriage is exclusive. It is one man and one woman, joined by God, for life (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6). What belongs in marriage is to be shared with no one else.

5:18-19 *Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a doe of loves and a mountain goat of grace; let her breasts satisfy you at all times; in her love may you be lost continually.*

"Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth." The Bible is not shy about this. God blesses married love. A man is told to rejoice in his wife, and not only in the early years. "The wife of your youth" is the wife he married when he was young, and he is to keep rejoicing in her as they grow old together.

Verse 19 uses the tender language of love poetry. She is "a doe of loves and a mountain goat of grace," pictures of beauty and grace in that world. The father tells his son to let his wife's love satisfy him at all times, and to be captivated by her love continually. This is the opposite of the sad picture in verses 9 to 14. Sin promises pleasure and gives bitterness. Marriage, honored and cherished, gives a joy that lasts. The Song of Songs celebrates the same gift.

What does this mean for us? Husbands and wives should not let their love grow cold. Faithfulness is not only saying no to others. It is saying yes, again and again, to your own spouse. For those who are single, this is a reminder that God's commands about sex are not because He is against pleasure. He made it, and He made marriage as its home.

5:20 *And why should you be lost, my son, with a strange **woman**, and embrace the bosom of a foreign **woman**?*

"And why should you be lost, my son, with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a foreign woman?" The same word for being "lost" or captivated is used in verse 19 for being lost in a wife's love. The father asks a simple question: why would you be captivated by someone who is not yours, when God has given you a wife to be captivated by? Why trade a spring of living water for a poisoned cup?

5:21 *For before the eyes of the LORD **are** the ways of a man, and all his tracks He makes level.*

"For before the eyes of the LORD are the ways of a man, and all his tracks He makes level." The adulterer thinks no one sees. He sneaks out after dark. But God sees everything (Hebrews 4:13). He weighs every path a man takes. Nothing is hidden from Him. This is one of the strongest reasons for faithfulness: we live before the eyes of God.

David learned this the hard way. He thought he had covered up his sin with Bathsheba, but the LORD saw, and He sent Nathan the prophet to tell him (2 Samuel 12:1-12).

5:22-23 *His iniquities will capture him, the wicked **one**, and by the cords of his sin he will be held. He will die without discipline, and in the greatness of his folly he will be lost.*

"His iniquities will capture him, the wicked one, and by the cords of his sin he will be held." Sin is a trap that catches the one who sets it. The man who thinks he is free to do as he likes ends up tied up by his own choices, bound by habits, lies and consequences he cannot escape on his own. Jesus said everyone who practices sin is a slave of sin (John 8:34).

"He will die without discipline, and in the greatness of his folly he will be lost." The same word "lost" comes back a third time. A man can be lost in a wife's love, lost in an adulteress's arms, or, at the end, lost in his own folly. The difference is whether he listened to discipline.

Is there hope for the one who has already fallen? Yes. David fell, and he confessed his sin and was forgiven (Psalm 51; 2 Samuel 12:13). Jesus forgave the woman caught in adultery and told her to go and sin no more (John 8:11). Paul wrote to believers in Corinth who had been adulterers and said, "And such were some of you; but you were washed" (1 Corinthians 6:11). The consequences of sin may remain, but the guilt can be washed away by the blood of Christ. The father's warning is meant to keep us from falling, and God's grace is there to lift up those who have.

Chapter 5 Summary

The father warns his son about the strange woman, whose lips drip honey but whose end is as bitter as wormwood and as sharp as a sword. Her road leads down to death. He tells his son to keep far from her door, so that he does not waste his strength, his years and his wealth on strangers and end his life groaning, regretting that he hated discipline and would not listen. Instead, the son is to drink from his own well and rejoice in the wife of his youth, letting her love satisfy him always. The father asks why anyone would be captivated by a stranger, reminds his son that the LORD sees every path a man takes, and warns that the wicked are caught in the cords of their own sin and die for lack of discipline.

Chapter 5 Study Questions

1. How are the lips of the strange woman described, and what is her end like? (5:3-4)

2. Where do her feet lead? (5:5)

3. What practical advice does the father give in verse 8? (5:8)

4. What does the man who did not listen lose, and what does he say at the end? (5:9-14)

5. What does the picture of drinking from your own well mean? (5:15-17)

6. What does the father tell his son to do with the wife of his youth? (5:18-19)

7. Why is it important that the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD? (5:21)

8. How does sin "capture" a person, according to verse 22? Have you seen this happen? (5:22)

9. What practical steps can you take to "keep your way far" from temptation in your own life? (5:8)

10. Verse 18 tells husbands to rejoice in their wives. If you are married, what could you do this week to cherish your spouse? If you are single, how does this chapter shape how you think about marriage? (5:18-19)

Chapter 6: Things the LORD Hates

Scripture

6:1-19 My son, if you have become surety for your neighbor, ***if*** you have struck your palms for the stranger, you have been snared by the sayings of your mouth; you have been caught by the sayings of your mouth. Do this then, my son, and deliver yourself, for you have come into the palm of your neighbor: go, humble yourself, and press your neighbor hard. Do not give sleep to your eyes, and slumber to your eyelids; deliver yourself like a gazelle from ***the*** hand, and like a bird from the hand of a fowler. Go to the ant, sluggard; consider its ways, and be wise, which has no commander, officer, and ruler; it prepares its bread in the summer; it gathers its food at the harvest. Until when, sluggard, will you lie down? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to lie down, and your poverty will come like a wanderer, and your need like a man with a shield. A man of worthlessness, a man of wickedness, ***is*** one walking ***with*** crookedness of mouth, winking with his eyes, scraping with his feet, pointing with his fingers; perversities ***are*** in his heart; ***he is*** devising evil at every time; he sends out contentions. Therefore his calamity will come suddenly; in an instant he will be broken, and ***there is*** no healing. These six ***things*** the LORD hates, and seven ***are*** an abomination of His soul: haughty eyes, a tongue of falsehood, and hands shedding innocent blood, a heart devising plans of wickedness, feet hurrying to run to evil, a witness of falsehood ***who*** breathes out lies, and one sending out contentions between brothers.

6:20-35 Keep, my son, the commandment of your father, and do not forsake the instruction of your mother; bind them on your heart continually; tie them on your neck. When you walk about, it will lead you; when you lie down, it will watch over you; and ***when*** you awake, it will talk with you. For a lamp ***is*** the commandment, and the instruction ***is*** a light, and the reproofs of discipline ***are*** a way of life, to keep you from a woman of evil, from the smoothness of the tongue of a foreign ***woman***. Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her take you with her eyelids; for the price of a woman ***who is*** a prostitute ***is*** up to a loaf of bread, and the wife of a man hunts a precious life. Can a man scoop up fire in his bosom, and his garments not be burned? Or can a man walk on the burning coals, and his feet not be scorched? So ***is*** he who goes in to the wife of his neighbor; everyone who touches her will not go unpunished. They do not despise the thief if he steals to fill his appetite when he is hungry; and ***if*** he is found, he will repay sevenfold; all the wealth of his house he will give. He who commits adultery ***with*** a woman lacks sense; he who destroys his ***own*** soul, he does it. A wound and shame he will find, and his reproach will not be wiped away. For jealousy ***is*** the rage of a man, and he will not spare in ***the*** day of vengeance. He will not accept any ransom, and he will not be willing though you multiply ***the*** bribe.

Chapter 6 Preview

Chapter 6 opens with three short warnings. The first is about putting up security for someone else's debt: if you have done it, go and get free as fast as you can. The second sends the lazy man to watch the ant, which works hard without anyone telling it to. The third describes a worthless man who stirs up trouble with his mouth, his eyes and his hands, and whose ruin will come suddenly. Then comes a list of six things the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to Him.

The second half of the chapter goes back to the warning against adultery. The father's commands are a lamp and a light that will guard his son from the evil woman. He asks whether a man can carry fire in his lap and not be burned. Adultery is worse than theft. A thief can pay back what he stole, but the adulterer destroys himself, and the jealous husband will take no payment.

Chapter 6 Study

6:1-2 *My son, if you have become surety for your neighbor, **if** you have struck your palms for the stranger, you have been snared by the sayings of your mouth; you have been caught by the sayings of your mouth.*

"My son, if you have become surety for your neighbor." To become surety means to promise to pay someone else's debt if he does not. Today we would call it co-signing a loan. "If you have struck your palms for the stranger." Striking hands was how a deal was sealed, like a handshake.

"You have been snared by the sayings of your mouth." The son has made a promise he may not be able to keep. He has tied his own future to someone else's choices.

Is it always wrong to help someone with money? No. The Law commanded Israel to lend to the poor (Deuteronomy 15:7-8), and Jesus told us to give to those who ask (Matthew 5:42). The warning here is about promising more than you can pay, and about putting your family at risk for a debt you do not control, especially for a stranger. Proverbs warns about this several times (11:15; 17:18; 22:26-27).

6:3-5 *Do this then, my son, and deliver yourself, for you have come into the palm of your neighbor: go, humble yourself, and press your neighbor hard. Do not give sleep to your eyes, and slumber to your eyelids; deliver yourself like a gazelle from **the** hand, and like a bird from the hand of a fowler.*

"Do this then, my son, and deliver yourself." If you have made such a promise, do not wait. "Go, humble yourself, and press your neighbor hard." Swallow your pride. Go to the person and plead with him to release you, or to pay what he owes.

"Do not give sleep to your eyes." This is urgent. Do not put it off another night. "Deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hand, and like a bird from the hand of a fowler." A gazelle caught by a hunter, or a bird in a trap, fights with everything it has to get free. Act that way.

The wider lesson is that unwise promises should be dealt with quickly. It is better to admit a mistake and fix it than to let it grow.

6:6-8 *Go to the ant, sluggard; consider its ways, and be wise, which has no commander, officer, and ruler; it prepares its bread in the summer; it gathers its food at the harvest.*

"Go to the ant, sluggard; consider its ways, and be wise." A sluggard is a lazy man, one who will not work. Proverbs mocks him often, and sometimes with humor. Here he is sent to school, and his teacher is an ant.

What can an ant teach? It "has no commander, officer, and ruler." No one stands over it with a whip. And yet "it prepares its bread in the summer; it gathers its food at the harvest." The ant works hard, works ahead and works without being told. It knows winter is coming, so it gets ready now.

God made us to work. Adam was put in the garden to work it and keep it before sin ever came (Genesis 2:15). Paul told the Thessalonians that anyone who will not work should not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). This is not about those who cannot work because of sickness or age. It is about those who will not.

6:9-11 *Until when, sluggard, will you lie down? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to lie down, and your poverty will come like a wanderer, and your need like a man with a shield.*

"Until when, sluggard, will you lie down? When will you rise from your sleep?" The sluggard is still in bed. Then the father imitates his excuse: "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to lie down." He never plans to be lazy forever. He just wants a little more rest, again and again.

"And your poverty will come like a wanderer, and your need like a man with a shield." Poverty does not knock politely. It sneaks up like a drifter, and then it arrives like an armed robber. Laziness ruins a person a little at a time, and then all at once. The same words come back in 24:33-34.

6:12-15 *A man of worthlessness, a man of wickedness, **is** one walking **with** crookedness of mouth, winking with his eyes, scraping with his feet, pointing with his fingers; perversities **are** in his heart; **he is** devising evil at every time; he sends out contentions. Therefore his calamity will come suddenly; in an instant he will be broken, and **there is** no healing.*

Now we meet a different kind of man. "A man of worthlessness, a man of wickedness." The Hebrew words are a man of belial, a worthless, good-for-nothing person. He walks "with crookedness of mouth," always twisting the truth.

He has a whole set of signals: "winking with his eyes, scraping with his feet, pointing with his fingers." He is sending secret messages to his partners, mocking someone behind his back or setting someone up. "Perversities are in his heart." It all starts on the inside. He is always "devising evil," and "he sends out contentions." He loves to stir up fights.

"Therefore his calamity will come suddenly; in an instant he will be broken, and there is no healing." The troublemaker who plots against others will one day fall, and fast. God sees what he is doing.

6:16-19 *These six **things** the LORD hates, and seven **are** an abomination of His soul: haughty eyes, a tongue of falsehood, and hands shedding innocent blood, a heart devising plans of wickedness, feet hurrying to run to evil, a witness of falsehood **who** breathes out lies, and one sending out contentions between brothers.*

"These six things the LORD hates, and seven are an abomination of His soul." This is a way of making a list in Hebrew poetry: six, and then seven. The seventh is the one to watch most closely. An abomination is something God finds disgusting.

Here is the list:

- "Haughty eyes": pride, looking down on others. It comes first. Pride is at the root of many other sins.
- "A tongue of falsehood": lying.
- "Hands shedding innocent blood": murder and violence against those who have done nothing wrong.
- "A heart devising plans of wickedness": plotting evil.
- "Feet hurrying to run to evil": eagerness to sin.
- "A witness of falsehood who breathes out lies": lying in court, in a way that harms someone else.
- And seventh, "one sending out contentions between brothers": stirring up division among family or among God's people.

Notice how the list goes through the body: eyes, tongue, hands, heart, feet, and then the whole person. The worthless man of verses 12 to 15 does all of these.

Why does the seventh sin get the place of emphasis? Because God loves unity among His people. Psalm 133:1 says how good it is when brothers dwell together in unity, and Jesus prayed that His followers would be one (John 17:21). The person who breaks up families, friendships or churches with gossip and division does something the LORD hates.

We sometimes rank sins in our minds, and we tend to see lying or pride as small things. God puts them on the same list as murder. That should make us stop and look at our own hearts.

6:20-23 *Keep, my son, the commandment of your father, and do not forsake the instruction of your mother; bind them on your heart continually; tie them on your neck. When you walk about, it will lead you; when you lie down, it will watch over you; and **when** you awake, it will talk with you. For a lamp **is** the commandment, and the instruction **is** a light, and the reproofs of discipline **are** a way of life,*

The father goes back to his main theme. "Keep, my son, the commandment of your father, and do not forsake the instruction of your mother." He repeats the words of 1:8.

"Bind them on your heart continually; tie them on your neck." Then he says what this teaching will do. "When you walk about, it will lead you; when you lie down, it will watch over you; and when you awake, it will talk with you." These words echo Deuteronomy 6:7, where Israel was told

to talk of God's words when they sat at home, walked by the way, lay down and rose up. God's Word is meant to go with us all day, every day.

"For a lamp is the commandment, and the instruction is a light." Psalm 119:105 says the same: God's Word is a lamp to the feet and a light to the path. In the dark, a lamp shows you where to step. "And the reproofs of discipline are a way of life." Even correction, which we do not enjoy, is the road to life.

6:24-26 *to keep you from a woman of evil, from the smoothness of the tongue of a foreign **woman**. Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her take you with her eyelids; for the price of a woman **who is** a prostitute **is** up to a loaf of bread, and the wife of a man hunts a precious life.*

The father's teaching guards "from a woman of evil, from the smoothness of the tongue of a foreign woman." Again the danger is the adulteress and her smooth words.

"Do not desire her beauty in your heart." Adultery begins in the heart, long before it happens in the body. Jesus said that anyone who looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:28). The battle has to be won there first. "And do not let her take you with her eyelids." Her eyes flirt and draw a man in.

"For the price of a woman who is a prostitute is up to a loaf of bread, and the wife of a man hunts a precious life." The father compares two kinds of sexual sin. Sin with a prostitute can bring a man down to poverty, to a loaf of bread. Sin with another man's wife is worse still. It hunts his very life. Both are wrong. The point is that the cost of adultery is higher than anything the man imagines.

6:27-29 *Can a man scoop up fire in his bosom, and his garments not be burned? Or can a man walk on the burning coals, and his feet not be scorched? So **is** he who goes in to the wife of his neighbor; everyone who touches her will not go unpunished.*

"Can a man scoop up fire in his bosom, and his garments not be burned? Or can a man walk on the burning coals, and his feet not be scorched?" The answer is obvious. Of course not. Fire burns. Anyone who plays with it gets hurt.

"So is he who goes in to the wife of his neighbor; everyone who touches her will not go unpunished." Many people think they can be the exception. They think they can get away with it, keep it secret or handle the consequences. The father says no one can. Sin has consequences built into it, just as fire has heat. And beyond the earthly consequences, God Himself will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers (Hebrews 13:4).

6:30-31 *They do not despise the thief if he steals to fill his appetite when he is hungry; and **if** he is found, he will repay sevenfold; all the wealth of his house he will give.*

"They do not despise the thief if he steals to fill his appetite when he is hungry." People may feel some pity for a starving man who steals bread. They understand why he did it. That does not make it right.

"And if he is found, he will repay sevenfold; all the wealth of his house he will give." The Law required a thief to pay back two, four or five times what he took (Exodus 22:1-4). Sevenfold here likely means a full and complete payment, whatever it costs. The thief may lose everything he owns. But at least he can pay, and then the matter is settled.

6:32-33 *He who commits adultery **with** a woman lacks sense; he who destroys his **own** soul, he does it. A wound and shame he will find, and his reproach will not be wiped away.*

Now the contrast. "He who commits adultery with a woman lacks sense; he who destroys his own soul, he does it." The adulterer is not driven by hunger like the thief. He has no excuse. He lacks sense. And he does not just lose money. He destroys himself.

"A wound and shame he will find, and his reproach will not be wiped away." The thief can pay back what he took. The adulterer cannot undo what he did. The shame stays. Even when God forgives, and He does forgive those who repent, people remember, trust is slow to rebuild and the scars can last a lifetime.

6:34-35 *For jealousy **is** the rage of a man, and he will not spare in **the** day of vengeance. He will not accept any ransom, and he will not be willing though you multiply **the** bribe.*

"For jealousy is the rage of a man, and he will not spare in the day of vengeance." The betrayed husband is full of rage. In Israel, the Law allowed the death penalty for adultery (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22), and a husband's anger could be fierce.

"He will not accept any ransom, and he will not be willing though you multiply the bribe." The thief could pay his way out. The adulterer cannot. No amount of money will satisfy a husband whose wife has been taken from him. The father is not telling his son to fear only an angry husband. He is showing him that some damage cannot be bought back.

For the reader who has been betrayed, these verses say that the pain is real, and that God takes it seriously. For the reader who has fallen, God's mercy is greater than our sin (Psalm 51:1-2; 1 John 1:9). But the father's word to every son is plain: do not go near the fire.

Chapter 6 Summary

The father warns his son to get free quickly if he has become surety for another's debt, as a gazelle or bird escapes a trap. He sends the sluggard to learn from the ant, which works ahead without being told, and he warns that poverty will come suddenly on the lazy. He describes the worthless man who twists words and stirs up trouble, and whose ruin will come in an instant. He lists seven things the LORD hates: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that plots evil, feet that run to evil, a false witness and one who sows discord among brothers. Then he returns to his warning about adultery. His teaching is a lamp and a light that will guard his son from the evil woman. A man cannot carry fire in his lap without being burned. A hungry thief can repay what he stole, but the adulterer destroys himself, finds a wound and shame that will not be wiped away, and faces a jealous husband who will accept no payment.

Chapter 6 Study Questions

1. What does it mean to become surety for a neighbor, and what does the father tell his son to do if he has? (6:1-5)

2. What can the sluggard learn from the ant? (6:6-8)

3. How does poverty come to the lazy man? (6:9-11)

4. How does the worthless man use his mouth, eyes, feet and fingers? (6:12-14)

5. List the seven things the LORD hates. Which one is last? (6:16-19)

6. What does the father's teaching do for his son when he walks, lies down and wakes? (6:20-23)

7. Where does adultery begin, according to verse 25 and Matthew 5:28? (6:25)

8. How is the adulterer different from the hungry thief? (6:30-35)

9. Look again at the list of seven things the LORD hates. Are there any you have treated as small sins? (6:16-19)

10. Is there a "little sleep, a little slumber" area of your life, a place where you keep putting off what you know you should do? What is one step you could take this week? (6:10)

Chapter 7: The Way to Her House

Scripture

7:1-13 My son, keep my sayings, and treasure my commandments with you. Keep my commandments and live, and my instruction like the pupil of your eyes. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart. Say to wisdom, "You ***are*** my sister," and you will call understanding a relative, to keep you from a strange woman, from a foreign ***woman who*** has made her sayings smooth. For at the window of my house, through my lattice, I looked down, and I saw among the simple ones, I discerned among the sons, a youth lacking sense, passing in the street near her corner, and he strides ***along*** the way to her house, in ***the*** twilight, in the evening of ***the*** day, in the pupil of ***the*** night and darkness. And look, a woman to meet him, ***in*** the garment of a prostitute, and guarded of heart. She ***is*** boisterous and rebellious; her feet do not stay in her house; now outside, now in the squares, and beside every corner she lies in wait. And she takes hold of him and kisses him; she has made her face bold, and she says to him,

7:14-27 "Sacrifices of peace offerings ***are*** on me; today I have paid my vows. Therefore I have come out to meet you, to seek your face earnestly, and I have found you. With coverings I have spread my couch, colored ***fabrics***, linen of Egypt. I have sprinkled my bed ***with*** myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of lovemaking until the morning; let us delight ourselves with loves. For the man is not in his house; he has gone on a journey far away. He has taken the bag of money in his hand; at the day of the full moon he will come ***to*** his house." She turns him with the greatness of her persuasion; with the smoothness of her lips she drives him. He goes after her suddenly, like an ox ***that*** goes to the slaughter, and like a fetter to the discipline of a fool, until an arrow pierces his liver; like a bird hurries into a trap, and he does not know that it ***is*** for his life. And now, sons, listen to me, and pay attention to the sayings of my mouth. Do not let your heart turn away to her ways; do not go astray in her paths; for many ***are*** the slain she has made fall, and numerous ***are*** all those killed by her. Her house ***is*** the ways of Sheol, going down to the chambers of death.

Chapter 7 Preview

Chapter 7 is the third and longest warning against adultery in Proverbs, and it is told as a story. The father tells his son to keep his words as close as the pupil of his eye and to call wisdom his sister. Then he looks out his window and tells what he saw: a young man with no sense, walking at dusk down the street toward a certain woman's house. She meets him, dressed to tempt him. She is bold. She kisses him and tells him she has just made her offerings, her bed is ready, and her husband is away on a long trip.

The young man follows her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a bird flying into a trap. He does not know it will cost him his life. The father ends with a plea. Do not let your heart turn toward her ways, because her house is the road to the grave, and many strong men have fallen there.

Chapter 7 Study

7:1-3 *My son, keep my sayings, and treasure my commandments with you. Keep my commandments and live, and my instruction like the pupil of your eyes. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.*

"My son, keep my sayings, and treasure my commandments with you." The father begins once more with a call to keep and treasure his words, just as in 2:1.

"Keep my commandments and live, and my instruction like the pupil of your eyes." The pupil is the most tender part of the eye, the part we protect without even thinking. God Himself is said to guard His people as the pupil of His eye (Deuteronomy 32:10). The son is to guard his father's teaching that carefully.

"Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart." The fingers are always in view, and the heart is where we live. God's Word is to be both in front of our eyes and deep inside us.

7:4-5 *Say to wisdom, "You **are** my sister," and you will call understanding a relative, to keep you from a strange woman, from a foreign **woman who** has made her sayings smooth.*

"Say to wisdom, You are my sister, and you will call understanding a relative." In Hebrew love poetry, "sister" was also a tender word for a bride (Song of Songs 4:9). The father wants his son to love wisdom with a close, warm, family kind of love, so that he has no room for the strange woman. The best protection against a wrong love is a stronger right love.

"To keep you from a strange woman, from a foreign woman who has made her sayings smooth." Wisdom guards us. This is the same woman we met in 2:16 and 5:3, with the same smooth words.

7:6-9 *For at the window of my house, through my lattice, I looked down, and I saw among the simple ones, I discerned among the sons, a youth lacking sense, passing in the street near her corner, and he strides **along** the way to her house, in **the** twilight, in the evening of **the** day, in the pupil of **the** night and darkness.*

Now the father tells a story. "For at the window of my house, through my lattice, I looked down." A lattice was a wooden screen over a window, letting in air while keeping people from seeing inside. The father watched the street below.

"And I saw among the simple ones, I discerned among the sons, a youth lacking sense." He picks out one young man from a group. He is simple, naive and easily led. He lacks sense, which in Hebrew is "lacking heart." He has no inner guard.

"Passing in the street near her corner, and he strides along the way to her house." Notice that he is not dragged there. He walks there. He takes the street that goes past her corner. Maybe he tells himself he is just out for a walk. But he knows where her house is.

"In the twilight, in the evening of the day, in the pupil of the night and darkness." The time moves from dusk into deep night. Sin loves the dark (John 3:20). The young man thinks no one sees. But the father sees from his window, and the LORD sees everything (5:21).

The lesson is plain: most falls begin with small steps in the wrong direction. We put ourselves where temptation lives, at the wrong time, with no plan to say no.

7:10-12 *And look, a woman to meet him, **in** the garment of a prostitute, and guarded of heart. She **is** boisterous and rebellious; her feet do not stay in her house; now outside, now in the squares, and beside every corner she lies in wait.*

"And look, a woman to meet him, in the garment of a prostitute, and guarded of heart." She is dressed to draw a man's eye. She is not a prostitute by trade; she is a married woman (7:19). But she dresses like one. "Guarded of heart" means she hides what she really wants. Her heart is closed and scheming.

"She is boisterous and rebellious; her feet do not stay in her house." She is loud and restless. She will not stay where she belongs. "Now outside, now in the squares, and beside every corner she lies in wait." She is a hunter, and she is looking for prey.

7:13 *And she takes hold of him and kisses him; she has made her face bold, and she says to him,*

"And she takes hold of him and kisses him; she has made her face bold." She does not wait for him to make a move. She grabs him. Her face shows no shame. Temptation is often bolder than we expect, and it moves faster than we are ready for.

7:14-15 *"Sacrifices of peace offerings **are** on me; today I have paid my vows. Therefore I have come out to meet you, to seek your face earnestly, and I have found you.*

Her first words are surprising: "Sacrifices of peace offerings are on me; today I have paid my vows." A peace offering was a sacrifice given to God out of thanks or to keep a vow. Part of the meat was burned on the altar, and the rest was eaten by the worshiper and his family that same day or the next (Leviticus 7:15-16). So she is saying she has fresh meat at home for a feast.

But she is also using religion to cover sin. She has just been to worship, and now she is ready to commit adultery. Some even think she means that, having done her religious duty, she feels free to do as she pleases. Religion without a changed heart can live side by side with gross sin. Jesus warned against those who honor God with their lips while their hearts are far from Him (Matthew 15:8).

"Therefore I have come out to meet you, to seek your face earnestly, and I have found you." She flatters him. She makes him feel special, as if she had been looking for him alone. She has likely said the same to others.

7:16-18 *With coverings I have spread my couch, colored **fabrics**, linen of Egypt. I have sprinkled my bed **with** myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of lovemaking until the morning; let us delight ourselves with loves.*

Now she describes her bedroom. "With coverings I have spread my couch, colored fabrics, linen of Egypt." Egyptian linen was costly. "I have sprinkled my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon." These were expensive spices with sweet smells. She appeals to every sense: sight, touch, smell.

"Come, let us take our fill of lovemaking until the morning." Her offer is open and direct. Notice how she makes sin sound beautiful, luxurious and harmless. That is the way of temptation. The father lets his son hear her words so that he will recognize them when he hears them himself.

7:19-20 *For the man is not in his house; he has gone on a journey far away. He has taken the bag of money in his hand; at the day of the full moon he will come **to** his house."*

Then she gives him the reason he does not need to worry. "For the man is not in his house; he has gone on a journey far away." She does not even call him "my husband." She calls him "the man." She has already put him out of her heart.

"He has taken the bag of money in his hand; at the day of the full moon he will come to his house." He has taken enough money for a long trip, and he will not be home for days. No one will find out. That is always the lie of sexual sin: no one will know. But God knows (Numbers 32:23 says your sin will find you out).

7:21-23 *She turns him with the greatness of her persuasion; with the smoothness of her lips she drives him. He goes after her suddenly, like an ox **that** goes to the slaughter, and like a fetter to the discipline of a fool, until an arrow pierces his liver; like a bird hurries into a trap, and he does not know that it **is** for his life.*

"She turns him with the greatness of her persuasion; with the smoothness of her lips she drives him." Her words win. He gives in.

"He goes after her suddenly, like an ox that goes to the slaughter." An ox led to the butcher has no idea what is about to happen. It just follows. "And like a fetter to the discipline of a fool." The Hebrew of this line is hard. It seems to picture a fool being led in chains to his punishment.

"Until an arrow pierces his liver." The liver was thought of as a seat of life. This is a deadly wound. "Like a bird hurries into a trap, and he does not know that it is for his life." The bird sees the bait and not the snare. The young man sees the pleasure and not the price. He does not know it will cost him his life.

7:24-25 *And now, sons, listen to me, and pay attention to the sayings of my mouth. Do not let your heart turn away to her ways; do not go astray in her paths;*

"And now, sons, listen to me, and pay attention to the sayings of my mouth." The father turns from the story to his sons. This is why he told it.

"Do not let your heart turn away to her ways; do not go astray in her paths." Notice the order. First the heart turns, then the feet go astray. The young man's fall began long before he walked down her street. It began when his heart started to wander. Guard your heart (4:23).

7:26-27 *for many **are** the slain she has made fall, and numerous **are** all those killed by her. Her house **is** the ways of Sheol, going down to the chambers of death.*

"For many are the slain she has made fall, and numerous are all those killed by her." The young man in the story is not the first, and he will not be the last. Strong men, wise men and godly men have fallen this way. Samson was the strongest man in Israel, and he fell to Delilah (Judges 16). David was a man after God's heart, and he fell with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11). Solomon himself, the wisest man of his day, was led astray by his foreign wives (1 Kings 11:3-4). No one is too strong to fall. Paul says, "let the one who thinks he stands watch, lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

"Her house is the ways of Sheol, going down to the chambers of death." Her house looks like a place of pleasure. It is really a road to the grave.

For believers today, the danger may come in a different form: an online relationship, a coworker, a conversation that goes too far, an image on a screen. The road is the same. It starts with a heart that wanders and feet that go where they should not, and it ends in ruin. But there is a way of escape. God is faithful, and He will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear, but with the temptation will also provide the way out (1 Corinthians 10:13). Often the way out is simply not to walk down that street. And if you have already gone through that door, the way back is still open. The one who confesses and forsakes his sin will be shown mercy (28:13; 1 John 1:9).

Chapter 7 Summary

The father calls his son to keep his teaching as carefully as the pupil of his eye and to love wisdom like a sister, so that he will be kept from the strange woman. He tells of watching from his window as a young man lacking sense walked at twilight toward a certain woman's house. She met him dressed like a prostitute, took hold of him and kissed him. She said she had just offered her peace offerings and paid her vows, that her bed was ready with fine linen and spices, and that her husband was away on a long trip. Her smooth words won him over, and he followed her like an ox to the slaughter and a bird into a trap, not knowing it would cost him his life. The father warns his sons not to let their hearts turn to her ways, because many strong men have been killed by her, and her house is the road to death.

Chapter 7 Study Questions

1. How carefully is the son told to keep his father's teaching? (7:1-3)

2. What does it mean to call wisdom "my sister," and how does that guard against temptation? (7:4-5)

3. What did the father see from his window, and what time of day was it? (7:6-9)

4. How is the woman dressed, and how does she act? (7:10-13)

5. How does she use religion as part of her temptation? (7:14)

6. What reasons does she give the young man that no one will find out? (7:19-20)

7. What pictures does the father use to show what happens to the young man? (7:22-23)

8. What happens first, the heart turning or the feet going astray? What does that teach about where the battle is fought? (7:25)

9. The young man walked down the street near her corner. What "streets" in your life lead toward temptation, and how can you avoid them? (7:8)

10. Verse 26 says many strong people have fallen this way. Why is it dangerous to think it could never happen to you? (7:26; 1 Corinthians 10:12-13)

Chapter 8: Wisdom Calls Out

Scripture

8:1-21 Does not wisdom call out, and understanding give her voice? At the top of ***the*** heights, beside ***the*** way, between ***the*** paths she takes her stand; beside ***the*** gates, at the mouth of ***the*** town, at the entrance of ***the*** doorways, she cries aloud: "To you, men, I call, and my voice ***is*** to the sons of mankind. Understand prudence, simple ones; and fools, understand sense. Hear, for I will speak noble things, and the opening of my lips ***will be*** uprightness; for my palate will utter truth, and wickedness ***is*** an abomination of my lips. All the sayings of my mouth ***are*** in righteousness; there is nothing twisted and crooked in them. All of them ***are*** straightforward to the one who discerns, and upright to those who find knowledge. Take my discipline and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom ***is*** better than jewels, and all desires do not compare with her. I, wisdom, dwell ***with*** prudence, and I find knowledge of discretion. The fear of the LORD ***is*** to hate evil; pride and arrogance and a way of evil and a mouth of perversities I hate. Counsel and sound wisdom ***are*** mine; I ***am*** understanding; strength ***is*** mine. By me kings reign, and rulers decree righteousness; by me princes rule, and nobles, all the judges of righteousness. I love those who love me, and those who seek me earnestly find me. Riches and honor ***are*** with me, enduring wealth and righteousness. My fruit ***is*** better than gold, and than pure gold, and my yield than choice silver. I walk in the path of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice, to cause those who love me to inherit substance, and I fill their treasuries.

8:22-36 The LORD possessed me ***at*** the beginning of His way, before His works of old. From long ago I was installed, from ***the*** beginning, from the earliest times of ***the*** earth. When ***there were*** no deeps I was brought forth, when ***there were*** no springs heavy ***with*** water. Before ***the*** mountains were settled, before ***the*** hills, I was brought forth, while He had not yet made ***the*** earth and ***the*** open places, and the first of the dusts of the world. When He established the heavens, I ***was*** there; when He marked out a circle on the face of ***the*** deep, when He made firm the clouds above, when the springs of ***the*** deep became strong, when He set for the sea its limit, and the waters would not pass beyond His command, when He marked out the foundations of ***the*** earth, then I was beside Him ***as*** an artisan, and I was ***His*** delight day ***by*** day, playing before Him at every time, playing in the world of His earth, and my delights ***were*** with the sons of mankind. And now, sons, listen to me, and how blessed ***are those who*** keep my ways! Hear discipline and be wise, and do not neglect ***it***. How blessed ***is*** the man ***who*** listens to me, keeping watch at my doors day ***by*** day, guarding the doorposts of my doorways! For he who finds me finds life, and obtains favor from the LORD. And he who misses me does violence to his ***own*** soul; all who hate me love death."

Chapter 8 Preview

In chapter 7 the strange woman lurked at street corners in the dark. In chapter 8 Wisdom stands in the open, on the heights, at the city gates, and calls out to everyone. Her words are true and right. Her teaching is worth more than silver, gold and jewels. Kings reign by her, and she loves those who love her. She hates pride and evil, and she gives riches, honor and righteousness to those who seek her.

Then Wisdom speaks of her place before the world was made. The LORD possessed her at the beginning of His way. She was there when He set the heavens in place, marked the edge of the sea and laid the foundations of the earth. She was beside Him as an artisan, His delight every day, rejoicing in the world and in mankind. The chapter ends with an invitation and a warning: whoever finds wisdom finds life and favor from the LORD, and whoever hates her loves death.

Chapter 8 Study

8:1-3 *Does not wisdom call out, and understanding give her voice? At the top of **the** heights, beside **the** way, between **the** paths she takes her stand; beside **the** gates, at the mouth of **the** town, at the entrance of **the** doorways, she cries aloud:*

"Does not wisdom call out, and understanding give her voice?" The question expects a yes. Of course she does. Wisdom is not silent or hidden.

Where does she call? "At the top of the heights, beside the way, between the paths." She stands where everyone can see her, at the crossroads where people choose which way to go. "Beside the gates, at the mouth of the town, at the entrance of the doorways, she cries aloud." The city gate was where people came and went and where business and court cases were done. Wisdom goes to the busiest places in life.

Compare her with the woman of chapter 7. That woman whispered in the dark at a corner. Wisdom cries out in daylight at the gate. Sin hides. Truth stands in the open. God has not hidden His wisdom from anyone who will listen (Romans 1:20; 10:18).

8:4-5 *"To you, men, I call, and my voice **is** to the sons of mankind. Understand prudence, simple ones; and fools, understand sense.*

"To you, men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of mankind." Wisdom's call is for everyone, not only for Israel, not only for the clever or the religious.

"Understand prudence, simple ones; and fools, understand sense." Even the simple and the fools are invited. No one is too far gone to be called. That is good news. God calls sinners to Himself (Luke 5:32).

8:6-9 *Hear, for I will speak noble things, and the opening of my lips **will be** uprightness; for my palate will utter truth, and wickedness **is** an abomination of my lips. All the sayings of my mouth **are** in righteousness; there is nothing twisted and crooked in them. All of them **are** straightforward to the one who discerns, and upright to those who find knowledge.*

"Hear, for I will speak noble things, and the opening of my lips will be uprightness." What wisdom says is worth hearing. Her words are noble, princely and right.

"For my palate will utter truth, and wickedness is an abomination of my lips." She cannot lie. She hates wickedness the way God hates it. "All the sayings of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing twisted and crooked in them." This is the opposite of the smooth, twisted words of the strange woman (7:21) and the evil man (2:12).

"All of them are straightforward to the one who discerns, and upright to those who find knowledge." Wisdom's words are clear to those who want to understand. The problem is not that God's truth is too hard. The problem is that some do not want it.

8:10-11 *Take my discipline and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom **is** better than jewels, and all desires do not compare with her.*

"Take my discipline and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold." If you had to choose between a bag of silver and wisdom, which would you take? Wisdom says to choose her.

"For wisdom is better than jewels, and all desires do not compare with her." This repeats 3:15 almost word for word. Solomon himself made this choice. When God offered him anything, he asked for wisdom, not riches, and God gave him both (1 Kings 3:11-13).

8:12-13 *I, wisdom, dwell **with** prudence, and I find knowledge of discretion. The fear of the LORD **is** to hate evil; pride and arrogance and a way of evil and a mouth of perversities I hate.*

"I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge of discretion." Wisdom lives with good sense. They are neighbors.

"The fear of the LORD is to hate evil." This is one of the clearest definitions of the fear of the LORD in the Bible. It is not only a feeling of awe. It is a moral stance. To fear God is to hate what He hates. You cannot love God and love evil at the same time.

"Pride and arrogance and a way of evil and a mouth of perversities I hate." Notice that pride comes first again, just as haughty eyes came first in 6:17. Pride is the opposite of the fear of the LORD. The proud man fears no one. The wise man bows before God.

8:14-16 *Counsel and sound wisdom **are** mine; I **am** understanding; strength **is** mine. By me kings reign, and rulers decree righteousness; by me princes rule, and nobles, all the judges of righteousness.*

"Counsel and sound wisdom are mine; I am understanding; strength is mine." Wisdom gives good advice, practical skill and the strength to carry it out.

"By me kings reign, and rulers decree righteousness; by me princes rule, and nobles, all the judges of righteousness." Good government depends on wisdom. Kings who rule well do it by wisdom. Solomon knew this better than anyone. He asked God for wisdom to govern His people (1 Kings 3:9). Leaders today, whether in nations, businesses, churches or homes, need the same wisdom. We should pray for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

8:17 *I love those who love me, and those who seek me earnestly find me.*

"I love those who love me, and those who seek me earnestly find me." This is a promise. Love for wisdom is returned. And the one who seeks will find. The word "earnestly" can also mean "early," as in seeking at dawn, first thing. God makes the same promise: "you will seek Me and find Me,

when you seek Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). Jesus said, "seek, and you will find" (Matthew 7:7).

Compare this with 1:28, where those who refused wisdom seek her and do not find her. The difference is the heart. Those who love wisdom seek her because they want her. Those who hated her seek her only when trouble comes.

8:18-21 *Riches and honor **are** with me, enduring wealth and righteousness. My fruit **is** better than gold, and than pure gold, and my yield than choice silver. I walk in the path of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice, to cause those who love me to inherit substance, and I fill their treasuries.*

"Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness." Wisdom gives good things, but notice the kind of wealth: "enduring wealth," the kind that lasts. And it comes together with righteousness. Wealth gained by wickedness does not last (10:2).

"My fruit is better than gold, and than pure gold, and my yield than choice silver." The best things wisdom gives are not things at all. They are a good character, a right relationship with God, and a life that pleases Him.

"I walk in the path of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice." Wisdom never leaves the road of right living. "To cause those who love me to inherit substance, and I fill their treasuries." As a general truth, wise and righteous living tends to bring blessing. But the true treasure of wisdom is the kind Jesus spoke of: treasure in heaven that moth and rust cannot destroy (Matthew 6:19-21).

8:22-26 *The LORD possessed me **at** the beginning of His way, before His works of old. From long ago I was installed, from **the** beginning, from the earliest times of **the** earth. When **there were** no deeps I was brought forth, when **there were** no springs heavy **with** water. Before **the** mountains were settled, before **the** hills, I was brought forth, while He had not yet made **the** earth and **the** open places, and the first of the dusts of the world.*

Now Wisdom speaks of something deeper: her place before creation. These verses have been studied and argued over more than almost any others in Proverbs, so we will read them carefully.

"The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old." The Hebrew word for possessed (qanah) usually means to get, own or acquire. In a few places it may mean to create or bring forth, and some translations say "created me" here. Either way, Wisdom is saying that she belonged to the LORD from the very start, before He made anything.

"From long ago I was installed, from the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth." "Installed" is a word used of setting up a king (Psalm 2:6). Wisdom was in place before the world began.

"When there were no deeps I was brought forth, when there were no springs heavy with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth." "Brought forth" is the language of birth. Wisdom is pictured as born before the oceans, the springs and the mountains.

How should we read this? First, it is poetry. In chapters 1 to 9 wisdom is pictured as a woman calling in the streets, building a house and setting a table (9:1-2). This is personification, a quality described as though it were a person. Here the poet is saying that God's wisdom is older than creation. God never lacked wisdom. He did not have to learn how to make the world. His wisdom was always with Him, and by it He made all things (3:19).

8:27-29 *When He established the heavens, I **was** there; when He marked out a circle on the face of **the** deep, when He made firm the clouds above, when the springs of **the** deep became strong, when He set for the sea its limit, and the waters would not pass beyond His command, when He marked out the foundations of **the** earth,*

"When He established the heavens, I was there; when He marked out a circle on the face of the deep." Wisdom was present when God set the sky in place and drew the horizon, the line where sky meets sea.

"When He made firm the clouds above, when the springs of the deep became strong." God set the waters above and below in their places.

"When He set for the sea its limit, and the waters would not pass beyond His command." God told the sea how far it could go, and it obeyed (Job 38:8-11). "When He marked out the foundations of the earth." The whole picture is of a wise Builder laying out His work with care. Everything in creation shows order, design and limits. That is wisdom at work.

8:30-31 *then I was beside Him **as** an artisan, and I was **His** delight day **by** day, playing before Him at every time, playing in the world of His earth, and my delights **were** with the sons of mankind.*

"Then I was beside Him as an artisan." The word artisan means a master craftsman, a skilled worker. Some translate it as a little child or a nursling, which fits the picture of delight and play that follows. Either way, Wisdom was at God's side as He worked.

"And I was His delight day by day, playing before Him at every time." There is joy in this picture. Creation was not hard labor for God. It was a delight. Wisdom rejoiced before Him.

"Playing in the world of His earth, and my delights were with the sons of mankind." Wisdom rejoices in the world God made, and especially in people. God's wisdom delights to be with us. That is why she calls out in the streets.

Many Bible teachers through the centuries have seen in 8:22-31 a picture that points to Jesus Christ. The New Testament calls Christ "the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24) and says that "all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge are hidden" in Him (Colossians 2:3). John says the Word was with God in the beginning and that all things came into being through Him (John 1:1-3). Paul says that in Christ all things were created and that "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16-17). So the picture of wisdom at God's side in creation fits Christ well, and many believers see it pointing to Him.

But we must be careful here, and I want to say this plainly. This passage is a poem about wisdom, pictured as a woman. It is not a direct statement about the Son of God, and it does not teach that

the Son was created. The New Testament never quotes these verses about Jesus. The Son of God is eternal. He was not made. He is the One through whom all things were made (John 1:3), and Micah says His goings out are "from of old, from the days of antiquity" (Micah 5:2). In the A.D. 300s a teacher named Arius used verse 22 to claim that the Son was a created being, and the church rightly rejected his teaching. If we press the poetry that far, we would also have to say that God was once without wisdom, which no one believes. The words possessed and brought forth tell us that God's wisdom is His own and older than the world. They do not tell us that the Son had a beginning.

So we can read this passage with joy. God's wisdom is eternal. It is seen in everything He made. And the fullness of that wisdom has come to us in a Person, Jesus Christ, who "became to us wisdom from God" (1 Corinthians 1:30).

8:32-34 *And now, sons, listen to me, and how blessed **are those who** keep my ways! Hear discipline and be wise, and do not neglect **it**. How blessed **is** the man **who** listens to me, keeping watch at my doors day **by** day, guarding the doorposts of my doorways!*

"And now, sons, listen to me, and how blessed are those who keep my ways!" After speaking of creation, Wisdom comes back to the street and speaks to us directly. The same wisdom that made the world is offered to us.

"Hear discipline and be wise, and do not neglect it." Do not let it slip.

"How blessed is the man who listens to me, keeping watch at my doors day by day, guarding the doorposts of my doorways!" The picture is of someone waiting eagerly at the door of the one he loves, or a servant waiting at his master's door each morning to hear what he wants. Contrast this with the young man in chapter 7, who went to the wrong door at night. The blessed man waits at Wisdom's door every day.

8:35-36 *For he who finds me finds life, and obtains favor from the LORD. And he who misses me does violence to his **own** soul; all who hate me love death."*

"For he who finds me finds life, and obtains favor from the LORD." Here is the greatest promise of the chapter. Wisdom is life. Finding her means finding favor with God. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6), and whoever has the Son has life (1 John 5:12).

"And he who misses me does violence to his own soul; all who hate me love death." To miss wisdom is to harm yourself. To hate wisdom is to love death. No one sets out to love death, but those who reject God's wisdom choose the road that leads there. The choice is set before us, as Moses set it before Israel: life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Chapter 8 Summary

Wisdom calls out from the heights and the city gates to all people, even the simple and the fools. Her words are noble, true and righteous, with nothing twisted in them, and she is worth more than silver, gold and jewels. The fear of the LORD is to hate evil, and wisdom hates pride and arrogance. By wisdom kings reign and rulers judge rightly. She loves those who love her and is

found by those who seek her, and she gives lasting riches, honor and righteousness. Wisdom then speaks of being with the LORD before creation, present when He set the heavens and the sea in their places, beside Him as an artisan and His daily delight, rejoicing in the world and in mankind. Many see in this a picture pointing to Christ, the wisdom of God, though it is a poem and does not teach that the Son was created. The chapter ends with a blessing on those who listen at Wisdom's doors: whoever finds her finds life and favor from the LORD, and whoever hates her loves death.

Chapter 8 Study Questions

1. Where does Wisdom stand to call out, and how is that different from the woman in chapter 7? (8:1-3; 7:12)

2. Who does Wisdom call to, and what does she want them to understand? (8:4-5)

3. How does verse 13 define the fear of the LORD? What does Wisdom hate? (8:13)

4. What does Wisdom promise to those who love her and seek her? (8:17-21)

5. What was Wisdom doing when God made the heavens, the sea and the earth? (8:27-30)

6. Why is it important to read 8:22-31 as poetry? What does it teach about God's wisdom? (8:22-31; 3:19)

7. How does the New Testament show Christ as the wisdom of God, and why must we not use this passage to say the Son was created? (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16-17)

8. What does the one who finds wisdom find, and what does the one who hates her love? (8:35-36)

9. If you had to choose between a large sum of money and true wisdom from God, what would you honestly choose? Why? (8:10-11)

10. What would it look like for you to keep watch at wisdom's doors day by day? (8:34)

Chapter 9: Two Invitations

Scripture

9:1-18 Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her meat; she has mixed her wine; also she has arranged her table. She has sent out her young women; she calls out on the elevations of the heights of ***the*** town: "Who ***is*** simple? Let him turn aside here!" One lacking sense, she says to him, "Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine I have mixed. Forsake simple ones and live, and walk straight on in the way of understanding. He who disciplines a scoffer receives shame for himself, and he who reproves a wicked ***one***, his blemish. Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you; reprove a wise ***one***, and he will love you. Give to a wise ***one***, and he will be wiser still; make known to a righteous ***one***, and he will increase learning. The beginning of wisdom ***is*** the fear of the LORD, and the knowledge of the Holy One ***is*** understanding. For by me your days will be many, and they will add to you years of life. If you are wise, you are wise for yourself; and ***if*** you scoff, you alone will bear ***it***." The woman of folly ***is*** boisterous; ***she is*** simplicity, and she does not know anything. And she sits at the doorway of her house, on a seat ***at*** the heights of ***the*** town, to call to those who pass along the way, who are making their paths straight: "Who ***is*** simple? Let him turn aside here!" And one lacking sense, she says to him, "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread of secrecy is pleasant." And he does not know that the shades ***are*** there, her invited ***ones*** in the depths of Sheol.

Chapter 9 Preview

Chapter 9 closes the first part of Proverbs with two invitations to dinner. Wisdom has built her house, set up her seven pillars, prepared meat and wine, and set her table. She sends out her young women to call from the high places of the town: whoever is simple, come in, eat my bread, drink my wine, leave foolishness behind and live. In the middle of the chapter she explains that scoffers will not listen to correction, but the wise will, and that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.

Then a second woman calls. The woman of folly sits at the door of her house on the heights of the town, and she calls to the same simple people with the same words: whoever is simple, come in. Her offer is stolen water and secret bread. What her guests do not know is that the dead are already there, and her house is the depths of Sheol. Every reader must choose which house to enter.

Chapter 9 Study

9:1-2 *Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her meat; she has mixed her wine; also she has arranged her table.*

"Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out her seven pillars." Wisdom is pictured as a wealthy woman who has built a fine house. Hewn pillars were cut from stone, and they show that the house is strong and beautiful. Seven is often a number of completeness in the Bible. Her house

lacks nothing. Some teachers have tried to name the seven pillars, but the text does not, and we do not need to. The point is that wisdom's house is complete, solid and ready.

"She has slaughtered her meat; she has mixed her wine; also she has arranged her table." She has prepared a feast. Mixed wine was wine blended with spices, or with water as was the custom. Everything is ready. All her guests have to do is come.

This picture reminds us of the invitations of Jesus. He told of a king who prepared a wedding feast and sent out his servants to say that all things were ready (Matthew 22:1-4). Wisdom's table points ahead to the gospel invitation.

9:3-6 *She has sent out her young women; she calls out on the elevations of the heights of **the** town: "Who **is** simple? Let him turn aside here!" One lacking sense, she says to him, "Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine I have mixed. Forsake simple ones and live, and walk straight on in the way of understanding.*

"She has sent out her young women; she calls out on the elevations of the heights of the town." Wisdom sends messengers and she calls out herself, from the highest places where everyone can hear.

"Who is simple? Let him turn aside here!" Her invitation is for the simple, the naive and inexperienced, the very people most in danger. "One lacking sense, she says to him." She does not invite only the wise. She invites those who know they need help. God's grace works that way. Jesus said He came not to call the righteous but sinners (Luke 5:32).

"Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine I have mixed." Isaiah has a similar call: everyone who is thirsty, come to the waters, and you who have no money, come, buy and eat (Isaiah 55:1). Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). Wisdom offers a meal that feeds the soul.

"Forsake simple ones and live, and walk straight on in the way of understanding." To accept her invitation means leaving something behind. The simple must leave their foolish ways, and perhaps their foolish friends. Then they will live. Coming to wisdom always means turning from folly. That is what repentance is.

9:7-9 *He who disciplines a scoffer receives shame for himself, and he who reproves a wicked **one**, his blemish. Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you; reprove a wise **one**, and he will love you. Give to a wise **one**, and he will be wiser still; make known to a righteous **one**, and he will increase learning.*

In the middle of the invitation, Wisdom gives some advice about teaching others. "He who disciplines a scoffer receives shame for himself, and he who reproves a wicked one, his blemish." If you correct a mocker, you will get insults in return. He will try to stain your name.

"Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you; reprove a wise one, and he will love you." This is one of the clearest tests of wisdom in the whole book. How do you respond when someone corrects you? The scoffer hates the person who corrects him. The wise man loves him. Jesus said something similar: do not give what is holy to dogs or throw pearls before pigs (Matthew 7:6). There are

times when correcting someone who will only mock is a waste of breath. This does not mean we never speak the truth. It means we use wisdom about when and how.

"Give to a wise one, and he will be wiser still; make known to a righteous one, and he will increase learning." The wise are always teachable. Give them a little instruction and they grow. The person who most needs correction is often the one least willing to receive it, and the person who least seems to need it is often the one most eager for it.

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

"The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the LORD, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Part One of Proverbs began with this truth in 1:7, and now it ends with it. Everything in between has been built on this foundation.

Here it adds a second line: "the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." The Holy One is God, the One who is set apart, pure and perfect, unlike anyone else. Isaiah loved to call Him "the Holy One of Israel." To know Him, not just know about Him, is true understanding. Jesus said eternal life is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent (John 17:3). All wisdom leads back to knowing God.

9:11-12 *For by me your days will be many, and they will add to you years of life. If you are wise, you are wise for yourself; and **if** you scoff, you alone will bear **it**."*

"For by me your days will be many, and they will add to you years of life." Again, a wise life tends toward a long life. This is the general truth Proverbs repeats in many places (3:2, 16; 4:10).

"If you are wise, you are wise for yourself; and if you scoff, you alone will bear it." This is a sobering verse. Each person is responsible for his own choice. The benefits of wisdom are yours. The cost of scoffing is yours too. No one else can choose for you, and no one else can carry the weight of your choice. Ezekiel 18:20 says the same: each one will bear his own guilt. We cannot ride into heaven on our parents' faith. Each of us must answer Wisdom's call.

9:13-15 *The woman of folly **is** boisterous; **she is** simplicity, and she does not know anything. And she sits at the doorway of her house, on a seat **at** the heights of **the** town, to call to those who pass along the way, who are making their paths straight:*

Now the second woman appears. "The woman of folly is boisterous; she is simplicity, and she does not know anything." Folly is pictured as a loud, restless woman, just like the adulteress of 7:11. She is simple herself, and she knows nothing.

"And she sits at the doorway of her house, on a seat at the heights of the town." Notice that she copies Wisdom. Wisdom called from the heights of the town (9:3), and Folly sits there too. Folly always copies wisdom. She sets up shop in the same places and tries to look like the real thing. Sin rarely announces itself as sin.

But see the difference. Wisdom worked: she built, she hewed, she slaughtered, she mixed, she sent out messengers. Folly just sits. She has prepared nothing.

"To call to those who pass along the way, who are making their paths straight." Her targets are people who are minding their own business, going straight down the road. She tries to pull them off course.

9:16-17 *"Who **is** simple? Let him turn aside here!" And one lacking sense, she says to him, "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread of secrecy is pleasant."*

"Who is simple? Let him turn aside here!" Folly uses the very same words as Wisdom (9:4). Both invitations sound the same at first. That is why we need discernment. Not every voice that calls to us is the voice of wisdom.

"Stolen waters are sweet, and bread of secrecy is pleasant." Here is the difference. Wisdom offered a feast she had prepared. Folly offers stolen water and secret bread. She has nothing of her own. She offers what belongs to someone else, and she says it tastes better because it is forbidden. In the setting of chapters 5 to 7, the stolen water points to adultery (5:15). But it fits every sin. Part of the pull of sin is the thrill of doing what we are not supposed to do, and the secret of it.

Satan used the same appeal in the garden of Eden. He made the one forbidden tree seem the most desirable of all (Genesis 3:1-6).

9:18 *And he does not know that the shades **are** there, her invited **ones** in the depths of Sheol.*

"And he does not know that the shades are there, her invited ones in the depths of Sheol." This is the end of the story. The simple man who accepts Folly's invitation does not know what is really inside her house. The shades are the dead. Her earlier guests are not at the table. They are in the grave. Her house is the entrance to Sheol.

So Part One of Proverbs ends with a choice between two houses. Wisdom's house leads to life (9:6). Folly's house leads to death (9:18). Both women call to the same people with the same words. We all hear both voices. Which invitation will we accept?

Jesus ended the Sermon on the Mount the same way, with two roads, two gates and two houses. One house was built on the rock and stood. The other was built on the sand and fell (Matthew 7:13-14, 24-27). The choice is set before every one of us.

Chapter 9 Summary

Wisdom has built her house with seven pillars and prepared a feast of meat and mixed wine. She sends out her young women to call from the heights of the town, inviting the simple to come, eat and drink, leave their simple ways and live. She warns that correcting a scoffer brings insult, while correcting a wise man makes him love you and grow wiser. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the LORD, and knowing the Holy One is understanding. Each person bears the result of his own choice to be wise or to scoff. Then the woman of folly, loud and ignorant, sits at the door of her house on the same heights and calls to the same simple people with the same words. She

offers stolen water and secret bread, but her guests do not know that the dead are there and that her house is the depths of Sheol.

Chapter 9 Study Questions

1. What has Wisdom prepared, and who does she invite? (9:1-5)

2. What must the simple leave behind to accept Wisdom's invitation? (9:6)

3. How do a scoffer and a wise man respond differently to correction? (9:7-9)

4. How does Part One of Proverbs end the same way it began? (9:10; 1:7)

5. What does verse 12 teach about each person's own responsibility? (9:12)

6. How is the woman of folly different from Wisdom? List the things Wisdom did and what Folly does. (9:1-3, 13-15)

7. Why do you think Folly uses the same words as Wisdom? What does that teach us about temptation? (9:4, 16)

8. What does Folly offer, and why does she say it is sweet? (9:17)

9. How do you usually respond when someone corrects you? Which person in verses 7 to 9 are you more like? (9:7-9)

10. Where do you hear the voice of Folly calling to you, and how can you tell it apart from the voice of Wisdom? (9:13-18)

Chapter 10: The Proverbs of Solomon Begin

Scripture

10:1-16 The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son makes a father glad, and a foolish son ***is*** the grief of his mother. Treasures of wickedness do not profit, and righteousness delivers from death. The LORD does not let the soul of ***the*** righteous hunger, and the craving of ***the*** wicked He thrusts away. Poor ***is*** he who works ***with*** a slack palm, and the hand of ***the*** diligent makes rich. He who gathers in the summer ***is*** a son who acts prudently; he who sleeps in the harvest ***is*** a son who acts shamefully. Blessings ***are*** for the head of ***the*** righteous, and the mouth of ***the*** wicked conceals violence. The memory of ***the*** righteous ***is*** for a blessing, and the name of ***the*** wicked will rot. The wise of heart will accept commandments, and a fool of lips will be ruined. He who walks in integrity walks ***in*** security, and he who perverts his ways will become known. He who winks an eye gives sorrow, and a fool of lips will be ruined. The mouth of a righteous ***one is*** a fountain of life, and the mouth of ***the*** wicked conceals violence. Hatred stirs up contentions, and love covers over all transgressions. On the lips of a discerning ***one*** wisdom is found, and a rod ***is*** for the back of one lacking sense. Wise ***ones*** store up knowledge, and the mouth of a fool ***is*** ruin near. The wealth of a rich ***man is*** the town of his strength; the ruin of ***the*** poor ***is*** their poverty. The wages of ***the*** righteous ***is*** for life; the produce of ***the*** wicked ***is*** for sin.

10:17-32 A path to life ***is*** he who keeps discipline, and he who forsakes rebuke leads astray. He who conceals hatred ***has*** lips of falsehood, and he who brings out slander, he ***is*** a fool. In a multitude of words transgression does not cease, and he who restrains his lips acts prudently. The tongue of ***the*** righteous ***is*** choice silver; the heart of ***the*** wicked ***is*** like a little ***thing***. The lips of ***the*** righteous feed many, and fools die by lack of heart. The blessing of the LORD, it makes rich, and He does not add sorrow with it. To do a wicked scheme ***is*** like sport for a fool, and wisdom for a man of understanding. The dread of ***the*** wicked, it will come to him, and the desire of ***the*** righteous will be given. When a storm-wind passes by, then the wicked ***is*** no more; and a righteous ***one is*** an everlasting foundation. Like vinegar to the teeth and like smoke to the eyes, so ***is*** the sluggard to those who send him. The fear of the LORD adds days, and the years of ***the*** wicked will be short. The expectation of ***the*** righteous ***is*** joy, and the hope of ***the*** wicked will perish. The way of the LORD ***is*** a stronghold for integrity, and ruin for those who do evil. ***The*** righteous will never be shaken, and ***the*** wicked will not dwell ***in the*** land. The mouth of a righteous ***one*** will bear fruit ***of*** wisdom, and a tongue of perversities will be cut off. The lips of ***the*** righteous know ***what is*** acceptable, and the mouth of ***the*** wicked ***knows*** perversities.

Chapter 10 Preview

With chapter 10 the book changes shape. The long talks of chapters 1 to 9 are over, and a new heading begins: "The proverbs of Solomon." From here to 22:16, most verses are single sayings of two lines each. In chapters 10 to 15 the second line usually gives the opposite of the first: the wise and the foolish, the righteous and the wicked, the diligent and the lazy. This kind of saying is called antithetic parallelism, which simply means the two halves are set against each other.

The sayings in this chapter are not arranged by topic, but several themes keep coming back. The righteous and the wicked are set side by side again and again, and we see what happens to each. Hard work is contrasted with laziness. And more than anything, the chapter speaks about the mouth: the lips and tongue of the righteous give life, while the mouth of the wicked hides violence. As we read, we need to remember that these are wise general truths about how life usually works under God, not promises that hold in every single case.

Chapter 10 Study

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

"The proverbs of Solomon." This is the second heading in the book (1:1). Then the first saying is about the home: "A wise son makes a father glad, and a foolish son is the grief of his mother." Our choices affect the people who love us most. Parents rejoice when children walk with God, and they grieve when they do not. The father of chapters 1 to 9 now steps back, but the point is the same: listen and be wise.

10:2-3 *Treasures of wickedness do not profit, and righteousness delivers from death. The LORD does not let the soul of **the** righteous hunger, and the craving of **the** wicked He thrusts away.*

"Treasures of wickedness do not profit, and righteousness delivers from death." Money gained by evil does not give what it promised (1:19). It cannot save anyone from death. Righteousness can, because the righteous belong to God.

"The LORD does not let the soul of the righteous hunger, and the craving of the wicked He thrusts away." God provides for His people. David said he had never seen the righteous forsaken (Psalm 37:25). This is the general rule. Yet godly people have gone hungry at times (Hebrews 11:37; 2 Corinthians 11:27), and God was with them even then. The deepest hunger, the hunger of the soul, God always satisfies.

10:4-5 *Poor **is** he who works **with** a slack palm, and the hand of **the** diligent makes rich. He who gathers in the summer **is** a son who acts prudently; he who sleeps in the harvest **is** a son who acts shamefully.*

Two sayings about work. "Poor is he who works with a slack palm, and the hand of the diligent makes rich." Laziness usually leads to poverty, and steady work usually leads to plenty. Not every poor person is lazy. Many poor people work very hard, and Proverbs knows that injustice can sweep away what the poor have earned (13:23). But the lazy will almost always be poor.

"He who gathers in the summer is a son who acts prudently; he who sleeps in the harvest is a son who acts shamefully." Harvest time is short. Miss it, and the whole year is lost. Some opportunities only come once. Wisdom knows when to work.

10:6-7 *Blessings **are** for the head of **the** righteous, and the mouth of **the** wicked conceals violence. The memory of **the** righteous **is** for a blessing, and the name of **the** wicked will rot.*

"Blessings are for the head of the righteous, and the mouth of the wicked conceals violence." The righteous are blessed by God and by others. The wicked hide their violent plans behind their words.

"The memory of the righteous is for a blessing, and the name of the wicked will rot." When the righteous die, people remember them with thanks. When the wicked die, their names spoil like rotting food. What will people say about you when you are gone?

10:8-10 *The wise of heart will accept commandments, and a fool of lips will be ruined. He who walks in integrity walks **in** security, and he who perverts his ways will become known. He who winks an eye gives sorrow, and a fool of lips will be ruined.*

"The wise of heart will accept commandments, and a fool of lips will be ruined." The wise listen. The fool talks, and talks himself into ruin.

"He who walks in integrity walks in security, and he who perverts his ways will become known." A person of integrity has nothing to hide, so he does not live in fear of being found out. The one who twists his ways will be exposed sooner or later (Numbers 32:23).

"He who winks an eye gives sorrow, and a fool of lips will be ruined." The wink is a sign of secret scheming (6:13). It brings trouble to others. The second line repeats the second line of verse 8. The fool's chatter undoes him.

10:11-12 *The mouth of a righteous **one is** a fountain of life, and the mouth of **the** wicked conceals violence. Hatred stirs up contentions, and love covers over all transgressions.*

"The mouth of a righteous one is a fountain of life, and the mouth of the wicked conceals violence." The words of the righteous refresh people, like a spring in the desert. The words of the wicked cover over plans to harm.

"Hatred stirs up contentions, and love covers over all transgressions." Hatred digs up old wrongs and keeps the fight going. Love lets them go. Peter quotes this: "love will cover a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). This does not mean love hides crimes or ignores abuse. It means love forgives, does not keep score and does not spread a person's faults around (17:9).

10:13-14 *On the lips of a discerning **one** wisdom is found, and a rod **is** for the back of one lacking sense. Wise **ones** store up knowledge, and the mouth of a fool **is** ruin near.*

"On the lips of a discerning one wisdom is found, and a rod is for the back of one lacking sense." The wise man's words show his wisdom. The fool will not learn from words, so he learns from pain.

"Wise ones store up knowledge, and the mouth of a fool is ruin near." The wise collect knowledge and keep it for the right time. The fool says everything he thinks, and ruin is never far away.

10:15-16 *The wealth of a rich **man is** the town of his strength; the ruin of **the** poor **is** their poverty. The wages of **the** righteous **is** for life; the produce of **the** wicked **is** for sin.*

"The wealth of a rich man is the town of his strength; the ruin of the poor is their poverty." This is an observation, not a command. Money gives a kind of protection, like a walled town. Poverty leaves people exposed to every trouble. Proverbs will also warn that wealth is a false security if we trust in it (11:28; 18:11).

"The wages of the righteous is for life; the produce of the wicked is for sin." What the righteous earn goes to good use. What the wicked gain feeds more sin. Paul says the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

10:17 *A path to life **is** he who keeps discipline, and he who forsakes rebuke leads astray.*

"A path to life is he who keeps discipline, and he who forsakes rebuke leads astray." The one who accepts correction not only walks the path of life, he shows it to others. The one who refuses correction leads others astray with him. Our response to correction affects more people than ourselves.

10:18-21 *He who conceals hatred **has** lips of falsehood, and he who brings out slander, he **is** a fool. In a multitude of words transgression does not cease, and he who restrains his lips acts prudently. The tongue of **the** righteous **is** choice silver; the heart of **the** wicked **is** like a little **thing**. The lips of **the** righteous feed many, and fools die by lack of heart.*

Four sayings about speech. "He who conceals hatred has lips of falsehood, and he who brings out slander, he is a fool." Whether you hide hatred behind a smile or spread it with gossip, both are wrong.

"In a multitude of words transgression does not cease, and he who restrains his lips acts prudently." The more we talk, the more likely we are to sin with our words. James says to be quick to hear and slow to speak (James 1:19).

"The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the heart of the wicked is like a little thing." Good words are valuable. A wicked heart is worth very little.

"The lips of the righteous feed many, and fools die by lack of heart." Godly words nourish people like food. Fools cannot even feed themselves.

10:22 *The blessing of the LORD, it makes rich, and He does not add sorrow with it.*

"The blessing of the LORD, it makes rich, and He does not add sorrow with it." Riches gained by our own scheming often bring worry and pain with them. What God gives comes without that sting. This does not mean every believer will be wealthy. God's riches may be in money or in things money cannot buy: peace, family, joy and a clear conscience.

10:23 *To do a wicked scheme **is** like sport for a fool, and wisdom for a man of understanding.*

"To do a wicked scheme is like sport for a fool, and wisdom for a man of understanding." The fool treats sin as a game. He laughs about it. The man of understanding takes delight in wisdom the way the fool delights in mischief. What we enjoy shows who we are.

10:24-25 *The dread of **the** wicked, it will come to him, and the desire of **the** righteous will be given. When a storm-wind passes by, then the wicked **is** no more; and a righteous **one is** an everlasting foundation.*

"The dread of the wicked, it will come to him, and the desire of the righteous will be given." The wicked often fear judgment deep down, and in the end it comes. The righteous long for good things from God, and in the end God gives them.

"When a storm-wind passes by, then the wicked is no more; and a righteous one is an everlasting foundation." Jesus told of two houses, one on the sand and one on the rock. When the storm came, only one stood (Matthew 7:24-27). The righteous are built on a foundation that cannot be moved.

10:26 *Like vinegar to the teeth and like smoke to the eyes, so **is** the sluggard to those who send him.*

"Like vinegar to the teeth and like smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him." Send a lazy man on an errand and you will be irritated, like sour vinegar on your teeth or smoke in your eyes. A worker who cannot be trusted is a constant pain to the one who depends on him.

10:27 *The fear of the LORD adds days, and the years of **the** wicked will be short.*

"The fear of the LORD adds days, and the years of the wicked will be short." This is a good place to see how to read a proverb. It is true as a general rule. A life lived in the fear of the LORD avoids much that shortens life: violence, drunkenness, sexual sin, reckless anger and the stress of guilt. The wicked often bring early death on themselves.

But is it a promise that every godly person will live long and every wicked person will die young? No. Abel was righteous and was murdered young (Genesis 4:8). Stephen and James were killed early in their service for Christ (Acts 7:59-60; 12:2). Some wicked men live to old age, and the psalmist struggled with that very thing (Psalm 73:3-12). Proverbs describes how God's world usually works. It does not tie God's hands in every case. And in the deepest sense the verse is always true: the one who fears the LORD has eternal life, and his days with God will never end.

10:28-30 *The expectation of **the** righteous **is** joy, and the hope of **the** wicked will perish. The way of the LORD **is** a stronghold for integrity, and ruin for those who do evil. **The** righteous will never be shaken, and **the** wicked will not dwell **in the** land.*

"The expectation of the righteous is joy, and the hope of the wicked will perish." The righteous have a hope that ends in joy. The wicked put their hope in things that will not last.

"The way of the LORD is a stronghold for integrity, and ruin for those who do evil." The same way of the LORD is safety for the upright and destruction for the wicked. God's ways do not change. What changes is how we stand toward them.

"The righteous will never be shaken, and the wicked will not dwell in the land." For Israel, staying in the land was the sign of God's blessing (2:21-22). The righteous have a place that cannot be taken away.

10:31-32 *The mouth of a righteous **one** will bear fruit **of** wisdom, and a tongue of perversities will be cut off. The lips of **the** righteous know **what is** acceptable, and the mouth of **the** wicked **knows** perversities.*

"The mouth of a righteous one will bear fruit of wisdom, and a tongue of perversities will be cut off." Good words are like a tree that bears good fruit. Twisted words will be cut off like a dead branch.

"The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, and the mouth of the wicked knows perversities." The righteous know what is fitting to say: what will help, encourage or heal. The wicked know only how to twist. The chapter ends where it spent much of its time, on the power of words. Jesus said that by our words we will be justified, and by our words we will be condemned (Matthew 12:37).

Chapter 10 Summary

Chapter 10 begins the proverbs of Solomon, single sayings that mostly set two kinds of people side by side. A wise son brings joy and a foolish son brings grief. Wealth gained by wickedness does not profit, but righteousness delivers from death, and the LORD provides for the righteous. Diligent work tends to bring plenty and laziness tends to bring poverty. The righteous are remembered with blessing, walk in security and stand on an everlasting foundation, while the name of the wicked rots and they are swept away. Many sayings speak of the mouth: the righteous speak words that are a fountain of life, that feed many and know what is fitting, while the wicked hide violence and slander behind their words. Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all wrongs. The fear of the LORD adds days, a general truth about how life usually goes under God, not a promise for every case.

Chapter 10 Study Questions

1. How do the choices of a son affect his father and mother? (10:1)

2. What does the LORD do for the righteous, and what does He do with the craving of the wicked? (10:3)

3. What do verses 4 and 5 teach about work and timing? (10:4-5)

4. How do hatred and love handle wrongs differently? (10:12; 1 Peter 4:8)

5. What happens to the person who keeps correction, and to the one who forsakes it? (10:17)

6. Why does a multitude of words often lead to sin? (10:19; James 1:19)

7. How does the blessing of the LORD differ from riches gained other ways? (10:22)

8. Is 10:27 a promise that every godly person will live a long life? How should we read it? (10:27)

9. Think about your words this past week. Were they more like a fountain of life or something else? (10:11, 21)

10. How would you like to be remembered? What would need to change now for that to happen? (10:7)

Chapter 11: The Upright and the Treacherous

Scripture

11:1-15 Scales of deceit ***are*** an abomination of the LORD, and a perfect weight ***is*** His delight. Pride comes, and shame comes; and with ***the*** modest ***is*** wisdom. The integrity of ***the*** upright guides them, and the crookedness of ***the*** treacherous destroys them. Wealth does not profit in ***the*** day of fury, and righteousness delivers from death. The righteousness of a blameless ***one*** makes his way straight, and by his wickedness a wicked ***one*** falls. The righteousness of ***the*** upright delivers them, and by the craving of ***the*** treacherous they are caught. At the death of a wicked man hope will perish, and the expectation of strength has perished. A righteous ***one*** is delivered from distress, and a wicked ***one*** comes in his place. By ***the*** mouth a godless ***one*** ruins his neighbor, and by knowledge ***the*** righteous are delivered. In the prosperity of ***the*** righteous a town rejoices, and when ***the*** wicked perish ***there is*** a shout of joy. By the blessing of ***the*** upright a town is exalted, and by the mouth of ***the*** wicked it is torn down. He who despises his neighbor ***is*** lacking sense, and a man of understanding keeps quiet. He who goes about ***as*** a slanderer reveals a secret, and one faithful of spirit conceals a matter. When ***there is*** no guidance, a people falls, and victory ***is*** in a multitude of counselors. He will surely be harmed, for he has stood surety for a stranger; and he who hates those who strike ***hands is*** secure.

11:16-31 A woman of grace lays hold of honor, and ruthless ***ones*** lay hold of wealth. A man of steadfast love deals bountifully with his ***own*** soul, and a cruel ***one*** troubles his ***own*** body. A wicked ***one*** makes wages of falsehood, and he who sows righteousness ***has*** a reward of truth. True righteousness ***is*** for life, and he who pursues evil ***is*** for his ***own*** death. Those perverse of heart ***are*** an abomination of the LORD, and those blameless of way ***are*** His delight. Hand to hand, an evil ***one*** will not go unpunished, and the seed of ***the*** righteous will be delivered. ***As*** a ring of gold in the nose of a pig, ***so is*** a woman beautiful and turning aside from discretion. The desire of ***the*** righteous ***is*** only good; the hope of ***the*** wicked ***is*** fury. There is one who scatters, and he is increased still; and one who withholds from uprightness, only to poverty. A soul of blessing will be made fat, and he who gives water, he also will be given water. He who withholds grain, ***the*** people curse him, and a blessing ***is*** for the head of him who sells grain. He who diligently seeks good seeks favor, and he who seeks evil, it will come to him. He who trusts in his wealth, he will fall, and like the leaf ***the*** righteous will bud. He who troubles his household will inherit wind, and a fool ***will be*** a servant to the wise of heart. The fruit of ***the*** righteous ***is*** a tree of life, and he who takes souls ***is*** wise. Look, a righteous ***one*** is repaid on the earth; how much more a wicked ***one*** and a sinner!

Chapter 11 Preview

Chapter 11 keeps setting the righteous and the wicked side by side. It opens with honest business: God hates crooked scales and delights in a fair weight. It warns that pride brings shame, that wealth cannot help on the day of judgment, and that righteousness guides and delivers those who walk in it. A whole city feels the difference between the upright and the wicked, and a nation needs wise counsel to stand.

The second half of the chapter speaks a great deal about money and generosity. The one who gives freely grows richer, and the one who holds back grows poorer. The one who hoards grain is cursed, and the one who sells it is blessed. The one who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf. The chapter ends with the fruit of the righteous as a tree of life, and a reminder that God repays both the righteous and the wicked on the earth.

Chapter 11 Study

11:1 *Scales of deceit **are** an abomination of the LORD, and a perfect weight **is** His delight.*

"Scales of deceit are an abomination of the LORD, and a perfect weight is His delight." In the market, goods were weighed on a balance against stone weights. A dishonest merchant might carry two sets of weights, a heavy one for buying and a light one for selling. The Law forbade it (Leviticus 19:35-36; Deuteronomy 25:13-16). God cares about how we do business. Cheating a customer, padding a bill or cutting corners on a job is not a small thing to Him. It is an abomination. Honesty is His delight.

11:2 *Pride comes, and shame comes; and with **the** modest **is** wisdom.*

"Pride comes, and shame comes; and with the modest is wisdom." Pride and shame arrive together. The proud person sets himself up to be humbled. Jesus said everyone who exalts himself will be humbled (Luke 14:11). The modest, the humble, are the ones who are wise, because they are willing to learn.

11:3-6 *The integrity of **the** upright guides them, and the crookedness of **the** treacherous destroys them. Wealth does not profit in **the** day of fury, and righteousness delivers from death. The righteousness of a blameless **one** makes his way straight, and by his wickedness a wicked **one** falls. The righteousness of **the** upright delivers them, and by the craving of **the** treacherous they are caught.*

Four sayings about how righteousness guides and protects. "The integrity of the upright guides them, and the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them." A person with integrity does not have to figure out each day which lie to tell. His character guides him.

"Wealth does not profit in the day of fury, and righteousness delivers from death." The day of fury is the day God's judgment falls. No amount of money can buy a way out on that day (Zephaniah 1:18).

"The righteousness of a blameless one makes his way straight, and by his wickedness a wicked one falls." Right living clears the road ahead. Wickedness trips people up.

"The righteousness of the upright delivers them, and by the craving of the treacherous they are caught." The treacherous are trapped by their own greed. Their desires become their snare.

11:7-8 *At the death of a wicked man hope will perish, and the expectation of strength has perished. A righteous **one** is delivered from distress, and a wicked **one** comes in his place.*

"At the death of a wicked man hope will perish, and the expectation of strength has perished." For the wicked, death ends every hope. Everything he lived for stays behind. For the believer, death is not the end of hope but the door to it (Philippians 1:21).

"A righteous one is delivered from distress, and a wicked one comes in his place." Haman built gallows for Mordecai and was hanged on them himself (Esther 7:10). Often the trouble the wicked plan for others falls on them instead.

11:9-11 *By **the** mouth a godless **one** ruins his neighbor, and by knowledge **the** righteous are delivered. In the prosperity of **the** righteous a town rejoices, and when **the** wicked perish **there is** a shout of joy. By the blessing of **the** upright a town is exalted, and by the mouth of **the** wicked it is torn down.*

Three sayings about how people affect their neighbors and their town. "By the mouth a godless one ruins his neighbor, and by knowledge the righteous are delivered." Lies and slander can ruin a neighbor. Knowledge of the truth sets the righteous free.

"In the prosperity of the righteous a town rejoices, and when the wicked perish there is a shout of joy." When good people do well, a whole community is glad. When the wicked are removed, people celebrate.

"By the blessing of the upright a town is exalted, and by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down." Godly people bless their cities by their prayers, their work and their example. Wicked words tear a city apart. Christians are called to seek the good of the place where they live (Jeremiah 29:7).

11:12-13 *He who despises his neighbor **is** lacking sense, and a man of understanding keeps quiet. He who goes about **as** a slanderer reveals a secret, and one faithful of spirit conceals a matter.*

Two sayings about holding your tongue. "He who despises his neighbor is lacking sense, and a man of understanding keeps quiet." It takes no wisdom to belittle others. The wise man knows when to say nothing.

"He who goes about as a slanderer reveals a secret, and one faithful of spirit conceals a matter." The gossip cannot keep a secret. He carries stories from house to house. A faithful friend can be trusted with what you tell him. Which kind of friend are you?

11:14 *When **there is** no guidance, a people falls, and victory **is** in a multitude of counselors.*

"When there is no guidance, a people falls, and victory is in a multitude of counselors." Leaders who will not listen to advice lead their nations to ruin. Wise leaders gather many counselors. Solomon's own son Rehoboam rejected the counsel of the older men and lost most of his kingdom (1 Kings 12:6-16). The same holds for families, churches and businesses. None of us sees everything. We need others.

11:15 *He will surely be harmed, for he has stood surety for a stranger; and he who hates those who strike* ***hands is*** *secure.*

"He will surely be harmed, for he has stood surety for a stranger." Proverbs warns again about putting up security for someone else's debt, especially a stranger's (6:1-5). "And he who hates those who strike hands is secure." Striking hands sealed such a deal. The one who refuses to make careless promises keeps himself safe.

11:16 *A woman of grace lays hold of honor, and ruthless* ***ones*** *lay hold of wealth.*

"A woman of grace lays hold of honor, and ruthless ones lay hold of wealth." A gracious woman gains honor. Ruthless men gain money. Both get what they go after, but honor is worth more (22:1). The woman of grace is the opposite of the loud and boisterous woman of chapters 7 and 9.

11:17 *A man of steadfast love deals bountifully with his* ***own*** *soul, and a cruel* ***one*** *troubles his* ***own*** *body.*

"A man of steadfast love deals bountifully with his own soul, and a cruel one troubles his own body." Kindness blesses the one who shows it. Cruelty comes back on the cruel. When we show hesed, steadfast love, to others, we find joy ourselves. Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

11:18-19 *A wicked* ***one*** *makes wages of falsehood, and he who sows righteousness* ***has*** *a reward of truth. True righteousness* ***is*** *for life, and he who pursues evil* ***is*** *for his* ***own*** *death.*

"A wicked one makes wages of falsehood, and he who sows righteousness has a reward of truth." The wages of the wicked are deceptive. They seem real, but they do not last. Righteousness is like seed sown in the ground. It brings a true and lasting harvest.

"True righteousness is for life, and he who pursues evil is for his own death." These are the two roads Proverbs keeps showing us. Each one leads to its own end.

11:20-21 *Those perverse of heart* ***are*** *an abomination of the LORD, and those blameless of way* ***are*** *His delight. Hand to hand, an evil* ***one*** *will not go unpunished, and the seed of* ***the*** *righteous will be delivered.*

"Those perverse of heart are an abomination of the LORD, and those blameless of way are His delight." God hates the twisted heart and delights in the one whose life is whole and straight.

"Hand to hand, an evil one will not go unpunished." The phrase "hand to hand" means you can count on it, as sure as a handshake. Evil will be punished. "And the seed of the righteous will be delivered." The children of the righteous will be kept safe. God's justice may seem slow, but it is sure.

11:22 ***As*** *a ring of gold in the nose of a pig,* ***so is*** *a woman beautiful and turning aside from discretion.*

"As a ring of gold in the nose of a pig, so is a woman beautiful and turning aside from discretion." A gold nose ring was jewelry in that world. Put it on a pig, and it is wasted and out of place. Beauty without good sense is the same. The proverb speaks of a woman, but it holds for men too. Outward looks without inner character are a waste. Peter says the beauty that matters to God is the hidden person of the heart (1 Peter 3:3-4).

11:23 *The desire of* ***the*** *righteous* ***is*** *only good; the hope of* ***the*** *wicked* ***is*** *fury.*

"The desire of the righteous is only good; the hope of the wicked is fury." What the righteous want leads to good. What the wicked hope for ends in God's wrath.

11:24-26 *There is one who scatters, and he is increased still; and one who withholds from uprightness, only to poverty. A soul of blessing will be made fat, and he who gives water, he also will be given water. He who withholds grain,* ***the*** *people curse him, and a blessing* ***is*** *for the head of him who sells grain.*

Three sayings about generosity. "There is one who scatters, and he is increased still; and one who withholds from uprightness, only to poverty." This sounds backward. How can giving away make you richer? But that is how God's world works. Generous people tend to be blessed, and stingy people often end up poorer, not only in money but in friends and joy. Paul says the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly (2 Corinthians 9:6).

"A soul of blessing will be made fat, and he who gives water, he also will be given water." The person who blesses others will be blessed. The one who refreshes others will be refreshed.

"He who withholds grain, the people curse him, and a blessing is for the head of him who sells grain." In a famine, a merchant might hoard grain to drive up the price. The people curse him. The one who sells it when it is needed is blessed. God cares about how we use what we have when others are in need.

Are these promises that giving will always make us rich? No. They are general truths about how generosity usually works out, and they speak of every kind of blessing, not only money. Jesus put it this way: "Give, and it will be given to you" (Luke 6:38). We do not give to get. We give because God has given to us. But we never lose by giving.

11:27 *He who diligently seeks good seeks favor, and he who seeks evil, it will come to him.*

"He who diligently seeks good seeks favor, and he who seeks evil, it will come to him." The one who goes looking for ways to do good finds favor with God and others. The one who goes looking for trouble will find it, and it will land on him.

11:28 *He who trusts in his wealth, he will fall, and like the leaf **the** righteous will bud.*

"He who trusts in his wealth, he will fall, and like the leaf the righteous will bud." Money is a poor thing to lean on. It can disappear overnight. Paul told Timothy to command the rich not to set their hope on uncertain riches but on God (1 Timothy 6:17). The righteous are like a green leaf, growing and alive (Psalm 1:3).

11:29 *He who troubles his household will inherit wind, and a fool **will be** a servant to the wise of heart.*

"He who troubles his household will inherit wind, and a fool will be a servant to the wise of heart." The man who brings trouble on his own family, through anger, foolishness or bad money choices, will end up with nothing, like trying to grab hold of the wind. The fool ends up working for the wise.

11:30 *The fruit of **the** righteous **is** a tree of life, and he who takes souls **is** wise.*

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who takes souls is wise." The life of a righteous person is like a tree of life, giving food and shade to others (3:18). "He who takes souls" here means the one who wins people over, who draws them to wisdom and life. For believers today, this points to bringing people to Christ. Daniel says those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever (Daniel 12:3).

11:31 *Look, a righteous **one** is repaid on the earth; how much more a wicked **one** and a sinner!*

"Look, a righteous one is repaid on the earth; how much more a wicked one and a sinner!" God's justice reaches into this life. If even the righteous are disciplined for their sins here, how much more will the wicked be judged? Peter quotes this verse from the Greek Old Testament: "And if the righteous one is saved with difficulty, the ungodly and sinner, where will he appear?" (1 Peter 4:18). No one escapes God's justice. That is why we all need the mercy He offers in Christ.

Chapter 11 Summary

Chapter 11 sets the upright and the treacherous side by side. The LORD hates dishonest scales and delights in honest weights. Pride brings shame, but the humble are wise. Integrity guides and delivers the upright, while the treacherous are trapped by their own crookedness and greed, and wealth cannot save on the day of wrath. The righteous bless their town, keep secrets and gather wise counsel, while the wicked tear down with their words. Kindness blesses the kind and cruelty troubles the cruel. Several sayings speak of generosity: the one who gives freely is blessed and refreshed, while the one who withholds grows poor and is cursed. The one who trusts in riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a leaf. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, the one who wins souls is wise, and God repays both the righteous and the wicked on the earth.

Chapter 11 Study Questions

1. Why does God care so much about honest scales and weights? What would that look like in your work? (11:1)

2. What comes along with pride, and what comes with humility? (11:2)

3. What can and cannot deliver a person in the day of fury? (11:4)

4. How do the righteous and the wicked affect their town? (11:10-11)

5. What does verse 13 say about the gossip and the faithful friend? (11:13)

6. Why does a people need many counselors? (11:14)

7. How can the one who scatters be made richer? Is this a promise of wealth? (11:24-26)

8. What does verse 28 say happens to the one who trusts in his wealth? (11:28)

9. Are you the kind of friend who can keep a matter private? How could you grow in this? (11:13)

10. Who in your life could you refresh or give water to this week? (11:25)

Chapter 12: The Diligent and the Slack

Scripture

12:1-14 He who loves discipline loves knowledge, and he who hates rebuke ***is*** stupid. A good ***one*** obtains favor from the LORD, and a man of evil devices He condemns. A man is not established by wickedness, and the root of ***the*** righteous will not be shaken. A wife of strength ***is*** the crown of her husband, and like rottenness in his bones ***is*** she who acts shamefully. The plans of ***the*** righteous ***are*** justice; the guidance of ***the*** wicked ***is*** deceit. The words of ***the*** wicked ***are*** to lie in wait for blood, and the mouth of ***the*** upright delivers them. ***The*** wicked are overthrown, and they ***are*** no more, and the house of ***the*** righteous will stand. According to his prudence a man is praised, and one perverted of heart will be for contempt. Better ***is*** one lightly esteemed who has a servant than one who honors himself and lacks bread. A righteous ***one*** knows the life of his animal, and the compassions of ***the*** wicked ***are*** cruel. He who works his ground will be satisfied ***with*** bread, and he who pursues worthless ***things is*** lacking sense. A wicked ***one*** covets the net of evil ***ones***, and the root of ***the*** righteous yields. In the transgression of ***the*** lips ***is*** an evil snare, and a righteous ***one*** comes out from trouble. From the fruit of the mouth of a man he will be satisfied ***with*** good, and the dealing of the hands of a man will be returned to him.

12:15-28 The way of a fool ***is*** right in his ***own*** eyes, and he who listens to counsel ***is*** wise. A fool, his vexation is known on the day, and he who conceals shame ***is*** prudent. He who breathes out faithfulness declares righteousness, and a witness of lies, deceit. There is one who speaks rashly like thrusts of a sword, and the tongue of ***the*** wise ***is*** healing. A lip of truth will be established forever, and a tongue of falsehood ***only*** for a moment. Deceit ***is*** in the heart of those who devise evil, and for counselors of peace ***is*** joy. No trouble will happen to the righteous, and ***the*** wicked are full ***of*** evil. Lips of falsehood ***are*** an abomination of the LORD, and doers of faithfulness ***are*** His delight. A prudent man conceals knowledge, and the heart of fools proclaims folly. The hand of ***the*** diligent will rule, and slackness will be for forced labor. Anxiety in the heart of a man bows it down, and a good word makes it glad. A righteous ***one*** is more excellent than his neighbor, and the way of ***the*** wicked leads them astray. Slackness does not roast its game, and the precious wealth of a man ***is*** diligence. In the path of righteousness ***is*** life, and ***in*** the way of ***its*** pathway ***there is*** no death.

Chapter 12 Preview

Chapter 12 opens with a hard saying: the one who loves discipline loves knowledge, and the one who hates rebuke is stupid. From there the chapter moves through many of the book's great themes. A good wife is her husband's crown. The righteous are rooted and will stand, while the wicked are overthrown. A righteous man even cares for his animals. Hard work brings bread and leadership, and laziness brings want and forced labor.

More than anything, this chapter is about words. It speaks of the lying lip and the truthful lip, rash words that cut like a sword and wise words that heal, a fool who shows his anger at once and a prudent man who covers an insult, anxious hearts and the good word that makes them glad. It ends with a promise: in the path of righteousness is life, and on that road there is no death.

Chapter 12 Study

12:1 *He who loves discipline loves knowledge, and he who hates rebuke **is** stupid.*

"He who loves discipline loves knowledge, and he who hates rebuke is stupid." Proverbs does not soften this one. The word stupid here describes someone who is like a dumb animal, who will not learn. If you want to grow, you have to welcome correction. If you hate it, you have chosen to stay where you are. That is a hard word, but a loving one.

12:2-3 *A good **one** obtains favor from the LORD, and a man of evil devices He condemns. A man is not established by wickedness, and the root of **the** righteous will not be shaken.*

"A good one obtains favor from the LORD, and a man of evil devices He condemns." God looks at the heart and the plans we make. The good receive His favor. The schemer receives His judgment.

"A man is not established by wickedness, and the root of the righteous will not be shaken." Wickedness may build something that looks strong, but it has no roots. The righteous are like a tree with deep roots. Storms will come, but they will not be torn up (Psalm 1:3; Jeremiah 17:7-8).

12:4 *A wife of strength **is** the crown of her husband, and like rottenness in his bones **is** she who acts shamefully.*

"A wife of strength is the crown of her husband, and like rottenness in his bones is she who acts shamefully." A wife of strength, the same phrase used in 31:10, is a woman of noble character, strong in faith, wisdom and work. She brings her husband honor, like a crown. A wife who brings shame on her home eats away at her husband from the inside, like a disease in the bones. Of course the same is true of husbands. A godly spouse is one of God's greatest gifts.

12:5-7 *The plans of **the** righteous **are** justice; the guidance of **the** wicked **is** deceit. The words of **the** wicked **are** to lie in wait for blood, and the mouth of **the** upright delivers them. **The** wicked are overthrown, and they **are** no more, and the house of **the** righteous will stand.*

"The plans of the righteous are justice; the guidance of the wicked is deceit." What people think about shows in what they do. The righteous plan what is fair. The wicked give advice that misleads.

"The words of the wicked are to lie in wait for blood, and the mouth of the upright delivers them." Wicked words can set traps for others, like the gang in chapter 1. The words of the upright rescue people.

"The wicked are overthrown, and they are no more, and the house of the righteous will stand." This is the end of the two roads again. The wicked fall and are gone. The house of the righteous stands (10:25).

12:8-9 *According to his prudence a man is praised, and one perverted of heart will be for contempt. Better **is** one lightly esteemed who has a servant than one who honors himself and lacks bread.*

"According to his prudence a man is praised, and one perverted of heart will be for contempt." Good sense earns respect. A twisted heart earns scorn.

"Better is one lightly esteemed who has a servant than one who honors himself and lacks bread." This is the first of many "better" sayings. It is better to be an ordinary person with enough to live on than a show-off who acts important but cannot feed his family. Pride often spends what it does not have.

12:10 *A righteous **one** knows the life of his animal, and the compassions of **the** wicked **are** cruel.*

"A righteous one knows the life of his animal, and the compassions of the wicked are cruel." A righteous man cares for his animals. He knows what they need and treats them well. The Law commanded rest for animals on the Sabbath (Exodus 23:12) and forbade muzzling an ox while it worked (Deuteronomy 25:4). God cares for His creatures (Jonah 4:11), and those who love Him do too. The wicked are so hard that even their kindness is cruel. How we treat those who cannot speak for themselves shows our heart.

12:11-12 *He who works his ground will be satisfied **with** bread, and he who pursues worthless **things is** lacking sense. A wicked **one** covets the net of evil **ones**, and the root of **the** righteous yields.*

"He who works his ground will be satisfied with bread, and he who pursues worthless things is lacking sense." Steady, ordinary work puts food on the table. Chasing get-rich-quick schemes and empty pursuits shows a lack of sense.

"A wicked one covets the net of evil ones, and the root of the righteous yields." The wicked envy what other evil men have caught by their schemes. The righteous do not need to. Their root bears fruit on its own.

12:13-14 *In the transgression of **the** lips **is** an evil snare, and a righteous **one** comes out from trouble. From the fruit of the mouth of a man he will be satisfied **with** good, and the dealing of the hands of a man will be returned to him.*

"In the transgression of the lips is an evil snare, and a righteous one comes out from trouble." The wicked are often caught by their own words. A lie leads to another lie, until the liar is trapped. The righteous, who speak the truth, find their way out of trouble.

"From the fruit of the mouth of a man he will be satisfied with good, and the dealing of the hands of a man will be returned to him." Our words and our work both come back to us. Good words bring a good harvest. What we do with our hands returns to us. Paul says whatever a man sows, that he will also reap (Galatians 6:7).

12:15-16 *The way of a fool **is** right in his **own** eyes, and he who listens to counsel **is** wise. A fool, his vexation is known on the day, and he who conceals shame **is** prudent.*

Two sayings about how fools and wise people act. "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, and he who listens to counsel is wise." The fool never doubts himself. He thinks he is always right, so he never asks for advice. The wise man knows he can be wrong, so he listens.

"A fool, his vexation is known on the day, and he who conceals shame is prudent." The fool shows his anger the moment he feels it. Everyone knows right away. The prudent man can take an insult without striking back. He covers it and lets it go. That is not weakness. It is strength under control (16:32).

12:17-19 *He who breathes out faithfulness declares righteousness, and a witness of lies, deceit. There is one who speaks rashly like thrusts of a sword, and the tongue of **the** wise **is** healing. A lip of truth will be established forever, and a tongue of falsehood **only** for a moment.*

Three sayings about truth and lies. "He who breathes out faithfulness declares righteousness, and a witness of lies, deceit." An honest witness tells what is right. A false witness tells lies. Courts and families and churches depend on people who tell the truth.

"There is one who speaks rashly like thrusts of a sword, and the tongue of the wise is healing." Careless words can stab. Most of us remember something cruel someone said to us years ago. But wise words heal. They can bind up a wound and bring life back. Paul tells us to let no rotten word come out of our mouths, but only what builds up and gives grace to those who hear (Ephesians 4:29).

"A lip of truth will be established forever, and a tongue of falsehood only for a moment." The truth lasts. Lies may work for a while, but they do not last. In the end, God's truth will stand.

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

"Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, and for counselors of peace is joy." Those who plot evil carry deceit inside them. Those who work for peace have joy. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9).

12:21 *No trouble will happen to the righteous, and **the** wicked are full **of** evil.*

"No trouble will happen to the righteous, and the wicked are full of evil." Read alone, this sounds like a promise that nothing bad will ever happen to a godly person. But the rest of the Bible, and our own lives, tell us that is not what it means. Job was righteous, and he lost almost everything (Job 1:1, 13-19). Jesus said that in the world we will have trouble (John 16:33). Paul suffered beatings, shipwrecks and prison (2 Corinthians 11:23-27).

So what does it mean? As a general truth, the righteous avoid much of the harm the wicked bring on themselves. And in the deepest sense, no harm can truly destroy a child of God. Even our trials are used by God for our good (Romans 8:28). Paul could say that nothing can separate us from

God's love (Romans 8:38-39). The wicked, on the other hand, are filled with evil, much of it of their own making.

12:22 *Lips of falsehood **are** an abomination of the LORD, and doers of faithfulness **are** His delight.*

"Lips of falsehood are an abomination of the LORD, and doers of faithfulness are His delight." God hates lying. That is strong language. Lying is on the list of seven things the LORD hates (6:17, 19). God is the God of truth, and He cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). When we lie, we act like the enemy. When we deal faithfully, we delight our Father.

12:23 *A prudent man conceals knowledge, and the heart of fools proclaims folly.*

"A prudent man conceals knowledge, and the heart of fools proclaims folly." The wise man does not have to show off everything he knows. He waits for the right time. The fool cannot wait to tell everyone what he thinks, and what comes out is folly.

12:24 *The hand of **the** diligent will rule, and slackness will be for forced labor.*

"The hand of the diligent will rule, and slackness will be for forced labor." Hard workers rise to leadership. Lazy people end up working for others, often in hard and unwanted jobs. Joseph worked faithfully as a slave and as a prisoner, and God raised him up to rule Egypt (Genesis 39:2-6, 22-23; 41:41).

12:25 *Anxiety in the heart of a man bows it down, and a good word makes it glad.*

"Anxiety in the heart of a man bows it down, and a good word makes it glad." Worry is heavy. It weighs a person down. Many people carry anxiety that no one else can see. A kind, encouraging word can lift that weight. Who in your life needs a good word today? And when we are anxious ourselves, we can cast our cares on the Lord, because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7).

12:26 *A righteous **one** is more excellent than his neighbor, and the way of **the** wicked leads them astray.*

"A righteous one is more excellent than his neighbor, and the way of the wicked leads them astray." The Hebrew of the first line can be read in more than one way. The SLB says the righteous man is more excellent than his neighbor: his life stands out from the people around him. Other translations say he guides his neighbor or chooses his friends with care. Either way, the righteous are careful about relationships. The wicked lead others, and themselves, astray.

12:27 *Slackness does not roast its game, and the precious wealth of a man **is** diligence.*

"Slackness does not roast its game." The lazy hunter goes out and catches something, and then he is too lazy to cook it. He starts things and never finishes. "And the precious wealth of a man is diligence." A man's most valuable possession is not what he owns. It is the habit of working hard and following through.

12:28 *In the path of righteousness **is** life, and **in** the way of **its** pathway **there is** no death.*

"In the path of righteousness is life, and in the way of its pathway there is no death." The chapter ends with a great promise. The road of righteousness leads to life, and on it there is no death. Some see in this one of the Old Testament's glimpses of life beyond the grave, that the righteous will live on with God. I believe it is true in its fullest sense in Christ, who said that whoever believes in Him will never die (John 11:25-26).

Chapter 12 Summary

Chapter 12 begins by saying that whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates rebuke is stupid. A good man receives favor from the LORD, and the righteous are rooted and will stand, while the wicked are overthrown. A wife of strength is her husband's crown. The righteous care even for their animals. Steady work brings bread and leadership, while laziness brings want and forced labor, and diligence is a man's precious wealth. Many sayings deal with words: lies are an abomination to the LORD, rash words cut like a sword, and wise words heal. The fool shows his anger at once and thinks he is always right, while the prudent man covers an insult and listens to counsel. Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a good word makes it glad. The chapter ends with the promise that in the path of righteousness is life, and in it there is no death.

Healing words, to me, are loving, peaceful, caring, strong and gentle all at the same time. I have been on both sides of words that cut. Proverbs 12:18 says the tongue of the wise brings healing. I want my words to do that.

Chapter 12 Study Questions

1. What does verse 1 say about the person who hates rebuke? Why such strong words? (12:1)

2. What does a wife of strength bring to her husband? (12:4)

3. How does a righteous person treat his animals, and what does that show? (12:10)

4. How does the fool respond to an insult, and how does the prudent man respond? (12:16)

5. What two kinds of words are compared in verse 18? (12:18)

6. How long does truth last, and how long does a lie last? (12:19)

7. Does 12:21 mean nothing bad will ever happen to a believer? How should we read it? (12:21; John 16:33)

8. What does the lazy man fail to do with his game, and what is the precious wealth of a man? (12:27)

9. Is there someone in your life weighed down by anxiety who needs a good word from you? (12:25)

10. Think of a time someone's words cut you, or a time your words cut someone. What would healing words have looked like? (12:18)

Chapter 13: Walking With the Wise

Scripture

13:1-12 A wise son ***hears*** the discipline of a father, and a mocker does not listen to rebuke. From the fruit of the mouth of a man he eats good, and the soul of ***the*** treacherous ***is*** violence. He who guards his mouth keeps his soul; he who opens wide his lips, ruin ***is*** for him. The soul of a sluggard craves, and ***there is*** nothing, and the soul of ***the*** diligent will be made fat. A righteous ***one*** hates a word of falsehood, and a wicked ***one*** acts odiously and acts shamefully. Righteousness guards integrity of way, and wickedness subverts sin. There is one who makes himself rich, and ***there is*** not anything; one who makes himself poor, and ***there is*** great wealth. The ransom of the life of a man ***is*** his riches, and a poor ***one*** does not hear rebuke. The light of ***the*** righteous rejoices, and the lamp of ***the*** wicked will be put out. Only through pride ***does one*** give contention, and with those who take counsel ***is*** wisdom. Wealth from vanity will diminish, and he who gathers by hand will increase ***it***. Expectation deferred makes ***the*** heart sick, and a tree of life ***is*** desire that comes.

13:13-25 He who despises a word will be in pledge to it, and he who fears a commandment, he will be repaid. The instruction of a wise ***one is*** a fountain of life, to turn aside from the snares of death. Good insight gives favor, and the way of ***the*** treacherous ***is*** hard. Every prudent ***one*** acts with knowledge, and a fool spreads out folly. A wicked messenger falls into evil, and an envoy of faithfulness ***is*** healing. Poverty and shame ***are for*** him who ignores discipline, and he who keeps rebuke is honored. Desire fulfilled is sweet to the soul, and to turn aside from evil ***is*** an abomination of fools. He who walks with wise ***ones*** will become wise, and he who associates with fools will be harmed. Calamity pursues sinners, and good repays ***the*** righteous. A good ***one*** leaves an inheritance to children of children, and the wealth of a sinner ***is*** stored up for the righteous. Abundance of food ***is in*** the fallow ground of poor ***ones***, and there is ***what*** is swept away for lack of justice. He who withholds his rod hates his son, and he who loves him seeks him early ***with*** discipline. A righteous ***one*** eats to the satisfying of his soul, and the belly of ***the*** wicked will lack.

Chapter 13 Preview

Chapter 13 begins and ends in the home. It opens with a wise son who listens to his father's discipline, and it closes with a father who loves his son enough to correct him. In between are sayings about guarding the mouth, about the difference between real wealth and the show of wealth, about money gained quickly and money gathered slowly, and about the heartache of hope put off and the joy of a desire fulfilled.

The best known verse in the chapter is about friends: whoever walks with the wise will become wise, but the companion of fools will be harmed. The people we spend time with shape who we become. Other sayings speak of good insight that wins favor, faithful messengers who bring healing, the value of correction, and God's justice that in the end repays both sinners and the righteous.

Chapter 13 Study

13:1 *A wise son **hears** the discipline of a father, and a mocker does not listen to rebuke.*

"A wise son hears the discipline of a father, and a mocker does not listen to rebuke." The difference between the wise son and the mocker is not how smart they are. It is whether they listen. The wise son wants to learn. The mocker laughs off correction. Which one we become is our own choice (9:12).

13:2-3 *From the fruit of the mouth of a man he eats good, and the soul of **the** treacherous **is** violence. He who guards his mouth keeps his soul; he who opens wide his lips, ruin **is** for him.*

Two sayings about the mouth. "From the fruit of the mouth of a man he eats good, and the soul of the treacherous is violence." Good words bear good fruit, and the one who speaks them enjoys it (12:14). The treacherous hunger for violence.

"He who guards his mouth keeps his soul; he who opens wide his lips, ruin is for him." Guarding the mouth protects the whole person. Many people have ruined a marriage, a friendship or a career with a few careless words. Think before you speak. David prayed, "Set, LORD, a guard for my mouth" (Psalm 141:3).

13:4 *The soul of a sluggard craves, and **there is** nothing, and the soul of **the** diligent will be made fat.*

"The soul of a sluggard craves, and there is nothing, and the soul of the diligent will be made fat." The lazy man wants many things, but wanting is all he does. Wishing is not working. The diligent are satisfied because they put their hands to what they want.

13:5-6 *A righteous **one** hates a word of falsehood, and a wicked **one** acts odiously and acts shamefully. Righteousness guards integrity of way, and wickedness subverts sin.*

"A righteous one hates a word of falsehood, and a wicked one acts odiously and acts shamefully." The righteous hate lies, even small ones. The wicked act in ways that bring disgust and shame.

"Righteousness guards integrity of way, and wickedness subverts sin." Righteousness is like a guard around the one who walks straight. Wickedness overthrows the sinner. The last word of the verse, sin, stands for the sinner himself. His own wickedness brings him down.

13:7-8 *There is one who makes himself rich, and **there is** not anything; one who makes himself poor, and **there is** great wealth. The ransom of the life of a man **is** his riches, and a poor **one** does not hear rebuke.*

Two sayings about money. "There is one who makes himself rich, and there is not anything; one who makes himself poor, and there is great wealth." Some people pretend to be rich and have nothing but debt. Others live simply and have more than anyone knows. Appearances can lie. This also points to a deeper truth: a person can be rich in this world and poor toward God, or poor in this world and rich in faith (Luke 12:21; James 2:5).

"The ransom of the life of a man is his riches, and a poor one does not hear rebuke." A rich man may have to pay ransom to robbers or kidnappers. Riches make a person a target. The poor man has nothing anyone wants to take, so no one threatens him. Wealth has its own troubles.

13:9 *The light of **the** righteous rejoices, and the lamp of **the** wicked will be put out.*

"The light of the righteous rejoices, and the lamp of the wicked will be put out." The life of the righteous is like a bright, cheerful light. The life of the wicked is like a lamp that will soon go out. In that world, a lamp burning in a house meant someone lived there. A lamp put out meant the family was gone.

13:10 *Only through pride **does one** give contention, and with those who take counsel **is** wisdom.*

"Only through pride does one give contention, and with those who take counsel is wisdom." Pride is behind most quarrels. The proud must always be right and always have the last word. The humble are willing to listen and take advice. If you are in a lot of fights, look for pride first, starting with your own.

13:11 *Wealth from vanity will diminish, and he who gathers by hand will increase **it**.*

"Wealth from vanity will diminish, and he who gathers by hand will increase it." Wealth from vanity is money that comes from nothing: easy money, schemes, gambling, dishonest gain. It tends to slip away as fast as it came. Money gathered slowly, little by little, by honest work tends to grow. Slow and steady usually wins.

13:12 *Expectation deferred makes **the** heart sick, and a tree of life **is** desire that comes.*

"Expectation deferred makes the heart sick, and a tree of life is desire that comes." When something we hope for keeps being put off, our hearts grow sick. Many have known this: waiting for a child, for healing, for a prodigal to come home, for a job, for a spouse. The Bible does not pretend this is easy. But when the desire is fulfilled, it is like a tree of life. Our greatest hope, the return of Christ, has been long delayed in our eyes, but it will surely come, and on that day every longing will be satisfied (2 Peter 3:8-9; Revelation 21:4).

13:13-14 *He who despises a word will be in pledge to it, and he who fears a commandment, he will be repaid. The instruction of a wise **one is** a fountain of life, to turn aside from the snares of death.*

"He who despises a word will be in pledge to it, and he who fears a commandment, he will be repaid." The one who despises God's Word will have to pay for it, like a debtor who owes on a pledge. The one who respects God's commands will be rewarded.

"The instruction of a wise one is a fountain of life, to turn aside from the snares of death." Good teaching is like a spring of fresh water. It gives life and helps us steer clear of traps. Almost the same words are used of the fear of the LORD in 14:27.

13:15-16 *Good insight gives favor, and the way of **the** treacherous **is** hard. Every prudent **one** acts with knowledge, and a fool spreads out folly.*

"Good insight gives favor, and the way of the treacherous is hard." Good sense wins people's respect. The second line says the way of the treacherous is hard. It is rough going, and it wears a person down. Either way, the treacherous do not win the favor that good insight brings.

"Every prudent one acts with knowledge, and a fool spreads out folly." The prudent think before they act. The fool spreads his folly out for all to see, like a peddler laying out his goods.

13:17 *A wicked messenger falls into evil, and an envoy of faithfulness **is** healing.*

"A wicked messenger falls into evil, and an envoy of faithfulness is healing." In a world without phones or mail, messengers mattered. A bad messenger could ruin a deal or start a war. A faithful one brought healing. The church is called to be faithful messengers of the good news (2 Corinthians 5:20).

13:18 *Poverty and shame **are for** him who ignores discipline, and he who keeps rebuke is honored.*

"Poverty and shame are for him who ignores discipline, and he who keeps rebuke is honored." Refusing correction leads to ruin. Accepting it leads to honor. Over and over Proverbs says the same thing because we need to hear it over and over.

13:19 *Desire fulfilled is sweet to the soul, and to turn aside from evil **is** an abomination of fools.*

"Desire fulfilled is sweet to the soul, and to turn aside from evil is an abomination of fools." Getting what we long for is sweet. But fools so love their evil that turning from it is unbearable to them. They will not give up their sin even to have what would truly satisfy them.

13:20 *He who walks with wise **ones** will become wise, and he who associates with fools will be harmed.*

"He who walks with wise ones will become wise, and he who associates with fools will be harmed." This is one of the most practical verses in the book. We become like the people we spend time with. Walk with the wise, and their wisdom rubs off on you. Spend your time with fools, and you will share their harm.

This is true for young people choosing friends, and it is true for adults too. Who are you walking with? Who are your children walking with? Paul says, "bad associations corrupt good morals" (1 Corinthians 15:33). This does not mean we never spend time with unbelievers. Jesus ate with sinners to reach them (Luke 15:1-2). It means we choose carefully whose voices shape us most.

13:21-22 *Calamity pursues sinners, and good repays **the** righteous. A good **one** leaves an inheritance to children of children, and the wealth of a sinner **is** stored up for the righteous.*

"Calamity pursues sinners, and good repays the righteous." Trouble follows sinners like a hunter. Good follows the righteous. This is the general pattern of God's world, and in eternity it will be true without exception.

"A good one leaves an inheritance to children of children, and the wealth of a sinner is stored up for the righteous." A good man thinks of his grandchildren. He works and saves so that he can leave something behind, and more than money, a good name and a godly example. The wealth of the wicked, gathered for himself, often ends up in other hands.

13:23 *Abundance of food **is in** the fallow ground of poor **ones**, and there is **what** is swept away for lack of justice.*

"Abundance of food is in the fallow ground of poor ones, and there is what is swept away for lack of justice." The fields of the poor could produce plenty of food, but injustice takes it away. This verse is important. It shows that Proverbs does not blame all poverty on laziness. Sometimes the poor are poor because others cheat them, steal from them or deny them justice. God sees that, and He cares (14:31; 22:22-23).

13:24 *He who withholds his rod hates his son, and he who loves him seeks him early **with** discipline.*

"He who withholds his rod hates his son, and he who loves him seeks him early with discipline." This verse has been misused, and it needs care. The rod was a picture of correction in that world, and the father in Proverbs did use physical discipline. The point of the verse is love. A father who never corrects his child is not being kind. He is failing him. Real love disciplines, and does it early, while the child is young and the habits are still forming. God disciplines His children the same way, because He loves them (3:11-12; Hebrews 12:6).

But this verse must never be used to excuse anger, cruelty or abuse. Discipline in Proverbs is controlled, fair and for the child's good, never in rage and never to harm. Paul tells fathers not to provoke their children to anger, but to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Godly parents today differ on whether to spank. They agree that a loving parent must correct a child, firmly and patiently. If anyone in your group was hurt as a child in the name of this verse, they need to hear that what was done to them was wrong, and that it was not what God meant.

13:25 *A righteous **one** eats to the satisfying of his soul, and the belly of **the** wicked will lack.*

"A righteous one eats to the satisfying of his soul, and the belly of the wicked will lack." The righteous have enough and are content. The wicked never have enough. They are always hungry for more. Paul learned the secret of being content in every situation (Philippians 4:11-13). Contentment is a gift God gives to those who trust Him.

Chapter 13 Summary

Chapter 13 opens with a wise son who listens to his father's discipline and a mocker who will not. Guarding the mouth protects the soul, while careless words bring ruin. The lazy crave and have nothing, but the diligent are satisfied. Some pretend to be rich and have nothing, while others live simply and have much. Pride causes quarrels, and the humble take counsel. Quick money dwindles, but money gathered little by little grows. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a

desire fulfilled is a tree of life. The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life. The one who walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools suffers harm. A good man leaves an inheritance to his grandchildren, injustice can sweep away the food of the poor, and a father who loves his son disciplines him early. The righteous eat and are satisfied, but the wicked always lack.

Chapter 13 Study Questions

1. What is the difference between a wise son and a mocker? (13:1)

2. What happens to the one who guards his mouth, and to the one who opens wide his lips? (13:3)

3. What does verse 7 teach about appearances and wealth? (13:7)

4. According to verse 10, what is behind most quarrels? (13:10)

5. How is money gained quickly different from money gathered slowly? (13:11)

6. What does verse 23 teach about the causes of poverty? (13:23)

7. How should we understand the rod in verse 24, and what must it never be used to excuse? (13:24; Ephesians 6:4)

8. Who are the people you walk with most? Are they making you wiser? (13:20)

9. Is there a hope in your life that has been deferred for a long time? How can you bring that to God? (13:12)

10. What kind of inheritance, beyond money, would you like to leave to the next generation? (13:22)

Chapter 14: A Way That Seems Right

Scripture

14:1-17 The wise of women builds her house, and folly tears it down with her hands. He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD, and he who is devious ***in*** his ways despises Him. In the mouth of a fool ***is*** a shoot of pride, and the lips of ***the*** wise will keep them. When ***there are*** no cattle, the trough ***is*** clean, and abundance of produce ***is*** by the strength of an ox. A witness of faithfulness will not lie, and a witness of falsehood breathes out lies. A mocker seeks wisdom, and ***there is*** none, and knowledge ***is*** easy for a discerning ***one***. Go from before a man ***who is*** a fool, and you will not have known lips of knowledge. The wisdom of a prudent ***one is*** to discern his way, and the folly of fools ***is*** deceit. Fools mock guilt, and among ***the*** upright ***is*** favor. A heart knows the bitterness of its ***own*** soul, and in its joy a stranger does not share. The house of ***the*** wicked will be destroyed, and the tent of ***the*** upright will flourish. There is a way right before a man, and its end ***is*** ways of death. Even in laughter a heart is in pain, and its end, joy, ***is*** grief. The backslider of heart will be satisfied from his ways, and a good man from himself. A simple ***one*** believes every word, and a prudent ***one*** considers his step. A wise ***one*** fears and turns aside from evil, and a fool is arrogant and confident. One short of anger does folly, and a man of evil devices is hated.

14:18-35 ***The*** simple inherit folly, and ***the*** prudent surround ***themselves with*** knowledge. Evil ***ones*** bow before good ***ones***, and wicked ***ones*** at the gates of a righteous ***one***. Even by his neighbor a poor ***one*** is hated, and those who love a rich ***one are*** many. He who despises his neighbor sins, and he who shows favor to ***the*** humble, how blessed ***is*** he! Do they not go astray, those who devise evil? And steadfast love and truth ***are for*** those who devise good. In all toil there is profit, and a word of lips ***leads*** only to poverty. The crown of ***the*** wise ***is*** their riches; the folly of fools ***is*** folly. A witness of truth delivers souls, and he who breathes out lies ***is*** deceit. In the fear of the LORD ***is*** confidence of strength, and for his children it will be a refuge. The fear of the LORD ***is*** a fountain of life, to turn aside from the snares of death. In the multitude of a people ***is*** the splendor of a king, and in the lack of people ***is*** the ruin of a ruler. One long of anger ***is*** great of understanding, and one short of spirit exalts folly. A heart of healing ***is*** the life of ***the*** flesh, and jealousy ***is*** rottenness of bones. He who oppresses a poor ***one*** reproaches his Maker, and he who shows favor to a needy ***one*** honors Him. By his evil a wicked ***one*** is thrust down, and a righteous ***one*** seeks refuge in his death. In the heart of a discerning ***one*** wisdom rests, and in the inner part of fools it is made known. Righteousness exalts a nation, and sin ***is*** a shame to peoples. The favor of a king ***is*** for a servant who acts prudently, and his fury will be ***on*** him who acts shamefully.

Chapter 14 Preview

Chapter 14 opens with two women and two houses: the wise woman builds her house, and folly tears hers down with her own hands. The chapter goes on to set the wise against the fool again and again. The fool's pride shows in his mouth, he mocks at guilt, he believes everything he hears, and he is quick to lose his temper. The prudent man thinks about his steps, turns from evil and is slow to anger.

At the center of the chapter is one of the most sobering verses in Proverbs: there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. The chapter also looks into the hidden places of the heart, where no one else can share our bitterness or our joy. And it speaks strongly about the poor: whoever oppresses them insults their Maker, and whoever is kind to the needy honors Him. It closes with a word for whole nations: righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.

Chapter 14 Study

14:1 *The wise of women builds her house, and folly tears it down with her hands.*

"The wise of women builds her house, and folly tears it down with her hands." A wise woman builds up her home with her care, her words, her work and her faith. A foolish one tears it down, and she does it with her own hands. Most homes are not destroyed from outside. They are torn down from within, one choice at a time. The same is true of husbands. Every day we are either building our homes or tearing them down.

14:2 *He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD, and he who is devious **in** his ways despises Him.*

"He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD, and he who is devious in his ways despises Him." How we live shows what we think of God. The one who walks straight shows that he fears the LORD. The one who lives crookedly shows that he despises Him, whatever he says with his lips.

14:3 *In the mouth of a fool **is** a shoot of pride, and the lips of **the** wise will keep them.*

"In the mouth of a fool is a shoot of pride, and the lips of the wise will keep them." Pride grows out of the fool's mouth like a shoot from a stump. His boasting and his insults show what is inside. The words of the wise protect them.

14:4 *When **there are** no cattle, the trough **is** clean, and abundance of produce **is** by the strength of an ox.*

"When there are no cattle, the trough is clean, and abundance of produce is by the strength of an ox." If you have no oxen, you have no mess to clean up. But you also have no one to plow your fields. A clean barn means an empty harvest. Anything worth doing brings some mess with it. A family, a church or a business that produces fruit will have some disorder. That is not a reason to avoid it.

14:5-7 *A witness of faithfulness will not lie, and a witness of falsehood breathes out lies. A mocker seeks wisdom, and **there is** none, and knowledge **is** easy for a discerning **one**. Go from before a man **who is** a fool, and you will not have known lips of knowledge.*

"A witness of faithfulness will not lie, and a witness of falsehood breathes out lies." A person's character shows in court. Some witnesses can be trusted. Others lie with every breath.

"A mocker seeks wisdom, and there is none, and knowledge is easy for a discerning one." The mocker may go looking for wisdom, but he never finds it, because his heart is not humble enough to receive it. For the one who wants to understand, learning comes easily.

"Go from before a man who is a fool, and you will not have known lips of knowledge." Do not stay around a fool hoping to learn something. You will not. Walk away (13:20).

14:8-9 *The wisdom of a prudent **one is** to discern his way, and the folly of fools **is** deceit. Fools mock guilt, and among **the** upright **is** favor.*

"The wisdom of a prudent one is to discern his way, and the folly of fools is deceit." The prudent man thinks about where he is going. The fool deceives himself and others.

"Fools mock guilt, and among the upright is favor." Fools laugh at sin and at the idea of guilt. They make light of wrongdoing. Among the upright there is good will, with God and with each other. A culture that mocks guilt is a culture of fools.

14:10 *A heart knows the bitterness of its **own** soul, and in its joy a stranger does not share.*

"A heart knows the bitterness of its own soul, and in its joy a stranger does not share." There are places in every heart that no one else can fully enter. No one else knows exactly how deep our grief goes, or how high our joy rises. We should be slow to tell anyone we know just how they feel. But there is One who knows us fully. God sees every hidden sorrow (Psalm 56:8), and Jesus, our High Priest, can sympathize with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15).

14:11 *The house of **the** wicked will be destroyed, and the tent of **the** upright will flourish.*

"The house of the wicked will be destroyed, and the tent of the upright will flourish." The wicked may live in a house and the upright in a tent, but the house will fall and the tent will flourish. What lasts is not how strong our dwelling looks, but whether God's blessing is on it.

14:12 *There is a way right before a man, and its end **is** ways of death.*

"There is a way right before a man, and its end is ways of death." This verse is repeated word for word in 16:25. When God says something twice, we should listen.

The way seems right. It looks good. It makes sense to us. It may feel right, and many people around us may be walking it. But its end is death. Our own judgment is not enough to keep us safe, because our hearts can deceive us (Jeremiah 17:9). This is why we need God's Word to show us the way, and not only our own sense of what seems right.

This verse applies to the deepest question of all. Many people believe they will reach God by their own way: being a good person, following a religion, doing more good than bad. It seems right. But Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). He also said the way that leads to destruction is broad and many walk it, while the way to life is narrow and few find it (Matthew 7:13-14). The way that seems right is not always the way that is right.

14:13-14 *Even in laughter a heart is in pain, and its end, joy, **is** grief. The backslider of heart will be satisfied from his ways, and a good man from himself.*

"Even in laughter a heart is in pain, and its end, joy, is grief." People can laugh on the outside while they hurt on the inside. A smile can hide a broken heart. And the pleasures of this world often end in sorrow. Be gentle with people. Their laughter may not tell the whole story.

"The backslider of heart will be satisfied from his ways, and a good man from himself." The backslider is one who turns away from God. He will get his fill of the way he chose, and it will not be pleasant (1:31). A good man will be satisfied with the fruit of his own good life.

14:15-17 *A simple **one** believes every word, and a prudent **one** considers his step. A wise **one** fears and turns aside from evil, and a fool is arrogant and confident. One short of anger does folly, and a man of evil devices is hated.*

"A simple one believes every word, and a prudent one considers his step." The simple person is gullible. He believes every rumor, every sales pitch and every story online. The prudent person checks before he steps. John tells us to test the spirits, because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

"A wise one fears and turns aside from evil, and a fool is arrogant and confident." The wise man sees danger and steps back. The fool charges ahead, sure of himself.

"One short of anger does folly, and a man of evil devices is hated." The hot-tempered man does foolish things in the heat of the moment. The schemer, who plots coldly, is hated. Neither the quick temper nor the cold plot is the way of wisdom.

14:18-19 ***The** simple inherit folly, and **the** prudent surround **themselves with** knowledge. Evil **ones** bow before good **ones**, and wicked **ones** at the gates of a righteous **one**.*

"The simple inherit folly, and the prudent surround themselves with knowledge." Simple people who do not learn end up with folly as their inheritance. The prudent are crowned with knowledge.

"Evil ones bow before good ones, and wicked ones at the gates of a righteous one." In the end, evil bows to good. Joseph's brothers bowed before him (Genesis 42:6). One day every knee will bow before Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:10-11).

14:20-21 *Even by his neighbor a poor **one** is hated, and those who love a rich **one are** many. He who despises his neighbor sins, and he who shows favor to **the** humble, how blessed **is** he!*

"Even by his neighbor a poor one is hated, and those who love a rich one are many." This is an honest observation of human nature. People avoid the poor and crowd around the rich. Proverbs does not praise this. It tells us the truth about how people act.

"He who despises his neighbor sins, and he who shows favor to the humble, how blessed is he!" Right after the observation comes God's judgment on it. Looking down on a neighbor, especially a

poor one, is sin. Showing kindness to the humble and needy brings blessing. James warns believers not to favor the rich and despise the poor (James 2:1-9).

14:22 *Do they not go astray, those who devise evil? And steadfast love and truth **are for** those who devise good.*

"Do they not go astray, those who devise evil? And steadfast love and truth are for those who devise good." Those who plan evil lose their way. Those who plan good find steadfast love and faithfulness. What we plan in our hearts shapes where we end up.

14:23 *In all toil there is profit, and a word of lips **leads** only to poverty.*

"In all toil there is profit, and a word of lips leads only to poverty." Hard work pays. Talk does not. Some people spend all their energy talking about what they will do and never do it.

14:24 *The crown of **the** wise **is** their riches; the folly of fools **is** folly.*

"The crown of the wise is their riches; the folly of fools is folly." The wise are crowned by what they have gained, whether wealth or wisdom. Fools end where they began, with folly. Folly produces nothing but more folly.

14:25 *A witness of truth delivers souls, and he who breathes out lies **is** deceit.*

"A witness of truth delivers souls, and he who breathes out lies is deceit." A truthful witness can save an innocent person's life. A lying witness is nothing but deceit, and his lies can kill.

14:26-27 *In the fear of the LORD **is** confidence of strength, and for his children it will be a refuge. The fear of the LORD **is** a fountain of life, to turn aside from the snares of death.*

Two sayings about the fear of the LORD. "In the fear of the LORD is confidence of strength, and for his children it will be a refuge." The fear of the LORD does not make a person timid. It makes him strong and secure, because he trusts in God. And his children find shelter in it too. A parent who fears the LORD gives his children a safe place to grow.

"The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to turn aside from the snares of death." This is almost the same as 13:14, where the teaching of the wise is the fountain. The fear of the LORD is a spring of life that keeps us from deadly traps.

14:28 *In the multitude of a people **is** the splendor of a king, and in the lack of people **is** the ruin of a ruler.*

"In the multitude of a people is the splendor of a king, and in the lack of people is the ruin of a ruler." A king's glory is in the people he rules. Without people, a ruler has nothing. Good leaders serve their people well, because they know their strength depends on them. Jesus, the King of kings, will rule over a great multitude from every nation (Revelation 7:9).

14:29-30 *One long of anger **is** great of understanding, and one short of spirit exalts folly. A heart of healing **is** the life of **the** flesh, and jealousy **is** rottenness of bones.*

"One long of anger is great of understanding, and one short of spirit exalts folly." Long of anger means slow to anger, patient. God Himself is described this way (Exodus 34:6). Being slow to anger shows great understanding. A quick temper puts folly on display.

"A heart of healing is the life of the flesh, and jealousy is rottenness of bones." A calm and peaceful heart is good for the body. Envy and jealousy eat away at a person from the inside, like rot in the bones. Our inner life affects our health.

14:31 *He who oppresses a poor **one** reproaches his Maker, and he who shows favor to a needy **one** honors Him.*

"He who oppresses a poor one reproaches his Maker, and he who shows favor to a needy one honors Him." This is one of the strongest verses in Proverbs about the poor. Every poor person is made in God's image (Genesis 1:27). To oppress them is to insult the God who made them. To be kind to the needy is to honor God. Jesus said that whatever we do for the least of His brothers, we do for Him (Matthew 25:40).

14:32 *By his evil a wicked **one** is thrust down, and a righteous **one** seeks refuge in his death.*

"By his evil a wicked one is thrust down, and a righteous one seeks refuge in his death." The wicked are brought down by their own evil. But the righteous have a refuge even in death. This is one of the places in Proverbs that looks beyond the grave. Death is not the end for those who trust in God. For believers, it means being with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8).

14:33 *In the heart of a discerning **one** wisdom rests, and in the inner part of fools it is made known.*

"In the heart of a discerning one wisdom rests, and in the inner part of fools it is made known." Wisdom rests quietly in the heart of the wise. He does not need to show it off. Fools, on the other hand, cannot keep anything inside; everything they think comes out. The second line is hard, and some read it to mean that even among fools wisdom makes itself known.

14:34 *Righteousness exalts a nation, and sin **is** a shame to peoples.*

"Righteousness exalts a nation, and sin is a shame to peoples." This is a word for every nation, not only Israel. Nations rise and fall, and God is the One who raises and brings them down (Daniel 2:21). Righteousness, justice, honesty and care for the weak lift a nation up. Sin, corruption, violence and injustice bring it shame and in time ruin. Believers should pray for their nation and live righteously in it (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

14:35 *The favor of a king **is** for a servant who acts prudently, and his fury will be **on** him who acts shamefully.*

"The favor of a king is for a servant who acts prudently, and his fury will be on him who acts shamefully." A wise ruler rewards a wise servant and is angry with one who brings shame. Daniel

served kings so well that they promoted him (Daniel 6:3). Christians should be the best workers in any place they serve, because we serve the Lord Christ (Colossians 3:23-24).

Chapter 14 Summary

Chapter 14 begins with the wise woman who builds her house and the foolish one who tears it down with her own hands. The way we live shows whether we fear the LORD or despise Him. An ox makes a mess, but it brings a harvest. Fools mock guilt, believe everything and are quick to anger, while the prudent think about their steps, turn from evil and are slow to anger. Each heart knows its own bitterness and joy, and laughter can hide pain. There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. The rich have many friends and the poor are shunned, but despising a neighbor is sin, and whoever oppresses the poor insults his Maker while whoever is kind to the needy honors Him. The fear of the LORD gives strong confidence, a refuge for children and a fountain of life. The righteous have a refuge even in death. Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.

Chapter 14 Study Questions

1. How does a wise woman build her house, and how does folly tear one down? How does this apply to all of us? (14:1)

2. What does the picture of the ox and the clean trough teach? (14:4)

3. Why can no one else fully share the bitterness or joy of our hearts? Who can? (14:10; Hebrews 4:15)

4. What is the danger of a way that seems right? Why is it repeated in 16:25? (14:12)

5. How does the simple person differ from the prudent person when he hears something? (14:15)

6. What does the fear of the LORD give to a person and to his children? (14:26-27)

7. What does verse 31 say about how we treat the poor, and how does Jesus echo it in Matthew 25:40? (14:31)

8. What exalts a nation, and what brings it shame? (14:34)

9. Is there an area of your life where you are following a way that seems right to you but have not checked it against God's Word? (14:12)

10. Are you more often building up your home or tearing it down? What is one thing you could do this week to build it up? (14:1)

Chapter 15: A Soft Answer

Scripture

15:1-17 A soft answer turns away rage, and a word of pain raises anger. The tongue of ***the*** wise makes knowledge good, and the mouth of fools pours forth folly. In every place ***are*** the eyes of the LORD, watching evil ***ones*** and good ***ones***. Healing of tongue ***is*** a tree of life, and perverseness in it ***is*** a breaking in spirit. A fool spurns the discipline of his father, and he who keeps rebuke is prudent. ***In*** the house of a righteous ***one is*** great wealth, and in the income of a wicked ***one is*** trouble. The lips of ***the*** wise scatter knowledge, and the heart of fools ***is*** not right. The sacrifice of ***the*** wicked ***is*** an abomination of the LORD, and the prayer of ***the*** upright ***is*** His delight. The way of a wicked ***one is*** an abomination of the LORD, and he who pursues righteousness He loves. Discipline ***is*** bad for him who forsakes ***the*** path; he who hates rebuke will die. Sheol and Abaddon ***are*** before the LORD; how much more the hearts of the sons of mankind! A mocker does not love ***one*** reproving him; to ***the*** wise he will not go. A glad heart makes a face good, and by sorrow of heart a spirit ***is*** stricken. A discerning heart seeks knowledge, and the mouth of fools feeds on folly. All the days of an afflicted ***one are*** evil, and he who is good of heart ***has*** a feast continually. Better ***is*** a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and turmoil with it. Better ***is*** a portion of vegetables and love there than a fattened ox and hatred with it.

15:18-33 A man of rage stirs up strife, and one long of anger quiets a dispute. The way of a sluggard ***is*** like a hedge of thorns, and the path of ***the*** upright ***is*** built up. A wise son makes a father glad, and a fool of a man despises his mother. Folly ***is*** joy to one lacking sense, and a man of understanding makes ***his*** walking straight. Plans go wrong when ***there is*** no counsel, and in a multitude of counselors it is established. Joy ***belongs*** to the man in the answer of his mouth, and a word in its time, how good! The path of life ***is*** upward for one who acts prudently, so as to turn aside from Sheol beneath. The house of ***the*** proud the LORD tears down, and He will establish the border of a widow. The plans of an evil ***one are*** an abomination of the LORD, and words of pleasantness ***are*** clean. He who gains unjust gain troubles his ***own*** house, and he who hates gifts will live. The heart of a righteous ***one*** considers to answer, and the mouth of ***the*** wicked pours forth evil ***things***. The LORD ***is*** far from ***the*** wicked, and the prayer of ***the*** righteous He hears. Light of eyes makes a heart glad; a good report fattens ***the*** bone. An ear that hears the rebuke of life will remain in the midst of ***the*** wise. He who ignores discipline rejects his ***own*** soul, and he who hears rebuke acquires heart. The fear of the LORD ***is*** the discipline of wisdom, and before honor ***is*** humility.

Chapter 15 Preview

Chapter 15 opens with one of the best known sayings in Proverbs: a soft answer turns away rage, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The chapter returns again and again to the tongue, the heart and the home. Gentle words are a tree of life. A glad heart makes a cheerful face. A little with the fear of the LORD is better than great treasure with trouble, and a plain meal where there is love is better than a feast where there is hatred.

The LORD's name runs all through this chapter. His eyes are in every place, watching the evil and the good. Even Sheol lies open before Him, so how much more the human heart. He hates the sacrifice of the wicked but delights in the prayer of the upright. He is far from the wicked but hears the prayer of the righteous. He tears down the house of the proud and protects the widow's boundary. The chapter ends where the book began: the fear of the LORD is the discipline that leads to wisdom, and humility comes before honor.

Chapter 15 Study

15:1 *A soft answer turns away rage, and a word of pain raises anger.*

"A soft answer turns away rage, and a word of pain raises anger." When someone comes at us angry, our first instinct is to answer in kind. But a harsh reply is like throwing fuel on a fire. A gentle answer cools things down. Gideon calmed the angry men of Ephraim with a soft answer (Judges 8:1-3). Abigail turned away David's wrath with humble words (1 Samuel 25:23-35). A soft answer is not weakness. It takes more strength to answer gently than to lash out.

15:2 *The tongue of **the** wise makes knowledge good, and the mouth of fools pours forth folly.*

"The tongue of the wise makes knowledge good, and the mouth of fools pours forth folly." The wise know how to say things well, at the right time and in the right way, so that what they say helps. Fools just gush. Words pour out of them like water from a broken pipe.

15:3 *In every place **are** the eyes of the LORD, watching evil **ones** and good **ones**.*

"In every place are the eyes of the LORD, watching evil ones and good ones." Nothing escapes God's sight. That is a warning to the wicked, who think they are hidden (Hebrews 4:13). It is a comfort to the righteous, who know that God sees what they suffer and what they do in secret (Matthew 6:4). Hagar called the LORD the God who sees her (Genesis 16:13).

15:4 *Healing of tongue **is** a tree of life, and perverseness in it **is** a breaking in spirit.*

"Healing of tongue is a tree of life, and perverseness in it is a breaking in spirit." Gentle, healing words give life to those who hear them. Twisted, cruel words crush a person's spirit. Some people carry for years the wounds left by a parent's or spouse's harsh words. Our tongues can be a tree of life or a tool that breaks hearts.

15:5 *A fool spurns the discipline of his father, and he who keeps rebuke is prudent.*

"A fool spurns the discipline of his father, and he who keeps rebuke is prudent." We have heard this before (13:1, 18), and we will hear it again. The way we respond to correction shows whether we are wise or foolish.

15:6 ***In*** *the house of a righteous* ***one is*** *great wealth, and in the income of a wicked* ***one is*** *trouble.*

"In the house of a righteous one is great wealth, and in the income of a wicked one is trouble." The righteous may or may not have much money, but their house is rich in what matters. The wicked may have a large income, but trouble comes with it.

15:7 *The lips of* ***the*** *wise scatter knowledge, and the heart of fools* ***is*** *not right.*

"The lips of the wise scatter knowledge, and the heart of fools is not right." The wise spread knowledge like a farmer scatters seed, and it grows in others. Fools have nothing good to give, because their hearts are not right.

15:8-9 *The sacrifice of* ***the*** *wicked* ***is*** *an abomination of the LORD, and the prayer of* ***the*** *upright* ***is*** *His delight. The way of a wicked* ***one is*** *an abomination of the LORD, and he who pursues righteousness He loves.*

Two sayings about what the LORD hates and loves. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination of the LORD, and the prayer of the upright is His delight." The wicked may bring an expensive offering, but God hates it, because their hearts are not right. The prophets said the same (Isaiah 1:11-17; Amos 5:21-24). God does not want religion without obedience. Samuel told Saul that to obey is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22). But the simple prayer of an upright person delights God.

"The way of a wicked one is an abomination of the LORD, and he who pursues righteousness He loves." The reason God hates the sacrifice of the wicked is that He hates their way of life. Their worship cannot cover their living. He loves the one who chases after righteousness. Notice the word "pursues." Righteousness is not something we fall into. We go after it (1 Timothy 6:11).

15:10 *Discipline* ***is*** *bad for him who forsakes* ***the*** *path; he who hates rebuke will die.*

"Discipline is bad for him who forsakes the path; he who hates rebuke will die." To the person who leaves the right road, correction feels harsh. But the one who hates correction so much that he refuses it altogether walks a road that ends in death.

15:11 *Sheol and Abaddon* ***are*** *before the LORD; how much more the hearts of the sons of mankind!*

"Sheol and Abaddon are before the LORD; how much more the hearts of the sons of mankind!" Sheol is the place of the dead, and Abaddon means destruction, another name for the realm of the dead (Job 26:6). These are the deepest, darkest places anyone can imagine, hidden from all human eyes. Yet they lie open before God. If He can see into the grave, He can certainly see into our hearts. Nothing we think or feel is hidden from Him (Psalm 139:1-4).

15:12 *A mocker does not love* ***one*** *reproving him; to* ***the*** *wise he will not go.*

"A mocker does not love one reproving him; to the wise he will not go." The mocker avoids anyone who might correct him. He will not go near the wise. He keeps himself around people who will tell him what he wants to hear.

15:13-15 *A glad heart makes a face good, and by sorrow of heart a spirit **is** stricken. A discerning heart seeks knowledge, and the mouth of fools feeds on folly. All the days of an afflicted **one are** evil, and he who is good of heart **has** a feast continually.*

Three sayings about the heart. "A glad heart makes a face good, and by sorrow of heart a spirit is stricken." What is in our hearts shows on our faces. Joy brightens a face. Sorrow breaks the spirit. The Bible is honest that sorrow is real and that it hurts.

"A discerning heart seeks knowledge, and the mouth of fools feeds on folly." We all feed on something. The discerning heart hungers for truth. The fool feeds on folly, and he keeps coming back for more. What are you feeding your mind on?

"All the days of an afflicted one are evil, and he who is good of heart has a feast continually." For one who is crushed, every day feels hard. But a cheerful heart can turn even a plain day into a feast. Our circumstances matter, but our hearts matter more. Paul and Silas sang hymns in prison (Acts 16:25). Joy in the Lord does not depend on what is happening around us (Philippians 4:4).

15:16-17 *Better **is** a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and turmoil with it. Better **is** a portion of vegetables and love there than a fattened ox and hatred with it.*

Two "better" sayings. "Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and turmoil with it." A small income with God's peace is worth more than great wealth with worry and strife. Paul said that godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6).

"Better is a portion of vegetables and love there than a fattened ox and hatred with it." A plain meal of vegetables in a home full of love is better than a fine steak dinner in a home full of hatred. What makes a home rich is not what is on the table, but who is around it and how they treat each other.

15:18 *A man of rage stirs up strife, and one long of anger quiets a dispute.*

"A man of rage stirs up strife, and one long of anger quiets a dispute." Hot-tempered people make fights worse. Patient people calm them down. Every family, church and workplace needs people who are slow to anger. James says the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God (James 1:20).

15:19 *The way of a sluggard **is** like a hedge of thorns, and the path of **the** upright **is** built up.*

"The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, and the path of the upright is built up." To the lazy man, every task looks like a thorn bush. There is always a reason it cannot be done. The road of the upright is a raised, smooth highway. Their honest work clears the way ahead.

15:20 *A wise son makes a father glad, and a fool of a man despises his mother.*

"A wise son makes a father glad, and a fool of a man despises his mother." The first line repeats 10:1. The second line goes further: a foolish man not only grieves his mother, he looks down on her. Children of any age should honor their parents (Exodus 20:12).

15:21 *Folly **is** joy to one lacking sense, and a man of understanding makes **his** walking straight.*

"Folly is joy to one lacking sense, and a man of understanding makes his walking straight." The fool enjoys his folly. He thinks it is fun. The man of understanding walks a straight path, and finds his joy in that.

15:22 *Plans go wrong when **there is** no counsel, and in a multitude of counselors it is established.*

"Plans go wrong when there is no counsel, and in a multitude of counselors it is established." Going it alone is risky. Plans made without advice often fail. Plans checked with many wise counselors tend to succeed (11:14). Before a big decision, ask godly people what they think.

15:23 *Joy **belongs** to the man in the answer of his mouth, and a word in its time, how good!*

"Joy belongs to the man in the answer of his mouth, and a word in its time, how good!" There is real joy in giving a good answer. And a word spoken at the right moment is a beautiful thing. Timing matters. The right word at the wrong time can still hurt, and the right word at the right time can change a life (25:11).

15:24 *The path of life **is** upward for one who acts prudently, so as to turn aside from Sheol beneath.*

"The path of life is upward for one who acts prudently, so as to turn aside from Sheol beneath." The road of the wise leads upward, toward life. The road of the fool leads downward, to the grave. This is another hint in Proverbs that the end of the wise is life, and in the New Testament we learn that it is life with God forever (Colossians 3:1-4).

15:25 *The house of **the** proud the LORD tears down, and He will establish the border of a widow.*

"The house of the proud the LORD tears down, and He will establish the border of a widow." The proud think they are secure, but God can bring down their house. The widow, with no husband to protect her, was an easy target. A greedy neighbor might move the boundary stones of her field and steal her land. The Law forbade it (Deuteronomy 19:14). The LORD Himself guards her border. God is the defender of the weak (Psalm 68:5).

15:26 *The plans of an evil **one are** an abomination of the LORD, and words of pleasantness **are** clean.*

"The plans of an evil one are an abomination of the LORD, and words of pleasantness are clean." God hates the evil plans of the wicked even before they are carried out. But kind words are pure in His sight.

15:27 *He who gains unjust gain troubles his **own** house, and he who hates gifts will live.*

"He who gains unjust gain troubles his own house, and he who hates gifts will live." The gifts here are bribes. The one who gets rich by cheating brings trouble on his whole family. Think of Achan, whose greed brought death on his house (Joshua 7:24-26). The one who refuses bribes keeps his life and his integrity.

15:28 *The heart of a righteous **one** considers to answer, and the mouth of **the** wicked pours forth evil **things**.*

"The heart of a righteous one considers to answer, and the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil things." The righteous think before they speak. They weigh their words. The wicked just let it all spill out. Peter tells us to be ready to give an answer for our hope, with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15).

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

"The LORD is far from the wicked, and the prayer of the righteous He hears." God is near to those who walk with Him and far from those who reject Him. That does not mean He cannot hear the wicked when they cry out in repentance. He always hears the prayer of a sinner who turns to Him (Luke 18:13-14). But those who live in rebellion should not expect Him to answer their prayers while they refuse to turn (Psalm 66:18). The prayer of the righteous He hears.

15:30 *Light of eyes makes a heart glad; a good report fattens **the** bone.*

"Light of eyes makes a heart glad; a good report fattens the bone." A bright, friendly face lifts the heart. Good news refreshes the whole body. The best news of all is the gospel, the good news of what God has done for us in Christ.

15:31-32 *An ear that hears the rebuke of life will remain in the midst of **the** wise. He who ignores discipline rejects his **own** soul, and he who hears rebuke acquires heart.*

"An ear that hears the rebuke of life will remain in the midst of the wise." The rebuke of life is correction that leads to life. The one who listens to it will be counted among the wise.

"He who ignores discipline rejects his own soul, and he who hears rebuke acquires heart." To refuse correction is to hurt yourself. To listen to it is to gain understanding. The Hebrew says he "acquires heart," that is, he gains sense.

15:33 *The fear of the LORD **is** the discipline of wisdom, and before honor **is** humility.*

"The fear of the LORD is the discipline of wisdom, and before honor is humility." The chapter ends with the theme of the whole book. The fear of the LORD is the school where wisdom is learned. And humility always comes before honor. The way up is down. Jesus humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death on a cross, and therefore God highly exalted Him (Philippians 2:8-9). The same pattern holds for us: humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up (James 4:10).

Chapter 15 Summary

Chapter 15 begins by teaching that a soft answer turns away rage, while a harsh word stirs up anger. Gentle words are a tree of life, but cruel words break the spirit. The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, watching the evil and the good, and even Sheol and Abaddon lie open before Him, much more the human heart. The LORD hates the sacrifice and the way of the wicked, but He loves the one who pursues righteousness and delights in the prayer of the upright. A glad heart

makes a cheerful face and a feast of every day. A little with the fear of the LORD is better than great treasure with turmoil, and a meal of vegetables with love is better than a fattened ox with hatred. Patience calms strife, many counselors make plans succeed, and a word in its time is good. The LORD tears down the house of the proud and protects the widow's border. The chapter ends with the theme of the whole book: the fear of the LORD is the discipline of wisdom, and humility comes before honor.

Chapter 15 Study Questions

1. What does a soft answer do, and what does a harsh word do? (15:1)

2. How does verse 3 bring both warning and comfort? (15:3)

3. Why does the LORD hate the sacrifice of the wicked but delight in the prayer of the upright? (15:8-9; 1 Samuel 15:22)

4. If Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD, what does that tell us about our hearts? (15:11)

5. What two "better" sayings are in verses 16 and 17, and what do they teach about what makes a home rich? (15:16-17)

6. Why do plans go wrong without counsel? (15:22)

7. Who protects the border of the widow, and what does that show about God? (15:25)

8. What comes before honor, and how did Jesus show this? (15:33; Philippians 2:8-9)

9. Think of the last time someone came at you in anger. How did you answer? What would a soft answer have sounded like? (15:1)

10. What are you feeding your heart and mind on most days? Is it knowledge or folly? (15:14)

Chapter 16: The LORD Directs His Steps

Scripture

16:1-15 To a man ***belong*** the arrangements of ***the*** heart, and from the LORD ***is*** the answer of ***the*** tongue. All the ways of a man ***are*** pure in his ***own*** eyes, and the LORD weighs spirits. Roll your works to the LORD, and your plans will be established. The LORD has made everything for its purpose, and also the wicked for a day of evil. Everyone haughty of heart ***is*** an abomination of the LORD; hand to hand, he will not go unpunished. By steadfast love and truth iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD ***is*** turning aside from evil. When the LORD is pleased with the ways of a man, even his enemies He causes to be at peace with him. Better ***is*** a little with righteousness than abundance of produce without justice. The heart of a man plans his way, and the LORD directs his step. Divination ***is*** on the lips of a king; in judgment his mouth will not act unfaithfully. A balance and scales of justice ***belong*** to the LORD; all the weights of the bag ***are*** His work. To do wickedness ***is*** an abomination of kings, for by righteousness a throne is established. Lips of righteousness ***are*** the delight of kings, and he who speaks upright ***things*** he loves. The rage of a king ***is*** messengers of death, and a wise man will appease it. In the light of the face of a king ***is*** life, and his favor ***is*** like a cloud of spring rain.

16:16-33 To acquire wisdom, how much better than gold! And to acquire understanding ***is*** to be chosen more than silver. The highway of ***the*** upright ***is*** to turn aside from evil; he who guards his way keeps his soul. Before breaking ***is*** pride, and before stumbling, haughtiness of spirit. Better ***is*** to be lowly of spirit with ***the*** humble than to divide plunder with ***the*** proud. He who gives attention to a word will find good, and he who trusts in the LORD, how blessed ***is*** he! The wise of heart will be called discerning, and sweetness of lips increases learning. Prudence ***is*** a fountain of life to its owners, and the discipline of fools ***is*** folly. The heart of a wise ***one*** gives insight to his mouth, and upon his lips it adds learning. Words of pleasantness ***are*** a honeycomb of honey, sweet to the soul and healing to the bone. There is a way right before a man, and its end ***is*** ways of death. The soul of a laborer labors for him, for his mouth presses on him. A man of worthlessness digs up evil, and on his lip ***it is*** like a scorching fire. A man of perversities sends out strife, and a whisperer separates a close friend. A man of violence entices his neighbor and leads him in a way ***that is*** not good. He who shuts his eyes ***does so*** to devise perversities; he who purses his lips accomplishes evil. Gray hair ***is*** a crown of splendor; in the way of righteousness it is found. Better ***is*** one long of anger than a mighty ***one***, and he who rules over his spirit than he who captures a city. Into the lap the lot is thrown, and from the LORD ***is*** its every judgment.

Chapter 16 Preview

Chapter 16 stands near the middle of Solomon's sayings, and the LORD's name fills its first verses. Man makes plans, but the LORD has the last word. Man thinks his ways are pure, but the LORD weighs the spirit. We are told to roll our works onto the LORD, and we are told that even the lot thrown into the lap is decided by Him. The chapter holds two truths together: we are responsible to plan, choose and act, and God rules over all of it.

The middle of the chapter speaks of kings: a just king, a king's anger and a king's favor. Then the sayings turn to humility and pride, to wise and pleasant words, and to the troublemakers who dig up evil and split close friends. The chapter also gives us some of the best known verses in the book: pride goes before a fall, a way can seem right and end in death, gray hair is a crown of splendor, and the one who rules his own spirit is better than one who captures a city.

Chapter 16 Study

16:1-3 *To a man **belong** the arrangements of **the** heart, and from the LORD **is** the answer of **the** tongue. All the ways of a man **are** pure in his **own** eyes, and the LORD weighs spirits. Roll your works to the LORD, and your plans will be established.*

"To a man belong the arrangements of the heart, and from the LORD is the answer of the tongue." We get our thoughts in order and plan what we will say. But what actually comes out, and what it accomplishes, is in God's hands. Balaam set out to curse Israel and could only bless (Numbers 23:11-12).

"All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, and the LORD weighs spirits." We are good at seeing ourselves in the best light. God is not fooled. He weighs our motives, the reasons behind what we do (1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Corinthians 4:4-5).

"Roll your works to the LORD, and your plans will be established." The picture is of rolling a heavy load off your own back and onto someone stronger. Commit your work to God, trust Him with it, and He will make it stand. This is not a promise that every plan we make will succeed. It is a promise that the plans we hand over to God, and that fit His will, will be established. Peter says the same thing: cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).

16:4-5 *The LORD has made everything for its purpose, and also the wicked for a day of evil. Everyone haughty of heart **is** an abomination of the LORD; hand to hand, he will not go unpunished.*

"The LORD has made everything for its purpose, and also the wicked for a day of evil." Everything God made has its purpose and its end. Even the wicked do not escape His plan. God does not make anyone sin, and He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11). But He rules over evil, and the wicked will meet their day of judgment.

"Everyone haughty of heart is an abomination of the LORD; hand to hand, he will not go unpunished." An abomination is something God finds hateful. "Hand to hand" is like our handshake on a deal: you can count on it. The proud will be punished, even if they join hands with others to protect themselves (11:21).

16:6-7 *By steadfast love and truth iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD **is** turning aside from evil. When the LORD is pleased with the ways of a man, even his enemies He causes to be at peace with him.*

"By steadfast love and truth iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD is turning aside from evil." Steadfast love is the Hebrew word hesed, God's loyal, covenant love. Iniquity is atoned

for, which means covered and paid for, by God's love and faithfulness. In Israel, atonement came through the sacrifices God gave. Those sacrifices pointed ahead to the cross, where God's love and truth met, and Jesus paid for sin once for all (Hebrews 10:10). Then the fear of the LORD keeps us turning away from evil.

"When the LORD is pleased with the ways of a man, even his enemies He causes to be at peace with him." God can turn enemies into friends, or at least stop their attacks. Jacob feared Esau, and God turned Esau's heart (Genesis 33:4). This is the usual pattern, not a promise that the godly will have no enemies. Jesus pleased His Father perfectly and was still crucified, and Paul says all who want to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12).

16:8 *Better **is** a little with righteousness than abundance of produce without justice.*

"Better is a little with righteousness than abundance of produce without justice." Here is one of the "better" sayings. It is better to be poor and honest than rich and crooked. This verse alone shows that Proverbs does not promise riches to the righteous. Sometimes the righteous have little. What they have, they have with a clean conscience (15:16).

16:9 *The heart of a man plans his way, and the LORD directs his step.*

"The heart of a man plans his way, and the LORD directs his step." This is one of the clearest verses in the Bible on God's sovereignty, which means His right and power to rule over everything. Notice that both halves are true. Man really plans. God really directs. Proverbs does not tell us to stop planning. It tells us to plan humbly, knowing God has the final say. James warns us about saying we will go here and do this, when we do not know what tomorrow holds; we ought to say, "If the Lord wills" (James 4:13-15).

This is a comfort. When our plans fall apart, God has not lost control. Joseph's brothers planned evil, and God directed every step toward good (Genesis 50:20).

16:10-15 *Divination **is** on the lips of a king; in judgment his mouth will not act unfaithfully. A balance and scales of justice **belong** to the LORD; all the weights of the bag **are** His work. To do wickedness **is** an abomination of kings, for by righteousness a throne is established. Lips of righteousness **are** the delight of kings, and he who speaks upright **things** he loves. The rage of a king **is** messengers of death, and a wise man will appease it. In the light of the face of a king **is** life, and his favor **is** like a cloud of spring rain.*

Six sayings about kings. "Divination is on the lips of a king; in judgment his mouth will not act unfaithfully." Divination here is not sorcery, which the Law forbade (Deuteronomy 18:10). It means a decision with weight, as if from God. A king's word was final, so he must judge rightly. This describes what a king ought to be. Many kings failed.

"A balance and scales of justice belong to the LORD; all the weights of the bag are His work." Merchants carried stone weights in a bag to weigh goods. Honest weights belong to God. Cheating in business is cheating against Him (11:1).

"To do wickedness is an abomination of kings, for by righteousness a throne is established." "Lips of righteousness are the delight of kings, and he who speaks upright things he loves." A good king hates wrong because his throne rests on justice. He values advisers who tell him the truth, not flatterers.

"The rage of a king is messengers of death, and a wise man will appease it." "In the light of the face of a king is life, and his favor is like a cloud of spring rain." A king's anger could mean death. His favor was like the late spring rain that ripened the grain before harvest. The wise know how to calm an angry ruler, as Daniel did (Daniel 2:14-16). If an earthly king's favor matters so much, how much more the favor of the King of kings?

16:16-17 *To acquire wisdom, how much better than gold! And to acquire understanding **is** to be chosen more than silver. The highway of **the** upright **is** to turn aside from evil; he who guards his way keeps his soul.*

"To acquire wisdom, how much better than gold! And to acquire understanding is to be chosen more than silver." People work their whole lives for gold. Wisdom is worth more (3:14; 8:10-11). Gold stays behind when we die. Wisdom shapes who we are forever.

"The highway of the upright is to turn aside from evil; he who guards his way keeps his soul." The upright walk on a raised, well-made road. Their road goes around evil, not through it. Watch your road, and you protect your life.

16:18-19 *Before breaking **is** pride, and before stumbling, haughtiness of spirit. Better **is** to be lowly of spirit with **the** humble than to divide plunder with **the** proud.*

"Before breaking is pride, and before stumbling, haughtiness of spirit." We often hear that pride goes before a fall, and this is where that saying comes from. Pride comes first, and the crash follows. Pharaoh, Haman, Nebuchadnezzar and Herod all show it (Esther 7:10; Daniel 4:30-33; Acts 12:21-23). Pride is dangerous because it blinds us to the edge we are walking toward.

"Better is to be lowly of spirit with the humble than to divide plunder with the proud." It is better to be humble and poor among humble people than to share in the gains of proud people. God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).

16:20-24 *He who gives attention to a word will find good, and he who trusts in the LORD, how blessed **is** he! The wise of heart will be called discerning, and sweetness of lips increases learning. Prudence **is** a fountain of life to its owners, and the discipline of fools **is** folly. The heart of a wise **one** gives insight to his mouth, and upon his lips it adds learning. Words of pleasantness **are** a honeycomb of honey, sweet to the soul and healing to the bone.*

Five sayings about wise words. "He who gives attention to a word will find good, and he who trusts in the LORD, how blessed is he!" Listening to God's word and trusting the LORD go together. Blessed means happy in the deepest sense, well off before God (Psalm 1:1-2).

"The wise of heart will be called discerning, and sweetness of lips increases learning." Wisdom gets a good name. Kind, pleasant words make teaching easier to receive. Truth spoken harshly is often rejected. Truth spoken kindly is often heard.

"Prudence is a fountain of life to its owners, and the discipline of fools is folly." Good sense keeps refreshing the one who has it. Fools are trained by their own folly, and it is a poor teacher.

"The heart of a wise one gives insight to his mouth, and upon his lips it adds learning." Wise words start in a wise heart. Jesus said the mouth speaks from what fills the heart (Luke 6:45).

"Words of pleasantness are a honeycomb of honey, sweet to the soul and healing to the bone." Kind words taste good and do good. They reach the inner person and even help the body. Think of someone who needs a sweet word from you this week.

16:25 *There is a way right before a man, and its end **is** ways of death.*

"There is a way right before a man, and its end is ways of death." This saying appears word for word at 14:12, and saying it twice makes it stronger. A road can look right, feel right and be popular, and still end in death. Our feelings are not a safe guide. Only God's Word shows the true way. Jesus said He is the way (John 14:6), and that the broad road leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14).

16:26 *The soul of a laborer labors for him, for his mouth presses on him.*

"The soul of a laborer labors for him, for his mouth presses on him." Hunger keeps a worker working. His own appetite pushes him on. That is not a bad thing. Need teaches us to work, and Paul said that if anyone will not work, he should not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

16:27-30 *A man of worthlessness digs up evil, and on his lip **it is** like a scorching fire. A man of perversities sends out strife, and a whisperer separates a close friend. A man of violence entices his neighbor and leads him in a way **that is** not good. He who shuts his eyes **does so** to devise perversities; he who purses his lips accomplishes evil.*

Four sayings about troublemakers. "A man of worthlessness digs up evil, and on his lip it is like a scorching fire." A worthless man goes digging for dirt on others, and his words burn like fire (James 3:6).

"A man of perversities sends out strife, and a whisperer separates a close friend." A whisperer is a gossip. A few quiet words in the right ear can split the closest of friends. Do not be the whisperer, and do not listen to one.

"A man of violence entices his neighbor and leads him in a way that is not good." Violent men recruit others, as the gang in 1:10-19 did.

"He who shuts his eyes does so to devise perversities; he who purses his lips accomplishes evil." Closed eyes and pressed lips are the face of a man plotting. Body language can betray the schemer (6:13-14).

16:31 *Gray hair **is** a crown of splendor; in the way of righteousness it is found.*

"Gray hair is a crown of splendor; in the way of righteousness it is found." In Israel, gray hair was honored (Leviticus 19:32). A long life lived God's way is a crown. Our world chases youth. God honors age, especially age that has walked with Him. This is a general truth, as with 10:27. Not every righteous person grows old, and not every old person is righteous.

16:32 *Better **is** one long of anger than a mighty **one**, and he who rules over his spirit than he who captures a city.*

"Better is one long of anger than a mighty one, and he who rules over his spirit than he who captures a city." "Long of anger" means slow to anger, patient. Self-control takes more strength than winning a battle. A man can conquer a city and still be a slave to his own temper. The fruit of the Spirit includes self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

16:33 *Into the lap the lot is thrown, and from the LORD **is** its every judgment.*

"Into the lap the lot is thrown, and from the LORD is its every judgment." The lot was like casting dice or drawing straws. Israel used it to divide the land (Joshua 18:10) and the apostles used it to choose Matthias (Acts 1:26). It looks like pure chance. But nothing is chance with God. Even the roll of a die is under His rule.

The chapter began with the LORD giving the answer of the tongue, and it ends with the LORD deciding the lot. From our words to our plans to things that seem random, the LORD rules. This does not make us puppets, because the same chapter calls us to plan, to work and to choose wisely. But it lets us rest. Nothing happens to God's people by accident (Romans 8:28).

Chapter 16 Summary

Chapter 16 teaches that man plans, but the LORD directs. He weighs the motives behind our ways, and He calls us to roll our works onto Him. He rules over all things, even the wicked and the lot thrown in the lap. Iniquity is atoned for by steadfast love and truth, and a little with righteousness is better than much without justice. A king should judge rightly, hate wickedness and love honest words, and his favor is like the spring rain. Wisdom is worth more than gold. Pride goes before a fall, and it is better to be humble with the lowly. Pleasant words are like honey, while worthless men dig up evil and whisperers split friends. A way can seem right and end in death. Gray hair gained in righteousness is a crown, and ruling one's own spirit is greater than capturing a city.

Chapter 16 Study Questions

1. What does it mean to roll your works to the LORD? (16:3; 1 Peter 5:7)

2. What does the LORD weigh, and why does that matter when our ways seem pure to us? (16:2)

3. How does verse 9 hold together our planning and God's directing? (16:9; James 4:13-15)

4. What does verse 8 tell us about whether the righteous will always be rich? (16:8)

5. What comes before a fall, according to verse 18? Give an example from Scripture. (16:18)

6. What do pleasant words do for a person? (16:24)

7. Why is ruling over your own spirit greater than capturing a city? (16:32)

8. What does verse 33 teach about chance and God's control? (16:33; Romans 8:28)

9. Is there a plan in your life right now that you need to hand over to God? (16:3, 9)

10. Where might pride be leading you toward a fall? What would humility look like there? (16:18-19)

Chapter 17: A Friend Loves at Every Time

Scripture

17:1-14 Better ***is*** a dry morsel and quietness with it than a house full of sacrifices of strife. A servant who acts prudently will rule over a son who acts shamefully, and in the midst of brothers he will share the inheritance. A crucible ***is*** for silver, and a furnace for gold, and the LORD tests hearts. An evildoer pays attention to a lip of trouble; falsehood gives ear to a tongue of destructions. He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished. Children of children ***are*** the crown of old ***men***, and the splendor of children ***is*** their fathers. A lip of excellence is not fitting for a senseless ***one***; how much less for a noble a lip of falsehood! The bribe ***is*** a stone of favor in the eyes of its owners; to all that it turns, it prospers. He who covers a transgression seeks love, and he who repeats a matter separates a close friend. A rebuke goes deeper into one who understands than striking a fool a hundred ***times***. An evil ***one*** seeks only rebellion, and a cruel messenger will be sent against him. Let a bear robbed of cubs meet a man, and not a fool in his folly. He who returns evil for good, evil will not depart from his house. One who lets out water ***is*** the beginning of strife; and before the dispute breaks out, abandon ***it***.

17:15-28 He who justifies ***the*** wicked and he who condemns ***the*** righteous, even both of them ***are*** an abomination of the LORD. Why ***is*** this, a price in the hand of a fool to acquire wisdom, and ***there is*** no heart? At every time the friend loves, and a brother is born for adversity. A man lacking sense strikes a palm, pledging a pledge before his neighbor. He who loves transgression loves contention; he who makes his entrance high seeks breaking. One twisted of heart will not find good, and one perverted in his tongue will fall into trouble. He who fathers a fool ***does so*** to his grief, and the father of a senseless ***one*** does not rejoice. A glad heart makes healing good, and a stricken spirit dries up ***the*** bone. A wicked ***one*** accepts a bribe from ***the*** bosom to turn aside the paths of justice. Wisdom ***is*** before the face of one who has understanding, and the eyes of a fool ***are*** on the end of the earth. A son ***who is*** a fool ***is*** vexation to his father and bitterness to her who bore him. Also to fine a righteous ***one is*** not good, ***nor*** to strike nobles for uprightness. He who restrains his words knows knowledge, and one precious of spirit ***is*** a man of understanding. Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; he who shuts his lips, discerning.

Chapter 17 Preview

Chapter 17 opens with a quiet home and a dry crust of bread, and it says that is better than a feast full of fighting. Much of the chapter is about the people closest to us: children and grandchildren, fathers and mothers, brothers and friends. A friend loves at every time, and a brother is born for the hard days. Love covers a wrong, but repeating it splits close friends. A foolish son brings grief to his father and bitterness to his mother.

The chapter also speaks about justice. It warns against bribes, against declaring the guilty innocent and the innocent guilty, and against mocking the poor. It tells us that the LORD tests hearts the way fire tests silver and gold. It warns us to stop a quarrel before it starts, like water

leaking from a dam. And it ends with a saying many of us need: even a fool who keeps quiet is thought wise.

Chapter 17 Study

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

"Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it than a house full of sacrifices of strife." Sacrifices here means the feast that followed a peace offering, when the family ate meat together (7:14). A big dinner with fighting at the table is worse than dry bread in a peaceful home. Peace in the home is worth more than plenty in it (15:17).

17:2 *A servant who acts prudently will rule over a son who acts shamefully, and in the midst of brothers he will share the inheritance.*

"A servant who acts prudently will rule over a son who acts shamefully, and in the midst of brothers he will share the inheritance." Character counts for more than birth. A wise servant could rise above a foolish son and even receive a share of the family inheritance. Abraham once thought his servant Eliezer would be his heir (Genesis 15:2-3). God honors faithfulness, whatever our station.

17:3 *A crucible **is** for silver, and a furnace for gold, and the LORD tests hearts.*

"A crucible is for silver, and a furnace for gold, and the LORD tests hearts." A crucible is a pot that can take great heat. The refiner heats the metal until the impurities rise and can be skimmed away. God tests our hearts in the same way, through trials, not to destroy us but to make us pure (1 Peter 1:6-7; Malachi 3:3). If you are in the furnace right now, remember who is watching the fire.

17:4-5 *An evildoer pays attention to a lip of trouble; falsehood gives ear to a tongue of destructions. He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.*

"An evildoer pays attention to a lip of trouble; falsehood gives ear to a tongue of destructions." Evil people love to listen to evil talk. What we like to hear says a lot about us.

"He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished." The poor are made by God, in His image. To laugh at them is to insult the God who made them (14:31). To be glad when someone else suffers, even an enemy, invites God's judgment (24:17-18).

17:6 *Children of children **are** the crown of old **men**, and the splendor of children **is** their fathers.*

"Children of children are the crown of old men, and the splendor of children is their fathers." Grandchildren are the joy and honor of the old. Children, in turn, take pride in good parents. Each generation can be a crown to the other. Fathers, live so that your children can be proud of you.

17:7-8 *A lip of excellence is not fitting for a senseless **one**; how much less for a noble a lip of falsehood! The bribe **is** a stone of favor in the eyes of its owners; to all that it turns, it prospers.*

"A lip of excellence is not fitting for a senseless one; how much less for a noble a lip of falsehood!" Fine words from a fool do not fit him. Lies from a leader fit him even less. We expect leaders to tell the truth, and God does too.

"The bribe is a stone of favor in the eyes of its owners; to all that it turns, it prospers." This is an observation, not an approval. The one who gives bribes thinks of them as a lucky charm that opens every door. And often, in a crooked world, it works. But verse 23 makes clear what God thinks of it. Proverbs sometimes tells us how the world works before it tells us what God thinks of it.

17:9-10 *He who covers a transgression seeks love, and he who repeats a matter separates a close friend. A rebuke goes deeper into one who understands than striking a fool a hundred **times**.*

"He who covers a transgression seeks love, and he who repeats a matter separates a close friend." Covering a wrong means forgiving it and not bringing it up again. Repeating it, to the person or to others, breaks friendships. When a friend wrongs you and is sorry, let it go (10:12). This is not about covering up crime or abuse. It is about the small hurts that every friendship has.

"A rebuke goes deeper into one who understands than striking a fool a hundred times." A wise person learns from one word of correction. A fool will not learn from a hundred blows. Which are you when someone corrects you?

17:11-13 *An evil **one** seeks only rebellion, and a cruel messenger will be sent against him. Let a bear robbed of cubs meet a man, and not a fool in his folly. He who returns evil for good, evil will not depart from his house.*

"An evil one seeks only rebellion, and a cruel messenger will be sent against him." The rebel will face a harsh reply, whether from a king's officer or from God Himself.

"Let a bear robbed of cubs meet a man, and not a fool in his folly." A mother bear whose cubs are taken is about as dangerous as anything in nature (2 Samuel 17:8). A fool in full folly is worse. Stay out of his way.

"He who returns evil for good, evil will not depart from his house." Paying back good with evil is the lowest of sins. David repaid Uriah's loyalty with murder, and the sword never left his house (2 Samuel 12:10). Jesus calls us to the opposite: return good for evil (Romans 12:17-21).

17:14 *One who lets out water **is** the beginning of strife; and before the dispute breaks out, abandon **it**.*

"One who lets out water is the beginning of strife; and before the dispute breaks out, abandon it." A small leak in a dam soon becomes a flood. A quarrel is the same. Once it starts, it is hard to stop. The wise walk away before it begins. Not every hill is worth fighting on.

17:15 *He who justifies **the** wicked and he who condemns **the** righteous, even both of them **are** an abomination of the LORD.*

"He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, even both of them are an abomination of the LORD." To justify means to declare someone in the right. Judges who call the guilty innocent, or the innocent guilty, are hateful to God (Deuteronomy 25:1; Isaiah 5:23). So how can God justify sinners like us without breaking His own rule? Paul answers this. God is "righteous and the One justifying the one who is of faith of Jesus" (Romans 3:26). Our guilt was not ignored. It was paid for by Christ on the cross. God declares us righteous because our sin was laid on Him.

17:16 *Why **is** this, a price in the hand of a fool to acquire wisdom, and **there is** no heart?*

"Why is this, a price in the hand of a fool to acquire wisdom, and there is no heart?" "Heart" in Proverbs often means sense or understanding. A fool may pay for lessons, but money cannot buy wisdom if there is no desire to learn. Wisdom begins with a heart that wants it (2:1-5).

17:17 *At every time the friend loves, and a brother is born for adversity.*

"At every time the friend loves, and a brother is born for adversity." A true friend is not a fair-weather friend. He loves when you are up and when you are down. And a brother, whether by blood or by faith, shows what he is in hard times. Jonathan was that kind of friend to David (1 Samuel 18:1-3; 20:17).

Many see in this verse a picture of Jesus, who calls us His friends (John 15:13-15) and is not ashamed to call us brothers (Hebrews 2:11). He loves at every time, and He was born for our adversity. Ask yourself: am I that kind of friend to anyone?

17:18 *A man lacking sense strikes a palm, pledging a pledge before his neighbor.*

"A man lacking sense strikes a palm, pledging a pledge before his neighbor." Striking hands was how a man agreed to guarantee another person's debt. Proverbs warns against this again and again (6:1-5; 11:15). It is not wrong to help someone in need. It is foolish to promise to pay a debt you cannot afford to pay.

17:19-20 *He who loves transgression loves contention; he who makes his entrance high seeks breaking. One twisted of heart will not find good, and one perverted in his tongue will fall into trouble.*

"He who loves transgression loves contention; he who makes his entrance high seeks breaking." Sin and strife go together. "Makes his entrance high" may mean a man who builds a showy gate to show off his wealth, or it may mean one who opens his mouth proudly. Either way, pride invites a crash.

"One twisted of heart will not find good, and one perverted in his tongue will fall into trouble." A crooked heart and a lying tongue lead to trouble, not to the good they are looking for.

17:21-22 *He who fathers a fool **does so** to his grief, and the father of a senseless **one** does not rejoice. A glad heart makes healing good, and a stricken spirit dries up **the** bone.*

"He who fathers a fool does so to his grief, and the father of a senseless one does not rejoice." Raising a child who rejects wisdom is one of the deepest griefs in life. Some reading this know that grief. God knows it too. He said, "Sons I have reared and brought up, and they have transgressed against Me" (Isaiah 1:2).

"A glad heart makes healing good, and a stricken spirit dries up the bone." A cheerful heart is good medicine. A crushed spirit drains the strength out of a person. Our inner life affects our body. This is not a cure for every illness, and depression is not simply a lack of cheer. But joy in the Lord truly does strengthen us (Nehemiah 8:10).

17:23 *A wicked **one** accepts a bribe from **the** bosom to turn aside the paths of justice.*

"A wicked one accepts a bribe from the bosom to turn aside the paths of justice." The bribe is slipped out of a fold in the robe, out of sight. Its purpose is to bend justice. Verse 8 told us how bribes look to those who use them. This verse tells us what they are: wicked (Exodus 23:8).

17:24-25 *Wisdom **is** before the face of one who has understanding, and the eyes of a fool **are** on the end of the earth. A son **who is** a fool **is** vexation to his father and bitterness to her who bore him.*

"Wisdom is before the face of one who has understanding, and the eyes of a fool are on the end of the earth." Wisdom is right in front of us, in the plain duties of today. The fool is always looking somewhere far away, dreaming of what he does not have, and missing what is in front of him.

"A son who is a fool is vexation to his father and bitterness to her who bore him." The chapter returns to the grief of parents (10:1; 17:21). A foolish child hurts both father and mother. Children, your choices touch the people who love you most.

17:26 *Also to fine a righteous **one is** not good, **nor** to strike nobles for uprightness.*

"Also to fine a righteous one is not good, nor to strike nobles for uprightness." Punishing people for doing right is wrong. It turns justice upside down. Yet it happens, and it happened most of all to Jesus, who was beaten and killed though He did no wrong (1 Peter 2:22-23).

17:27-28 *He who restrains his words knows knowledge, and one precious of spirit **is** a man of understanding. Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; he who shuts his lips, discerning.*

"He who restrains his words knows knowledge, and one precious of spirit is a man of understanding." The wise do not say everything they think. "Precious of spirit" may mean calm or cool of spirit. Self-control in speech is a mark of understanding.

"Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; he who shuts his lips, discerning." This one is almost funny, but it is true. Silence hides a lot of foolishness. If you are not sure what to say, sometimes the wisest thing is to say nothing (James 1:19).

Chapter 17 Summary

Chapter 17 begins with peace in the home: a dry crust with quiet is better than a feast with strife. A wise servant can rise above a shameful son. The LORD tests hearts as fire tests silver and gold. Mocking the poor insults their Maker. Grandchildren are the crown of the old, and good fathers the pride of their children. Love covers a wrong, but repeating it splits close friends. A wise person learns from one rebuke, and a fool from none. Returning evil for good brings evil on one's house, and a quarrel should be dropped before it breaks out. Justifying the wicked and condemning the righteous are both hateful to God, a problem only the cross solves. A friend loves at every time, and a brother is born for adversity. A glad heart is good medicine. Bribes bend justice. The chapter ends by praising those who hold their tongue.

Chapter 17 Study Questions

1. Why is a dry morsel with quiet better than a house full of feasting with strife? (17:1)

2. How does the LORD test hearts, and why does He do it? (17:3; 1 Peter 1:6-7)

3. What does it mean to mock the poor, and why is it so serious? (17:5)

4. What is the difference between covering a transgression and repeating it? (17:9)

5. How can God justify sinners without breaking the rule of verse 15? (17:15; Romans 3:26)

6. What does verse 17 say a true friend and brother do? (17:17; John 15:13-15)

7. What do verses 8 and 23 together teach about bribes? (17:8, 23)

8. Is there a quarrel in your life you should drop before it breaks out? (17:14)

9. Who has been a friend to you in a hard time? Who needs you to be that friend now? (17:17)

10. When were you corrected and learned from it? When did you not? What made the difference? (17:10)

Chapter 18: The Name of the LORD Is a Tower of Strength

Scripture

18:1-12 One who separates himself seeks for ***his own*** desire; against all sound wisdom he breaks out. A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in his heart revealing itself. When a wicked ***one*** comes, contempt also comes, and with dishonor, reproach. Deep waters ***are*** the words of the mouth of a man; a flowing torrent, a fountain of wisdom. To lift up the face of a wicked ***one is*** not good, ***nor*** to turn aside a righteous ***one*** in judgment. The lips of a fool go into strife, and his mouth calls for blows. The mouth of a fool ***is*** ruin to him, and his lips ***are*** the snare of his soul. The words of a whisperer ***are*** like delicacies, and they go down ***into*** the chambers of the belly. Also one who shows himself slack in his work, he ***is*** a brother to a master of destruction. A tower of strength ***is*** the name of the LORD; into it a righteous ***one*** runs and is set on high. The wealth of a rich ***man is*** the town of his strength, and like a wall set on high in his imagination. Before breaking, the heart of a man is haughty, and before honor ***is*** humility.

18:13-24 He who returns a word before he hears, it ***is*** folly to him and shame. The spirit of a man will sustain his sickness, and a stricken spirit, who will bear it? A discerning heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of ***the*** wise seeks knowledge. The gift of a man makes room for him, and it leads him before ***the*** great. The first in his case ***is*** righteous, and his neighbor comes and examines him. The lot causes contentions to cease, and it separates between ***the*** mighty. A brother transgressed against ***is more*** than a town of strength, and contentions ***are*** like the bar of a fortress. From the fruit of the mouth of a man his belly is satisfied; ***with*** the produce of his lips he is satisfied. Death and life ***are*** in the hand of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit. He who finds a wife finds a good ***thing***, and obtains favor from the LORD. A poor ***one*** speaks supplications, and a rich ***one*** answers strong ***things***. A man of companions ***is*** to be shattered, and there is one who loves ***who*** clings more than a brother.

Chapter 18 Preview

Chapter 18 is a chapter about words and about where we run for safety. It begins with a man who cuts himself off from others and a fool who only wants to hear himself talk. It warns about the tasty gossip that goes down deep, about answering before we listen, and about deciding a case after hearing only one side. It tells us that death and life are in the power of the tongue.

At the center of the chapter stand two towers. The righteous run into the name of the LORD, a tower of strength, and are safe. The rich man trusts his wealth as a high wall, but only in his imagination. The chapter also speaks of the good gift of a wife, of a brother who has been offended, and it closes with a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Chapter 18 Study

18:1-2 *One who separates himself seeks for **his own** desire; against all sound wisdom he breaks out. A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in his heart revealing itself.*

"One who separates himself seeks for his own desire; against all sound wisdom he breaks out." The man who cuts himself off from others usually does it to please himself. He does not want anyone to tell him no. Living alone in that way leads away from wisdom. God made us for community, and believers need one another (Hebrews 10:24-25). Time alone with God is good. Cutting ourselves off from all counsel is not.

"A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in his heart revealing itself." The fool is not interested in learning. He only wants to air his own opinions. Some people do not listen in a conversation; they just wait for their turn to talk.

18:3 *When a wicked **one** comes, contempt also comes, and with dishonor, reproach.*

"When a wicked one comes, contempt also comes, and with dishonor, reproach." Wickedness brings disgrace with it. Where sin goes, shame follows. It may come quickly or slowly, but it comes.

18:4 *Deep waters **are** the words of the mouth of a man; a flowing torrent, a fountain of wisdom.*

"Deep waters are the words of the mouth of a man; a flowing torrent, a fountain of wisdom." Words can be deep, with more meaning than appears on the surface. When they come from a wise heart, they are like a fresh, flowing stream that keeps refreshing those who hear. This fits the words of the wise best, as the second line shows (20:5).

18:5 *To lift up the face of a wicked **one is** not good, **nor** to turn aside a righteous **one** in judgment.*

"To lift up the face of a wicked one is not good, nor to turn aside a righteous one in judgment." "To lift up the face" means to show favor or play favorites. A judge must not favor the guilty or deny the innocent their rights (17:15). God shows no partiality, and neither should we (James 2:1-4).

18:6-8 *The lips of a fool go into strife, and his mouth calls for blows. The mouth of a fool **is** ruin to him, and his lips **are** the snare of his soul. The words of a whisperer **are** like delicacies, and they go down **into** the chambers of the belly.*

Three sayings about the fool's mouth and the gossip's words. "The lips of a fool go into strife, and his mouth calls for blows." The fool's mouth starts fights, and sometimes it earns him a beating.

"The mouth of a fool is ruin to him, and his lips are the snare of his soul." His own words trap him. The fool is his own worst enemy.

"The words of a whisperer are like delicacies, and they go down into the chambers of the belly." Gossip tastes good. We want to hear it, and once we hear it, it goes deep and stays there. That is why gossip is so dangerous. It is hard to stop listening, and hard to forget what we heard. The same saying comes again at 26:22. The best cure is to refuse the first bite.

18:9 *Also one who shows himself slack in his work, he **is** a brother to a master of destruction.*

"Also one who shows himself slack in his work, he is a brother to a master of destruction." The lazy worker and the destroyer are brothers. One tears down; the other lets things fall down. Either way, the result is the same. Neglect does as much damage as vandalism.

18:10-11 *A tower of strength **is** the name of the LORD; into it a righteous **one** runs and is set on high. The wealth of a rich **man is** the town of his strength, and like a wall set on high in his imagination.*

"A tower of strength is the name of the LORD; into it a righteous one runs and is set on high." In the ancient world, a strong tower in a city was the last place of safety when enemies broke in. People ran into it and climbed up high, out of reach. The name of the LORD stands for God Himself, all that He is and has shown Himself to be: faithful, mighty, merciful (Exodus 34:5-7). The righteous do not run to their own strength. They run to Him.

This verse does not promise that a believer will never suffer. It promises a place of safety that no enemy can finally reach. David knew this: "The LORD is my crag and my stronghold and my deliverer" (Psalm 18:2). Paul knew it too: nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ (Romans 8:35-39). Where do you run when trouble comes? The New Testament tells us there is salvation in no other name than the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12).

"The wealth of a rich man is the town of his strength, and like a wall set on high in his imagination." Set this beside verse 10. The rich man has a tower too, his money. The first line is the same as 10:15. But the second line adds a warning: it is high only in his imagination. Wealth feels safe, but it cannot stop death or judgment (11:4). Jesus told of a rich fool who trusted his barns and died that night (Luke 12:16-21). Two towers. Only one is real.

18:12 *Before breaking, the heart of a man is haughty, and before honor **is** humility.*

"Before breaking, the heart of a man is haughty, and before honor is humility." This repeats 16:18 and 15:33. Pride comes before the crash. Humility comes before honor. God brings down the proud and lifts up the humble (1 Peter 5:5-6).

18:13 *He who returns a word before he hears, it **is** folly to him and shame.*

"He who returns a word before he hears, it is folly to him and shame." Answering before we have heard the whole matter is foolish and shameful. How many arguments happen because someone did not listen first? Listen to the end before you answer.

18:14 *The spirit of a man will sustain his sickness, and a stricken spirit, who will bear it?*

"The spirit of a man will sustain his sickness, and a stricken spirit, who will bear it?" A strong spirit can carry a person through sickness. But when the spirit itself is crushed, what holds it up? Inner wounds can be harder to bear than outer ones. If someone's spirit is crushed, be gentle. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18).

18:15-16 *A discerning heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of **the** wise seeks knowledge. The gift of a man makes room for him, and it leads him before **the** great.*

"A discerning heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge." The wise never stop learning. They go looking for it.

"The gift of a man makes room for him, and it leads him before the great." A gift opens doors. This can be a bribe (17:23), but it can also be an honest present, as Jacob sent to Esau (Genesis 32:20) and Abigail brought to David (1 Samuel 25:27). Proverbs states what happens. Our motive decides whether it is right.

18:17-18 *The first in his case **is** righteous, and his neighbor comes and examines him. The lot causes contentions to cease, and it separates between **the** mighty.*

"The first in his case is righteous, and his neighbor comes and examines him." The first person to tell his side always sounds right, until the other side speaks and asks questions. This is wise counsel for judges, parents, church leaders and anyone who hears a complaint. Never decide on one side of a story.

"The lot causes contentions to cease, and it separates between the mighty." When two strong men could not settle a matter, casting lots ended the fight, because the lot was in God's hands (16:33).

18:19 *A brother transgressed against **is more** than a town of strength, and contentions **are** like the bar of a fortress.*

"A brother transgressed against is more than a town of strength, and contentions are like the bar of a fortress." It is easier to take a walled city than to win back a brother you have hurt. Family fights and church fights can harden like iron bars on a gate. Be slow to offend, and quick to make it right (Matthew 5:23-24).

18:20-21 *From the fruit of the mouth of a man his belly is satisfied; **with** the produce of his lips he is satisfied. Death and life **are** in the hand of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*

"From the fruit of the mouth of a man his belly is satisfied; with the produce of his lips he is satisfied." Our words are like a crop we will eat. Speak good things, and you will be fed by them.

"Death and life are in the hand of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." Words can kill or give life. They can crush a child's spirit or build it up. They can spread lies that ruin a man, or the gospel that saves him. Those who love to talk will eat the fruit of their talk, sweet or bitter. James says the tongue is small but sets a whole forest on fire (James 3:5-6).

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

"He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD." Marriage is God's good gift (Genesis 2:18). A good wife is a sign of God's favor. This is not saying every man must marry, and it does not mean a single person lacks God's favor. Paul speaks well of singleness for those

who are called to it (1 Corinthians 7:7-8). But marriage is good, and a husband should thank God for his wife (19:14; 31:10).

18:23 *A poor **one** speaks supplications, and a rich **one** answers strong **things**.*

"A poor one speaks supplications, and a rich one answers strong things." The poor man has to beg, and the rich man answers roughly. This is an observation, not an approval. Money can make people hard. God hears the poor when others brush them off.

18:24 *A man of companions **is** to be shattered, and there is one who loves **who** clings more than a brother.*

"A man of companions is to be shattered, and there is one who loves who clings more than a brother." A man with many casual friends may still come to ruin, because they will not stand with him when it counts. Better to have one true friend who sticks with you closer than a brother.

Many believers see the fullest friend in Jesus. He called His disciples friends (John 15:15), and He laid down His life for them. He will never leave us (Hebrews 13:5). We should also be that kind of friend to others: fewer friends, perhaps, but true ones.

Chapter 18 Summary

Chapter 18 warns against cutting ourselves off from others and against loving our own opinions more than understanding. A fool's mouth starts fights and traps his own soul, and the words of a gossip go down deep like tasty food. The lazy man is brother to the destroyer. The name of the LORD is a tower of strength where the righteous run and are safe, while the rich man's wealth is a high wall only in his imagination. Pride comes before a fall, and humility before honor. We must hear before we answer and hear both sides before we judge. An offended brother is harder to win than a strong city. Death and life are in the power of the tongue. A wife is a good gift and a sign of God's favor, and there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Chapter 18 Study Questions

1. Why is cutting yourself off from others against sound wisdom? (18:1; Hebrews 10:24-25)

2. Why are the words of a gossip so hard to resist and so hard to forget? (18:8)

3. What does it mean to run into the name of the LORD? (18:10; Psalm 18:2)

4. How is the rich man's tower different from the tower of verse 10? (18:10-11; Luke 12:16-21)

5. What happens when we answer before we hear? (18:13)

6. Why should we hear both sides before deciding a matter? (18:17)

7. What does verse 21 teach about the power of words? (18:21; James 3:5-6)

8. When trouble comes, where do you usually run first? (18:10)

9. Is there a brother or sister you have offended who needs you to make it right? (18:19; Matthew 5:23-24)

10. Who is a friend who sticks closer than a brother to you? How can you be that friend to someone else? (18:24)

Chapter 19: The Counsel of the LORD Will Stand

Scripture

19:1-14 Better ***is*** a poor ***one*** who walks in his integrity than one perverse of his lips, and he ***is*** a fool. Also without knowledge a soul ***is*** not good, and he who hastens with ***his*** feet misses. The folly of a man subverts his way, and his heart rages against the LORD. Wealth adds many friends, and a poor ***one*** is separated from his friend. A witness of falsehoods will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will not escape. Many entreat the face of a noble, and everyone ***is*** the friend of a man of gift. All the brothers of a poor ***one*** hate him; how much more do his companions go far from him! He pursues ***with*** words; they ***are*** to him. He who acquires heart loves his soul; he who keeps understanding ***is*** to find good. A witness of falsehoods will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will perish. Luxury is not fitting for a fool; how much less for a servant to rule over princes! The prudence of a man makes his anger long, and his splendor ***is*** to pass over transgression. A roaring like the young lion ***is*** the rage of a king, and like dew on vegetation ***is*** his favor. Destructions to his father ***is*** a son ***who is*** a fool, and a continual dripping ***are*** the contentions of a wife. House and wealth ***are*** an inheritance of fathers, and from the LORD ***is*** a wife who acts prudently.

19:15-29 Laziness makes deep sleep fall, and a soul of slackness will be hungry. He who keeps a commandment keeps his soul; he who despises his ways will die. A lender to the LORD ***is*** he who shows favor to a poor ***one***, and his recompense He will repay to him. Discipline your son, for there is hope, and do not lift up your soul to putting him to death. One great of rage bears the penalty; for if you rescue ***him***, then you will add again. Listen to counsel and accept discipline, so that you may become wise in your end. Many ***are*** the plans in the heart of a man, and the counsel of the LORD, it will stand. The desire of a man ***is*** his steadfast love, and better ***is*** a poor ***one*** than a man of a lie. The fear of the LORD ***is*** to life, and satisfied he will lodge; he will not be visited ***with*** evil. A sluggard hides his hand in the dish; even to his mouth he does not bring it back. You strike a mocker, and a simple ***one*** becomes prudent; and reproving a discerning ***one***, he will understand knowledge. He who assaults a father ***and*** drives away a mother ***is*** a son who brings shame and causes disgrace. Cease, my son, to listen to discipline, to stray from the words of knowledge. A witness of worthlessness mocks justice, and the mouth of wicked ***ones*** swallows evil. Judgments are prepared for the mockers, and blows for the back of fools.

Chapter 19 Preview

Chapter 19 talks a great deal about the poor: the poor man who walks in integrity, the poor man whose friends leave him, and the poor man whom God Himself takes notice of. Whoever shows kindness to the poor lends to the LORD, and the LORD repays. Alongside these are sayings about false witnesses, about patience and anger, about lazy men too tired to lift food to their mouths, and about the grief a foolish son or a quarrelsome wife can bring into a home.

At the heart of the chapter is a familiar truth: a man may have many plans in his heart, but the counsel of the LORD will stand. The chapter also speaks to parents about disciplining a child while there is hope, and to sons about listening to counsel so that they will be wise in the end.

Chapter 19 Study

19:1-2 *Better **is** a poor **one** who walks in his integrity than one perverse of his lips, and he **is** a fool. Also without knowledge a soul **is** not good, and he who hastens with **his** feet misses.*

"Better is a poor one who walks in his integrity than one perverse of his lips, and he is a fool." Honest poverty is better than crooked talk. A man with little money and a clean life is richer than a smooth-talking fool (28:6).

"Also without knowledge a soul is not good, and he who hastens with his feet misses." Zeal without knowledge is not good. Rushing ahead without thinking makes us miss the path. Paul spoke of Israel having a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge (Romans 10:2). Slow down long enough to learn the right way.

19:3 *The folly of a man subverts his way, and his heart rages against the LORD.*

"The folly of a man subverts his way, and his heart rages against the LORD." Here is something we see often. A man ruins his life by his own foolish choices, and then he blames God for the result. Adam blamed God for giving him Eve (Genesis 3:12). Before we get angry at God for our trouble, we should ask whether we brought it on ourselves.

19:4-7 *Wealth adds many friends, and a poor **one** is separated from his friend. A witness of falsehoods will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will not escape. Many entreat the face of a noble, and everyone **is** the friend of a man of gift. All the brothers of a poor **one** hate him; how much more do his companions go far from him! He pursues **with** words; they **are** to him.*

Sayings about money and friends, with a warning about false witnesses in the middle. "Wealth adds many friends, and a poor one is separated from his friend." This is how the world works. Money attracts friends. Poverty drives them off. It is not how it should be, but it is how it often is.

"A witness of falsehoods will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will not escape." Lying in court is a serious sin, forbidden in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:16). The liar may fool a judge, but he will not fool God. The same saying comes again in verse 9 with a stronger ending.

"Many entreat the face of a noble, and everyone is the friend of a man of gift." People crowd around the powerful and the generous, often hoping to get something. Such friends are not true friends (18:24).

"All the brothers of a poor one hate him; how much more do his companions go far from him! He pursues with words; they are to him." When a man is poor, even his family may avoid him, and his friends drift away faster still. The last line is hard in the Hebrew. It seems to mean he chases after them with pleading words, but they are gone. Jesus was not like this. He drew near to the poor (Luke 4:18).

19:8-9 *He who acquires heart loves his soul; he who keeps understanding **is** to find good. A witness of falsehoods will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will perish.*

"He who acquires heart loves his soul; he who keeps understanding is to find good." To get wisdom is to love yourself in the right way. Gaining sense is good for you.

"A witness of falsehoods will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will perish." This repeats verse 5, but now the liar does not just fail to escape. He perishes. God takes lies seriously.

19:10 *Luxury is not fitting for a fool; how much less for a servant to rule over princes!*

"Luxury is not fitting for a fool; how much less for a servant to rule over princes!" Some things do not fit. A fool living in luxury will misuse it. A servant suddenly placed over princes, without the wisdom to rule, makes things worse (30:21-22). Position without character is dangerous.

19:11-12 *The prudence of a man makes his anger long, and his splendor **is** to pass over transgression. A roaring like the young lion **is** the rage of a king, and like dew on vegetation **is** his favor.*

"The prudence of a man makes his anger long, and his splendor is to pass over transgression." Good sense makes a man slow to anger. And it is his glory to overlook an offense. That does not mean we pretend sin does not matter. It means we do not take every slight personally, and we forgive freely, as God forgave us (Ephesians 4:32).

"A roaring like the young lion is the rage of a king, and like dew on vegetation is his favor." A king's anger is as fearful as a lion's roar. His favor is as refreshing as dew on the grass (16:14-15). The wise live in a way that earns a ruler's favor.

19:13-14 *Destructions to his father **is** a son **who is** a fool, and a continual dripping **are** the contentions of a wife. House and wealth **are** an inheritance of fathers, and from the LORD **is** a wife who acts prudently.*

Two sayings about the home. "Destructions to his father is a son who is a fool, and a continual dripping are the contentions of a wife." A foolish son can bring ruin on his father. A quarrelsome wife is like a roof that drips and drips (27:15). The same is true of a quarrelsome husband. A home without peace wears everyone down.

"House and wealth are an inheritance of fathers, and from the LORD is a wife who acts prudently." A man can inherit a house and money from his father. But a wise wife is a gift only God can give (18:22). Pray for one, and thank God for her if you have one.

19:15-16 *Laziness makes deep sleep fall, and a soul of slackness will be hungry. He who keeps a commandment keeps his soul; he who despises his ways will die.*

"Laziness makes deep sleep fall, and a soul of slackness will be hungry." Laziness is like a heavy sleep. The lazy man drifts along until he wakes up hungry.

"He who keeps a commandment keeps his soul; he who despises his ways will die." Keeping God's commands protects the whole life. Despising them, or living carelessly, leads to death.

19:17 *A lender to the LORD **is** he who shows favor to a poor **one**, and his recompense He will repay to him.*

"A lender to the LORD is he who shows favor to a poor one, and his recompense He will repay to him." This is one of the most beautiful verses in Proverbs. When you are kind to a poor person, you are lending to God. And God always pays back. He is no man's debtor.

Jesus taught the same thing. Whatever we do for the least of His brothers, we do for Him (Matthew 25:40). Give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven (Luke 12:33). The repayment may come in this life, in many forms, or in the life to come. This is not a scheme to get rich by giving. It is a promise that God sees every kindness to the poor and will not forget it (Hebrews 6:10).

19:18 *Discipline your son, for there is hope, and do not lift up your soul to putting him to death.*

"Discipline your son, for there is hope, and do not lift up your soul to putting him to death." Correct your child while he is young, while there is still hope he will change. The second line is a warning. It may mean, do not let your anger go so far that you harm him. Or it may mean, do not by neglect let him go on to a road that ends in death. Either way, the verse calls for loving, timely correction, not rage. Paul tells fathers not to provoke their children to anger (Ephesians 6:4).

19:19 *One great of rage bears the penalty; for if you rescue **him**, then you will add again.*

"One great of rage bears the penalty; for if you rescue him, then you will add again." A hot-tempered man keeps getting into trouble. If you bail him out once, you will have to do it again and again. Sometimes love lets a person face the results of his choices so he can learn.

19:20-21 *Listen to counsel and accept discipline, so that you may become wise in your end. Many **are** the plans in the heart of a man, and the counsel of the LORD, it will stand.*

"Listen to counsel and accept discipline, so that you may become wise in your end." Wisdom is not instant. It grows over a lifetime of listening. The goal is to be wise at the end of life, not just clever at the start.

"Many are the plans in the heart of a man, and the counsel of the LORD, it will stand." We make many plans. God has one counsel, and it stands. This is like 16:9. It humbles us, because our plans may fail. It comforts us, because God's purpose never does. Isaiah says the same: God's counsel will stand, and He will do all His pleasure (Isaiah 46:10). So plan, but hold your plans loosely and trust the One whose counsel stands.

19:22 *The desire of a man **is** his steadfast love, and better **is** a poor **one** than a man of a lie.*

"The desire of a man is his steadfast love, and better is a poor one than a man of a lie." What people value most in a person is loyal kindness. That is why a poor man who is true is better than

a man who lies, however rich he may be. The first line may also mean that what a man truly desires shows in his kindness. Either way, faithfulness counts more than money.

19:23 *The fear of the LORD **is** to life, and satisfied he will lodge; he will not be visited **with** evil.*

"The fear of the LORD is to life, and satisfied he will lodge; he will not be visited with evil." The fear of the LORD leads to life and rest. This is a general truth. Believers do face trouble (John 16:33). But no evil can finally harm the one who belongs to God (Romans 8:28).

19:24 *A sluggard hides his hand in the dish; even to his mouth he does not bring it back.*

"A sluggard hides his hand in the dish; even to his mouth he does not bring it back." This is a funny picture, on purpose. The lazy man puts his hand in the bowl of food and is too lazy to lift it to his mouth. Laziness can grow until it is ridiculous (26:15).

19:25 *You strike a mocker, and a simple **one** becomes prudent; and reproving a discerning **one**, he will understand knowledge.*

"You strike a mocker, and a simple one becomes prudent; and reproving a discerning one, he will understand knowledge." The mocker may not learn from his punishment, but the simple one (peti) watching it does. The discerning man learns from a word of rebuke alone. Different people learn in different ways (21:11).

19:26-27 *He who assaults a father **and** drives away a mother **is** a son who brings shame and causes disgrace. Cease, my son, to listen to discipline, to stray from the words of knowledge.*

"He who assaults a father and drives away a mother is a son who brings shame and causes disgrace." A son who mistreats his parents in their old age, robbing his father or putting his mother out of the house, is a disgrace. Honoring father and mother includes caring for them when they are old (Exodus 20:12; 1 Timothy 5:4, 8).

"Cease, my son, to listen to discipline, to stray from the words of knowledge." This sounds strange at first. It is a sharp warning, almost ironic: if you stop listening to discipline, you will wander away from knowledge. The father is saying, do not stop listening.

19:28-29 *A witness of worthlessness mocks justice, and the mouth of wicked **ones** swallows evil. Judgments are prepared for the mockers, and blows for the back of fools.*

"A witness of worthlessness mocks justice, and the mouth of wicked ones swallows evil." A false witness makes a joke of the court. The wicked gulp down evil like food they love.

"Judgments are prepared for the mockers, and blows for the back of fools." Mockers laugh at judgment, but judgment is ready for them. The fool who will not learn by words will learn by blows (10:13; 26:3). God's justice may wait, but it comes.

Chapter 19 Summary

Chapter 19 says that honest poverty is better than crooked speech, and that a man often wrecks his life by folly and then rages at God. Wealth draws friends while poverty drives them away, but whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and the LORD repays. False witnesses will not escape. Good sense makes a man slow to anger and quick to overlook an offense. A foolish son brings ruin and a quarrelsome wife is like a dripping roof, but a prudent wife is from the LORD. Parents should correct their children while there is hope, never in rage. Men make many plans, but the counsel of the LORD will stand. The fear of the LORD leads to life. The lazy man will not even feed himself, the son who mistreats his parents brings shame, and judgment is ready for mockers.

Chapter 19 Study Questions

1. What does verse 3 say a man often does after his folly ruins his way? (19:3)

2. How does wealth affect friendships, according to this chapter? (19:4, 6-7)

3. What does it mean to overlook an offense, and why is it a man's glory? (19:11; Ephesians 4:32)

4. What does verse 17 say happens when we are kind to the poor? (19:17; Matthew 25:40)

5. What does verse 18 teach about the timing and spirit of correcting a child? (19:18; Ephesians 6:4)

6. What is the difference between man's many plans and the counsel of the LORD? (19:21; Isaiah 46:10)

7. How should adult children treat their aging parents? (19:26; 1 Timothy 5:4)

8. Have you ever blamed God for trouble you brought on yourself? (19:3)

9. Who is one poor person you could show kindness to this month? (19:17)

10. What plan in your life do you need to hold more loosely, trusting God's counsel? (19:21)

Chapter 20: The Lamp of the LORD

Scripture

20:1-15 Wine ***is*** a mocker, strong drink ***is*** noisy, and anyone who strays by it is not wise. A roaring like the young lion ***is*** the terror of a king; he who infuriates him sins ***against*** his ***own*** life. Honor to the man ***is*** ceasing from strife, and every fool breaks out. From winter a sluggard does not plow; and he asks in the harvest, and ***there is*** nothing. Counsel in the heart of a man ***is*** deep waters, and a man of understanding will draw it out. A multitude of men, each proclaims his steadfast love; and a man of faithfulness, who will find? A righteous ***one*** who goes about in his integrity, how blessed ***are*** his sons after him! A king who sits on a throne of judgment winnows all evil with his eyes. Who will say, "I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin"? A weight and a weight, an ephah and an ephah, even both of them ***are*** an abomination of the LORD. Even by his deeds a youth makes himself known, whether his work ***is*** pure and whether ***it is*** upright. An ear that hears and an eye that sees, the LORD has made even both of them. Do not love sleep, lest you become poor; open your eyes, be satisfied ***with*** bread. "Bad, bad," says the buyer; and he goes his way, then he boasts. There is gold and an abundance of jewels, and a vessel of preciousness ***are*** lips of knowledge.

20:16-30 Take his garment, for he has stood surety for a stranger, and for a foreign ***woman*** hold it in pledge. Bread of falsehood ***is*** sweet to the man, and afterward his mouth will be filled ***with*** gravel. Plans are established by counsel, and by guidance make war. He who goes about ***as*** a slanderer reveals a secret, and with one who opens wide his lips do not get involved. He who curses his father and his mother, his lamp will be put out in the pupil of darkness. An inheritance gained hastily at the first, and its end will not be blessed. Do not say, "I will repay evil"; wait for the LORD, and let Him save you. An abomination of the LORD ***are*** a weight and a weight, and scales of deceit ***are*** not good. From the LORD ***are*** the steps of a man; and mankind, how will he understand his way? A snare to a man ***is that*** he says rashly, "Holy!" and after vows ***he begins*** to inquire. A wise king winnows wicked ***ones***, and he turns back a wheel over them. The lamp of the LORD ***is*** the breath of mankind, searching all the chambers of the belly. Steadfast love and truth preserve a king, and he sustains his throne by steadfast love. The splendor of young men ***is*** their strength, and the majesty of old ***men is*** gray hair. Stripes of a wound ***are*** a cleansing against evil, and blows, the chambers of the belly.

Chapter 20 Preview

Chapter 20 opens with a warning about wine and strong drink, and then moves through a wide range of everyday life: the lazy farmer who will not plow, the buyer who runs down the price and then brags about his bargain, the man who cosigns for a stranger, the gossip who cannot keep a secret. Twice it says that false weights are an abomination to the LORD. Twice it speaks of the king who winnows the wicked like grain.

The chapter also asks some searching questions. Who can say, "I have made my heart pure"? Who can find a faithful man? How can a man understand his own way, when his steps are from the LORD? The title verse tells us that the human spirit is the lamp of the LORD, searching the inner

parts. God sees all the way down. The chapter calls us to wait for the LORD instead of paying back evil, and to think before we make a vow.

Chapter 20 Study

20:1 *Wine **is** a mocker, strong drink **is** noisy, and anyone who strays by it is not wise.*

"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is noisy, and anyone who strays by it is not wise." Wine was made from grapes. Strong drink was a beer or other drink made from grain or fruit. Here they are pictured as two of the characters we have met in the book. Wine is a mocker (lets), and strong drink is a brawler. They lead a person to scoff and to fight. "Strays by it" means to stagger, to be led astray by drink. The one who lets drink lead him is not wise.

The Bible clearly forbids drunkenness. Paul says, "do not be drunk with wine, in which is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). Proverbs will paint a full picture of the drunkard in 23:29-35. Believers differ on whether a Christian should drink at all. Some hold that Scripture permits wine in moderation, pointing to Psalm 104:15 and to Jesus making wine at Cana (John 2:1-11). Others choose not to drink at all, because of the dangers this verse warns about, the harm alcohol does in so many homes, and the weaker brother (Romans 14:21). Both sides agree on what this verse says: drink can deceive, and anyone who is led astray by it is not wise. If drink has a hold on you, please get help. There is freedom in Christ.

20:2-3 *A roaring like the young lion **is** the terror of a king; he who infuriates him sins **against** his **own** life. Honor to the man **is** ceasing from strife, and every fool breaks out.*

"A roaring like the young lion is the terror of a king; he who infuriates him sins against his own life." Angering a king is like poking a lion. You put your own life at risk (19:12).

"Honor to the man is ceasing from strife, and every fool breaks out." It takes no skill to start a fight. Any fool can do it. The honorable thing is to stop one, or stay out of it. Peacemakers are blessed (Matthew 5:9).

20:4 *From winter a sluggard does not plow; and he asks in the harvest, and **there is** nothing.*

"From winter a sluggard does not plow; and he asks in the harvest, and there is nothing." In Israel, plowing was done in the cold, rainy season. The lazy man did not want to go out in the cold. Then at harvest he goes looking for a crop and finds none. Work done or not done in the hard season shows up later.

20:5 *Counsel in the heart of a man **is** deep waters, and a man of understanding will draw it out.*

"Counsel in the heart of a man is deep waters, and a man of understanding will draw it out." A person's true purposes can be hidden deep, like water in a well. A wise man knows how to draw them out, by asking good questions and listening patiently. This is a good word for parents, counselors and friends.

20:6 *A multitude of men, each proclaims his steadfast love; and a man of faithfulness, who will find?*

"A multitude of men, each proclaims his steadfast love; and a man of faithfulness, who will find?" Many people talk about how loyal they are. Few prove it. Talk is cheap. Faithfulness shows itself over time. The same question is asked about the woman of strength in 31:10.

20:7 *A righteous **one** who goes about in his integrity, how blessed **are** his sons after him!*

"A righteous one who goes about in his integrity, how blessed are his sons after him!" A father's godly life is a blessing to his children. They inherit his example, his good name and often God's kindness for his sake. The best thing a father can give his children is his own walk with God.

20:8-9 *A king who sits on a throne of judgment winnows all evil with his eyes. Who will say, "I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin"?*

"A king who sits on a throne of judgment winnows all evil with his eyes." A good king sees through evil and separates it out, the way a farmer winnows grain, throwing it into the wind so the chaff blows away.

Who will say, "I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin"? No one honestly can. This verse stands right after the king who sees all evil, and it humbles all of us. Every person is a sinner (1 Kings 8:46; Romans 3:23). John says, "If we say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves" (1 John 1:8). We cannot clean our own hearts. Only God can, through Christ. David prayed, "Create for me a pure heart, God" (Psalm 51:10), and John promises that if we confess our sins, He will forgive us and cleanse us (1 John 1:9).

20:10 *A weight and a weight, an ephah and an ephah, even both of them **are** an abomination of the LORD.*

"A weight and a weight, an ephah and an ephah, even both of them are an abomination of the LORD." An ephah was a measure for grain, a little more than half a bushel. A dishonest merchant kept two sets: a heavy weight for buying and a light one for selling. God hates cheating (Deuteronomy 25:13-16). The same saying returns in verse 23.

20:11-12 *Even by his deeds a youth makes himself known, whether his work **is** pure and whether **it is** upright. An ear that hears and an eye that sees, the LORD has made even both of them.*

"Even by his deeds a youth makes himself known, whether his work is pure and whether it is upright." Even a child shows his character by what he does. Parents, watch what your children do, not only what they say.

"An ear that hears and an eye that sees, the LORD has made even both of them." God made our ears and eyes. He can certainly hear and see us (Psalm 94:9). And since He made them, we should use them for Him: to hear His Word and see His works.

20:13-15 *Do not love sleep, lest you become poor; open your eyes, be satisfied **with** bread. "Bad, bad," says the buyer; and he goes his way, then he boasts. There is gold and an abundance of jewels, and a vessel of preciousness **are** lips of knowledge.*

"Do not love sleep, lest you become poor; open your eyes, be satisfied with bread." Rest is good and needed. Loving sleep more than work leads to want.

"Bad, bad," says the buyer, and then "he goes his way, then he boasts." Here is a scene from the market. The buyer runs down the goods to get a lower price, then walks away and brags about his deal. Proverbs smiles at this, but it also exposes a small dishonesty most of us have practiced.

"There is gold and an abundance of jewels, and a vessel of preciousness are lips of knowledge." Gold and jewels are common compared to wise words. Wise speech is the rarest treasure of all.

20:16 *Take his garment, for he has stood surety for a stranger, and for a foreign **woman** hold it in pledge.*

"Take his garment, for he has stood surety for a stranger, and for a foreign woman hold it in pledge." To stand surety is to guarantee someone else's debt. If a man is foolish enough to do that for a stranger, the lender should take his coat as a pledge, because he will probably end up owing. Proverbs keeps warning against this (6:1-5; 27:13).

20:17 *Bread of falsehood **is** sweet to the man, and afterward his mouth will be filled **with** gravel.*

"Bread of falsehood is sweet to the man, and afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel." Things gained by lying or cheating taste sweet at first. Later they turn to gravel in the mouth. Sin always promises more than it gives.

20:18 *Plans are established by counsel, and by guidance make war.*

"Plans are established by counsel, and by guidance make war." Big decisions, even the decision to go to war, should be made with wise advice (15:22; 24:6). Jesus said a king counts the cost before he goes to battle (Luke 14:31).

20:19 *He who goes about **as** a slanderer reveals a secret, and with one who opens wide his lips do not get involved.*

"He who goes about as a slanderer reveals a secret, and with one who opens wide his lips do not get involved." The gossip cannot keep a secret. If he tells you other people's secrets, he will tell yours. Do not make him your close friend.

20:20-21 *He who curses his father and his mother, his lamp will be put out in the pupil of darkness. An inheritance gained hastily at the first, and its end will not be blessed.*

"He who curses his father and his mother, his lamp will be put out in the pupil of darkness." Under the Law, cursing a parent was a capital crime (Exodus 21:17). The lamp going out in the deepest darkness pictures a life and a family line ending in ruin. God takes honor for parents very seriously.

"An inheritance gained hastily at the first, and its end will not be blessed." Money gotten in a rush, perhaps by grabbing an inheritance early, as the prodigal son did (Luke 15:12-13), or by schemes, usually does not end well.

20:22 *Do not say, "I will repay evil"; wait for the LORD, and let Him save you.*

When someone wrongs us, our first thought is "I will repay evil." This verse says do not even say it. Instead, "wait for the LORD, and let Him save you." He will deliver you and deal with the wrong in His own time. Paul says the same: do not avenge yourselves, for the Lord says, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" (Romans 12:19). Leaving revenge to God is not weakness. It is faith.

20:23 *An abomination of the LORD **are** a weight and a weight, and scales of deceit **are** not good.*

"An abomination of the LORD are a weight and a weight, and scales of deceit are not good." The warning of verse 10 comes again. Hearing it twice shows how much God cares about honesty in daily business.

20:24 *From the LORD **are** the steps of a man; and mankind, how will he understand his way?*

"From the LORD are the steps of a man; and mankind, how will he understand his way?" Our steps are ordered by God. We often cannot see why our lives go the way they do. That is all right. We do not have to understand every step to trust the One who orders them (16:9; Jeremiah 10:23).

20:25 *A snare to a man **is that** he says rashly, "Holy!" and after vows **he begins** to inquire.*

"A snare to a man is that he says rashly" the word Holy, and then "after vows he begins to inquire." To call something holy was to set it apart for God, as a gift or vow. The man promised quickly, then started asking whether he really had to keep it. Think first, promise second. Ecclesiastes warns, "What you vow, pay" (Ecclesiastes 5:4). Jephthah is the sad example of a rash vow (Judges 11:30-35).

20:26 *A wise king winnows wicked **ones**, and he turns back a wheel over them.*

"A wise king winnows wicked ones, and he turns back a wheel over them." The wheel was a threshing wheel, rolled over grain to break the husks. A wise ruler separates the wicked from the good and deals with them firmly, so that evil does not spread (Romans 13:3-4).

20:27 *The lamp of the LORD **is** the breath of mankind, searching all the chambers of the belly.*

"The lamp of the LORD is the breath of mankind, searching all the chambers of the belly." The human spirit, the breath God breathed into man (Genesis 2:7), is like a lamp God uses to search our inner parts. That inner light is our conscience and our ability to know ourselves. God sees all the way down, into rooms of our hearts we keep hidden even from ourselves (Hebrews 4:12-13; Psalm 139:23-24). This is why we can never hide from Him, and why we can ask Him to search us.

20:28 *Steadfast love and truth preserve a king, and he sustains his throne by steadfast love.*

"Steadfast love and truth preserve a king, and he sustains his throne by steadfast love." A king lasts not by force alone, but by loyal love and faithfulness. The throne of Jesus, the Son of David, is established forever in steadfast love and truth (Isaiah 16:5; Luke 1:32-33).

20:29 *The splendor of young men **is** their strength, and the majesty of old **men is** gray hair.*

"The splendor of young men is their strength, and the majesty of old men is gray hair." Each age has its own glory. The young have strength. The old have the wisdom and experience that gray hair stands for (16:31). A church needs both, and each should honor the other.

20:30 *Stripes of a wound **are** a cleansing against evil, and blows, the chambers of the belly.*

"Stripes of a wound are a cleansing against evil, and blows, the chambers of the belly." Sometimes pain is what it takes to clean out evil. Hard correction reaches the inner person. God disciplines His children, and "afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11). The verse speaks of the work of correction, not of permission for cruelty.

Chapter 20 Summary

Chapter 20 warns that wine is a mocker and strong drink a brawler, and anyone led astray by them is not wise. It honors the man who stops a quarrel and warns the lazy farmer who will not plow in winter. A man's purposes are deep waters that the wise can draw out, and a faithful man is hard to find. No one can say he has made his heart pure, and only God can cleanse it. God hates false weights and measures. Stolen bread tastes sweet and turns to gravel. Plans need counsel, gossips should be avoided, and cursing parents brings darkness. We are not to repay evil but to wait for the LORD. Our steps are from the LORD even when we do not understand them. Rash vows are a snare. The human spirit is the lamp of the LORD searching the heart, kings stand by steadfast love, and hard correction cleanses the inner man.

Chapter 20 Study Questions

1. How does verse 1 picture wine and strong drink, and what does it say about the one led astray by them? (20:1; Ephesians 5:18)

2. Why is ending a quarrel honorable, and starting one foolish? (20:3)

3. What does verse 5 teach about drawing out what is in a person's heart? (20:5)

4. How would you answer the question in verse 9? Where do we go for a clean heart? (20:9; 1 John 1:9)

5. Why does God care so much about honest weights and measures? (20:10, 23)

6. What does verse 22 tell us to do instead of paying back evil? (20:22; Romans 12:19)

7. What does it mean that the human spirit is the lamp of the LORD? (20:27; Psalm 139:23-24)

8. Is there a promise or vow you made quickly that you need to keep, or think through? (20:25)

9. Where in your life are you tempted to get even? What would waiting on the LORD look like? (20:22)

10. Are there places in your business or work where you use "a weight and a weight"? (20:10)

Chapter 21: The King's Heart in the LORD's Hand

Scripture

21:1-16 Streams of water ***is*** the heart of a king in the hand of the LORD; to all that He desires He turns it. Every way of a man ***is*** upright in his eyes, and the LORD weighs hearts. To do righteousness and justice ***is*** chosen by the LORD more than sacrifice. Haughtiness of eyes and an arrogant heart, the lamp of wicked ***ones***, ***is*** sin. The plans of a diligent ***one are*** only to advantage, and everyone who hastens, only to poverty. The acquiring of treasures by a tongue of falsehood ***is*** a vapor driven about, seekers of death. The violence of wicked ***ones*** will drag them away, for they refuse to do justice. Crooked ***is*** the way of a man ***who is*** guilty, and a pure ***one***, his work ***is*** upright. Better ***is*** to dwell on a corner of a roof than ***with*** a woman of contentions and a house of association. The soul of a wicked ***one*** craves evil; his neighbor is not shown favor in his eyes. When a mocker is punished, a simple ***one*** becomes wise; and when insight is given to a wise ***one***, he receives knowledge. A righteous ***one*** gives attention to the house of a wicked ***one***, subverting wicked ***ones*** to evil. He who shuts his ear from the cry of ***the*** poor, he also will call out and will not be answered. A gift in secret subdues anger, and a bribe in the bosom, strong rage. To do justice ***is*** a joy to the righteous, and ruin to those who work evil. A man who wanders from the way of insight will rest in the assembly of the shades.

21:17-31 A man of poverty ***is*** he who loves joy; he who loves wine and oil will not become rich. A ransom for the righteous ***is*** a wicked ***one***, and in place of upright ***ones***, one who acts treacherously. Better ***is*** to dwell in a land of wilderness than ***with*** a woman of contentions and vexation. Desirable treasure and oil ***are*** in the dwelling of a wise ***one***, and a foolish man swallows it up. He who pursues righteousness and steadfast love will find life, righteousness, and honor. A wise ***one*** goes up ***to*** a city of warriors and brings down the strength of its confidence. He who guards his mouth and his tongue guards his soul from troubles. Proud, arrogant, "Mocker" ***is*** his name, he who acts in a fury of pride. The desire of a sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to work. All the day he craves a craving, and a righteous ***one*** gives and does not hold back. The sacrifice of wicked ***ones is*** an abomination; how much more when he brings it with a wicked scheme! A witness of lies will perish, and a man who listens will speak forever. A wicked man makes his face strong, and an upright ***one***, he considers his way. ***There is*** no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel opposite the LORD. A horse is prepared for a day of battle, and the victory ***belongs*** to the LORD.

Chapter 21 Preview

Chapter 21 begins and ends with the LORD's rule over the most powerful people and the biggest events. The heart of a king is like streams of water in His hand, and He turns it wherever He wants. Horses are made ready for battle, but victory belongs to the LORD. In between, the chapter reminds us that God weighs the heart, and that doing what is right and just pleases Him more than sacrifice.

The everyday sayings are here too. The diligent plan and prosper, while the hasty end in want. The one who closes his ears to the cry of the poor will cry out himself and not be answered. Twice

the chapter says it is better to live on the corner of a roof, or out in the desert, than in a house with a quarrelsome wife. The sluggard is killed by his own desires, the righteous give without holding back, and no wisdom or plan can stand against the LORD.

Chapter 21 Study

21:1 *Streams of water **is** the heart of a king in the hand of the LORD; to all that He desires He turns it.*

"Streams of water is the heart of a king in the hand of the LORD; to all that He desires He turns it." A farmer in a dry land dug small channels to guide water to his crops. He could turn the stream this way or that with his hand. God does that with the hearts of kings. He turned Pharaoh's heart, Cyrus's heart and Artaxerxes's heart to carry out His plans (Exodus 12:31; Ezra 1:1; Nehemiah 2:8). Kings are responsible for their choices, yet God rules over them. This is a great comfort when we pray for our leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-2). No ruler is outside God's reach.

21:2-3 *Every way of a man **is** upright in his eyes, and the LORD weighs hearts. To do righteousness and justice **is** chosen by the LORD more than sacrifice.*

"Every way of a man is upright in his eyes, and the LORD weighs hearts." This is close to 16:2. We all think we are right. God weighs what is really going on inside.

"To do righteousness and justice is chosen by the LORD more than sacrifice." God gave Israel the sacrifices, and He wanted them offered. But He never wanted sacrifice instead of obedience. Samuel told Saul that to obey is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22), and the prophets said the same (Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8). Going to church does not cover a life of injustice. God wants the heart and the life.

21:4 *Haughtiness of eyes and an arrogant heart, the lamp of wicked **ones**, **is** sin.*

"Haughtiness of eyes and an arrogant heart, the lamp of wicked ones, is sin." Proud eyes and a proud heart are what light the way for the wicked. Pride is the lamp they walk by, and it is sin. Pride is first on the list of things the LORD hates (6:16-17).

21:5-7 *The plans of a diligent **one are** only to advantage, and everyone who hastens, only to poverty. The acquiring of treasures by a tongue of falsehood **is** a vapor driven about, seekers of death. The violence of wicked **ones** will drag them away, for they refuse to do justice.*

"The plans of a diligent one are only to advantage, and everyone who hastens, only to poverty." Careful, patient planning usually pays. Rushing, the get-rich-quick spirit, usually ends in loss (28:20).

"The acquiring of treasures by a tongue of falsehood is a vapor driven about, seekers of death." Wealth gained by lying is like mist blown by the wind. It does not last, and those who chase it are chasing death.

"The violence of wicked ones will drag them away, for they refuse to do justice." The violence they use on others will come back and sweep them away, like fish dragged in a net.

21:8 *Crooked **is** the way of a man **who is** guilty, and a pure **one**, his work **is** upright.*

"Crooked is the way of a man who is guilty, and a pure one, his work is upright." Guilt makes a man's path crooked. He has to twist and hide. The pure man walks straight, and his work shows it.

21:9 *Better **is** to dwell on a corner of a roof than **with** a woman of contentions and a house of association.*

"Better is to dwell on a corner of a roof than with a woman of contentions and a house of association." Flat roofs in Israel were used like a porch. Living alone in a corner up there, in the sun and rain, would be better than sharing a house with a wife who always quarrels. The same is said in 25:24, and in verse 19 below. Of course, the same is true of a quarrelsome husband. These sayings are not against wives. They are against strife. A home full of fighting is a hard place to live.

21:10 *The soul of a wicked **one** craves evil; his neighbor is not shown favor in his eyes.*

"The soul of a wicked one craves evil; his neighbor is not shown favor in his eyes." The wicked man's deepest desires are evil, and he has no mercy for the people around him. Sin makes a person cold toward others.

21:11 *When a mocker is punished, a simple **one** becomes wise; and when insight is given to a wise **one**, he receives knowledge.*

"When a mocker is punished, a simple one becomes wise; and when insight is given to a wise one, he receives knowledge." This is close to 19:25. The simple (peti) learn by watching the mocker (lets) get what he deserves. The wise learn by simple instruction. Better to be the one who learns from a word.

21:12 *A righteous **one** gives attention to the house of a wicked **one**, subverting wicked **ones** to evil.*

"A righteous one gives attention to the house of a wicked one, subverting wicked ones to evil." This verse is hard. "A righteous one" may be God Himself, the Righteous One, who watches the house of the wicked and brings them to ruin. Or it may be a righteous judge who looks into the ways of the wicked. Either way, the wicked do not get away with it.

21:13 *He who shuts his ear from the cry of **the** poor, he also will call out and will not be answered.*

"He who shuts his ear from the cry of the poor, he also will call out and will not be answered." If we refuse to hear the poor, God may refuse to hear us. Jesus told of a rich man who ignored Lazarus at his gate, and later cried out for mercy and found none (Luke 16:19-31). James says judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy (James 2:13).

21:14 *A gift in secret subdues anger, and a bribe in the bosom, strong rage.*

"A gift in secret subdues anger, and a bribe in the bosom, strong rage." This is an observation about how things work. A quiet gift can calm an angry man. Jacob's gifts calmed Esau (Genesis 32:20). The verse describes what happens. It does not approve of bribes that bend justice (17:23).

21:15-16 *To do justice **is** a joy to the righteous, and ruin to those who work evil. A man who wanders from the way of insight will rest in the assembly of the shades.*

"To do justice is a joy to the righteous, and ruin to those who work evil." Justice makes the righteous glad. It terrifies evildoers, because it means their end.

"A man who wanders from the way of insight will rest in the assembly of the shades." The shades are the dead (2:18; 9:18). The man who wanders off the path of wisdom ends up among the dead. Wandering is how it starts. Death is where it ends.

21:17 *A man of poverty **is** he who loves joy; he who loves wine and oil will not become rich.*

"A man of poverty is he who loves joy; he who loves wine and oil will not become rich." "Joy" here means pleasure, the party life. Wine and oil were luxuries for feasts. The man who lives for parties and luxury will not get ahead. Enjoying God's good gifts is not sin (Ecclesiastes 9:7). Loving pleasure more than wisdom ruins a person (2 Timothy 3:4).

21:18 *A ransom for the righteous **is** a wicked **one**, and in place of upright **ones**, one who acts treacherously.*

"A ransom for the righteous is a wicked one, and in place of upright ones, one who acts treacherously." In the end, the trouble the wicked plan for the righteous falls on themselves. Haman built a gallows for Mordecai and was hanged on it himself (Esther 7:10). It is as if the wicked are paid out in place of the righteous (11:8).

We must be careful here. This is not the same as the gospel. Jesus is the true ransom, the righteous One who gave His life for the unrighteous (Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 3:18).

21:19 *Better **is** to dwell in a land of wilderness than **with** a woman of contentions and vexation.*

"Better is to dwell in a land of wilderness than with a woman of contentions and vexation." The desert is better than a house full of fighting. This repeats verse 9 even more strongly. Husbands and wives, let us make our homes places of peace (1 Peter 3:7-8).

21:20 *Desirable treasure and oil **are** in the dwelling of a wise **one**, and a foolish man swallows it up.*

"Desirable treasure and oil are in the dwelling of a wise one, and a foolish man swallows it up." The wise man saves. The fool spends everything as fast as it comes. It is wise to set something aside for later (6:6-8).

21:21 *He who pursues righteousness and steadfast love will find life, righteousness, and honor.*

"He who pursues righteousness and steadfast love will find life, righteousness, and honor." Chase after what is right and after loyal love, and you will find far more than you were looking for. Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added (Matthew 6:33).

21:22 *A wise **one** goes up **to** a city of warriors and brings down the strength of its confidence.*

"A wise one goes up to a city of warriors and brings down the strength of its confidence." Wisdom is stronger than walls and warriors. One wise man can take a city that soldiers could not (Ecclesiastes 9:14-16). Paul speaks of weapons that are mighty through God to pull down strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:4).

21:23 *He who guards his mouth and his tongue guards his soul from troubles.*

"He who guards his mouth and his tongue guards his soul from troubles." Much of our trouble comes from our mouths. Guard your tongue and you spare yourself many problems (13:3).

21:24 *Proud, arrogant, "Mocker" **is** his name, he who acts in a fury of pride.*

Proud and arrogant, "Mocker" is his name, the verse says, "he who acts in a fury of pride." The mocker (lets) is the proud man who scorns everyone and everything. Pride and scorn go together. When we find ourselves mocking others, pride is usually underneath.

21:25-26 *The desire of a sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to work. All the day he craves a craving, and a righteous **one** gives and does not hold back.*

"The desire of a sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to work." The lazy man wants things but will not work for them. His wants eat him alive.

"All the day he craves a craving, and a righteous one gives and does not hold back." The sluggard craves all day long. The righteous man works, and then gives freely. One lives to get, the other to give (Acts 20:35).

21:27 *The sacrifice of wicked **ones is** an abomination; how much more when he brings it with a wicked scheme!*

"The sacrifice of wicked ones is an abomination; how much more when he brings it with a wicked scheme!" Worship from a wicked heart disgusts God (15:8). Worse still is the man who uses religion to cover his evil plans, bringing an offering to make himself look good or to win favor for his schemes. God cannot be bribed.

21:28-29 *A witness of lies will perish, and a man who listens will speak forever. A wicked man makes his face strong, and an upright **one**, he considers his way.*

"A witness of lies will perish, and a man who listens will speak forever." The false witness will be cut off. The man who listens carefully and tells only what he heard will have a lasting word.

"A wicked man makes his face strong, and an upright one, he considers his way." The wicked man puts on a bold face and pushes ahead. The upright man thinks about his path and makes sure it is right.

21:30-31 ***There is*** *no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel opposite the LORD. A horse is prepared for a day of battle, and the victory* ***belongs*** *to the LORD.*

"There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel opposite the LORD." No plan, however clever, can succeed against God. Psalm 2 shows the kings of the earth plotting against the LORD and His Anointed, and God laughing at them. The greatest plot ever against God was the cross, and God turned it into our salvation (Acts 4:27-28).

"A horse is prepared for a day of battle, and the victory belongs to the LORD." Get the horse ready. Train the army. Do your part. But victory comes from God (Psalm 20:7). This holds work and trust together. We prepare, and we trust God for the outcome. That is how the chapter ends, the same way it began: the LORD rules.

Chapter 21 Summary

Chapter 21 shows the LORD's rule over all: the king's heart is in His hand like streams of water, and the victory belongs to Him. He weighs our hearts, and He wants righteousness and justice more than sacrifice. Pride is the lamp of the wicked. The diligent plan and prosper while the hasty come to want, and wealth gained by lies is a vapor. It is better to live on a corner of the roof or in the desert than in a home full of quarrels. The one who shuts his ears to the poor will cry and not be answered. Justice is joy to the righteous and terror to evildoers. Lovers of pleasure grow poor, while the wise save and the fool spends. Whoever pursues righteousness and steadfast love finds life and honor. The sluggard craves, but the righteous give freely. No wisdom or plan can stand against the LORD.

Chapter 21 Study Questions

1. What picture does verse 1 use for the king's heart in the LORD's hand? (21:1)

2. Why does God prefer righteousness and justice to sacrifice? (21:3; 1 Samuel 15:22)

3. What is the difference between diligent planning and hasty getting? (21:5)

4. What happens to the one who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor? (21:13; Luke 16:19-31)

5. Why is a quarrelsome home so hard to live in, and how can we bring peace to ours? (21:9, 19)

6. What does the one who pursues righteousness and steadfast love find? (21:21; Matthew 6:33)

7. How do verses 30 and 31 hold together our preparation and God's control? (21:30-31)

8. How does knowing God holds the king's heart change how you pray for leaders? (21:1; 1 Timothy 2:1-2)

9. Are you more a person who craves or a person who gives? (21:25-26)

10. What are you preparing for right now, and how are you trusting the LORD for the result? (21:31)

Chapter 22: A Good Name and the Words of the Wise

Scripture

22:1-16 A name ***is*** to be chosen more than great riches; more than silver and more than gold, grace ***is*** good. A rich ***one*** and a poor ***one*** meet together; the Maker of them all ***is*** the LORD. A prudent ***one*** sees evil and hides himself, and simple ***ones*** pass on and are punished. The consequence of humility, the fear of the LORD, ***is*** riches and honor and life. Thorns, snares ***are*** in the way of a perverse ***one***; he who guards his soul will be far from them. Train the youth according to his way; even when he is old he will not turn aside from it. A rich ***one*** rules over poor ***ones***, and a borrower ***is*** a servant to a man who lends. He who sows unrighteousness will reap evil, and the rod of his fury will come to an end. One good of eye, he will be blessed, for he gives from his bread to the poor. Drive out a mocker, and strife will go out, and dispute and dishonor will cease. He who loves purity of heart, the grace of his lips, a king ***is*** his friend. The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge, and He subverts the words of one who acts treacherously. A sluggard says, "A lion ***is*** outside! In the midst of the squares I will be murdered!" A deep pit ***is*** the mouth of strange ***women***; one denounced by the LORD will fall there. Folly ***is*** bound in the heart of a youth; the rod of discipline will put it far from him. One who oppresses a poor ***one*** to make much for him, one who gives to a rich ***one***, only to poverty.

22:17-29 Incline your ear and hear the words of wise ***ones***, and set your heart to my knowledge; for ***it is*** pleasant if you keep them in your belly; they will be prepared together on your lips. So that your trust may be in the LORD, I have made you know today, even you. Have I not written for you excellent ***things*** in counsels and knowledge, to make you know the certainty of words of truth, to bring back true words to those who send you? Do not rob a poor ***one*** because he ***is*** poor, and do not crush an afflicted ***one*** in the gate; for the LORD will plead their case, and He will despoil those who despoil them ***of*** life. Do not associate with a master of anger, and with a man of rages do not go, lest you learn his paths and take a snare for your soul. Do not be among those who strike a palm, among those who stand surety ***for*** debts. If you have nothing to pay, why should he take your bed from under you? Do not displace an ancient boundary which your fathers made. Do you see a man skilled in his work? Before kings he will stand; he will not stand before obscure ***ones***.

Chapter 22 Preview

Chapter 22 closes the long collection of Solomon's single sayings and opens a new section. The first sixteen verses finish what began at 10:1. They say a good name is worth more than riches, that rich and poor have the same Maker, and that the borrower is servant to the lender. Here too is one of the best known and most misunderstood verses in Proverbs: "Train the youth according to his way; even when he is old he will not turn aside from it."

At verse 17 a new heading begins: "the words of wise ones." The style changes. The sayings get longer again, two or more verses each, and the teacher speaks directly to "you," as the father did in chapters 1 to 9. He tells us why he is teaching: so that our trust may be in the LORD. Then he gives a set of warnings: do not rob the poor, do not make friends with an angry man, do not cosign

debts, do not move the old boundary stones. The chapter ends with a word of honor for the man who is skilled at his work.

Chapter 22 Study

22:1-2 *A name **is** to be chosen more than great riches; more than silver and more than gold, grace **is** good. A rich **one** and a poor **one** meet together; the Maker of them all **is** the LORD.*

"A name is to be chosen more than great riches; more than silver and more than gold, grace is good." A good name means a good reputation, built on a good character. It is worth more than money. "Grace" here means favor, being well thought of. Money can be lost and earned again. A ruined name is very hard to rebuild.

"A rich one and a poor one meet together; the Maker of them all is the LORD." Rich and poor live side by side, and both were made by the same God. No one is better than another before Him. The rich should not look down on the poor, and the poor should not envy the rich. We all stand on level ground before our Maker (Job 31:15; James 2:1-5).

22:3 *A prudent **one** sees evil and hides himself, and simple **ones** pass on and are punished.*

"A prudent one sees evil and hides himself, and simple ones pass on and are punished." The prudent see trouble coming and take cover. The simple (peti) walk straight into it. Wisdom looks ahead. This saying appears again at 27:12.

22:4 *The consequence of humility, the fear of the LORD, **is** riches and honor and life.*

"The consequence of humility, the fear of the LORD, is riches and honor and life." Humility and the fear of the LORD go together. Their usual result is blessing. This is a general truth, not a promise that every humble believer will be wealthy. Jesus was humble and poor. The riches, honor and life may come partly in this life, and they come fully in the next (Matthew 5:5; 1 Peter 5:6).

22:5 *Thorns, snares **are** in the way of a perverse **one**; he who guards his soul will be far from them.*

"Thorns, snares are in the way of a perverse one; he who guards his soul will be far from them." The crooked path is full of thorns and traps. The one who guards his life stays off that path. Many troubles can be avoided by simply not going where they are.

22:6 *Train the youth according to his way; even when he is old he will not turn aside from it.*

"Train the youth according to his way; even when he is old he will not turn aside from it." To train means to start a child off, to dedicate him and teach him from the beginning. The same Hebrew word is used for dedicating a house or the temple (Deuteronomy 20:5; 1 Kings 8:63). "The youth" can mean anyone from a small child to a young man. Parents are to start their children on the right road early and keep teaching them.

What does "according to his way" mean? Many take it to mean the way he should go, the way of wisdom and the LORD. Others take it to mean according to the child's own nature and stage of life: teach each child in the way that fits him. Both are true to the rest of Scripture. A wise parent teaches God's way, and teaches it to the child in front of him. A few teachers read it as a warning: let a child go his own way, and he will never leave it. The first two readings are the most common.

Is this verse a promise that a child raised well will always follow God? No. As we have seen all through this book, a proverb tells us how life usually works, not what happens in every case (10:27). Children raised in godly homes usually carry what they learned for life. But every child grows up and makes his own choices before God (Ezekiel 18:20). God Himself is the perfect Father, and Israel His son still rebelled against Him (Isaiah 1:2). Adam and Eve had a perfect Father and a perfect home, and they still fell.

If you are a parent whose grown child has turned away from the Lord, please hear this. This verse is not a verdict against you. You may have made mistakes, as every parent does, and you can confess those to God and to your child. But your child's choices are his own. Keep praying. Keep loving. Keep the door open. Many who wander come home, sometimes late in life, and the seed you planted may yet bear fruit. The father of the prodigal son kept watching the road (Luke 15:20). God has not given up on your child, and you should not either.

22:7 *A rich **one** rules over poor **ones**, and a borrower **is** a servant to a man who lends.*

"A rich one rules over poor ones, and a borrower is a servant to a man who lends." This is a plain description. The one who owes money is under the power of the one he owes. Debt is a kind of slavery. The Bible does not forbid all borrowing, but it warns us not to put ourselves under that weight lightly. Paul says, owe no one anything except to love one another (Romans 13:8).

22:8-9 *He who sows unrighteousness will reap evil, and the rod of his fury will come to an end. One good of eye, he will be blessed, for he gives from his bread to the poor.*

"He who sows unrighteousness will reap evil, and the rod of his fury will come to an end." What we sow, we reap (Galatians 6:7). The rod the wicked man used in anger against others will be broken.

"One good of eye, he will be blessed, for he gives from his bread to the poor." A good eye is a generous eye, one that sees the needs of others and is glad to help. The generous man shares his bread, and God blesses him (19:17; 2 Corinthians 9:6-7).

22:10-12 *Drive out a mocker, and strife will go out, and dispute and dishonor will cease. He who loves purity of heart, the grace of his lips, a king **is** his friend. The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge, and He subverts the words of one who acts treacherously.*

"Drive out a mocker, and strife will go out, and dispute and dishonor will cease." Sometimes one person is the cause of all the fighting. Remove the mocker (lets), and peace returns. Church leaders and employers sometimes have to make that hard decision (Titus 3:10).

"He who loves purity of heart, the grace of his lips, a king is his friend." A pure heart and gracious words win the favor of good leaders. Daniel and Nehemiah were trusted by kings for this reason.

"The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge, and He subverts the words of one who acts treacherously." God guards true knowledge. Lies will not stand. He overturns the words of the deceiver.

22:13 *A sluggard says, "A lion **is** outside! In the midst of the squares I will be murdered!"*

The sluggard says, "A lion is outside! In the midst of the squares I will be murdered!" The lazy man is full of excuses, and some of them are wild. A lion in the streets! He might be killed! So he stays in bed. We laugh, but we all have our own lions. What excuses keep you from the work God has given you? (26:13)

22:14 *A deep pit **is** the mouth of strange **women**; one denounced by the LORD will fall there.*

"A deep pit is the mouth of strange women; one denounced by the LORD will fall there." The smooth talk of the adulteress is a deep pit, like a trap dug for animals (5:3-5; 23:27). The one who falls in is the man who has already turned from God. Sexual sin is both a sin and a judgment on those who walk away from the LORD (Romans 1:24).

22:15 *Folly **is** bound in the heart of a youth; the rod of discipline will put it far from him.*

"Folly is bound in the heart of a youth; the rod of discipline will put it far from him." Children are not born wise. Folly is tied up tight in their hearts. Loving correction loosens it. As we saw at 13:24, the rod is a picture of correction, and Proverbs did include physical discipline. The heart of the verse is that a loving parent does not leave a child alone with his folly. That correction must never come from rage and never cross into abuse (Ephesians 6:4). Godly parents today differ on whether to spank, and they agree that children must be corrected with firmness and love.

22:16 *One who oppresses a poor **one** to make much for him, one who gives to a rich **one**, only to poverty.*

"One who oppresses a poor one to make much for him, one who gives to a rich one, only to poverty." Squeezing the poor to get richer, or giving gifts to the rich to win their favor, will end in loss. Both are ways of using people for gain, and God is against both. This is the last saying in the collection that began at 10:1.

22:17-19 *Incline your ear and hear the words of wise **ones**, and set your heart to my knowledge; for **it is** pleasant if you keep them in your belly; they will be prepared together on your lips. So that your trust may be in the LORD, I have made you know today, even you.*

A new section begins here: "the words of wise ones." It runs to 24:22, with a short addition in 24:23-34. Scholars note that parts of this section are much like an Egyptian book of sayings called the Instruction of Amenemope. Many believe the inspired writer used and reshaped wisdom that was known in his day, under God's guidance, setting it under the fear of the LORD. God's truth can be seen in part by others, but here it is placed on its true foundation.

"Incline your ear and hear the words of wise ones, and set your heart to my knowledge; for it is pleasant if you keep them in your belly; they will be prepared together on your lips." Listen, take it to heart, and keep it inside you. Then the right words will be ready on your lips when you need them.

"So that your trust may be in the LORD, I have made you know today, even you." This is the purpose of all the teaching that follows: that your trust may be in the LORD. Wisdom is not an end in itself. It leads us to trust God. And it is for "you," personally, "today."

22:20-21 *Have I not written for you excellent **things** in counsels and knowledge, to make you know the certainty of words of truth, to bring back true words to those who send you?*

"Have I not written for you excellent things in counsels and knowledge, to make you know the certainty of words of truth, to bring back true words to those who send you?" The teacher has written down good counsel so that the reader can be sure of the truth, and be a reliable person who brings back a true report to those who sent him. God wants us to know the truth with certainty (Luke 1:4), and to be people others can trust.

22:22-23 *Do not rob a poor **one** because he **is** poor, and do not crush an afflicted **one** in the gate; for the LORD will plead their case, and He will despoil those who despoil them **of** life.*

"Do not rob a poor one because he is poor, and do not crush an afflicted one in the gate; for the LORD will plead their case, and He will despoil those who despoil them of life." The gate was where the elders held court. The poor were easy to cheat because they could not hire anyone to defend them. But they have a defender: the LORD Himself. He takes up their case. Anyone who robs the poor will find that he is fighting God (Exodus 22:22-24).

22:24-25 *Do not associate with a master of anger, and with a man of rages do not go, lest you learn his paths and take a snare for your soul.*

"Do not associate with a master of anger, and with a man of rages do not go, lest you learn his paths and take a snare for your soul." Anger is catching. Spend time with a hothead, and you will start to act like him. Choose your friends carefully (13:20; 1 Corinthians 15:33).

22:26-27 *Do not be among those who strike a palm, among those who stand surety **for** debts. If you have nothing to pay, why should he take your bed from under you?*

"Do not be among those who strike a palm, among those who stand surety for debts. If you have nothing to pay, why should he take your bed from under you?" Do not guarantee someone else's loan if you cannot cover it. If the borrower fails, the lender will take what you have, down to your bed. It is better to give what you can afford than to promise what you cannot (6:1-5).

22:28 *Do not displace an ancient boundary which your fathers made.*

"Do not displace an ancient boundary which your fathers made." In Israel, the land was divided among the families by God's command (Joshua 13-21). Boundary stones marked each field.

Moving one at night was a quiet way to steal land, often from widows and orphans (23:10). The Law cursed anyone who did it (Deuteronomy 19:14; 27:17). Respect what belongs to others.

22:29 *Do you see a man skilled in his work? Before kings he will stand; he will not stand before obscure* ***ones****.*

"Do you see a man skilled in his work? Before kings he will stand; he will not stand before obscure ones." Good work gets noticed. Joseph and Daniel served before kings because they were skilled and faithful (Genesis 41:46; Daniel 1:19-20). Whatever your work, do it well, as for the Lord (Colossians 3:23). Skill and faithfulness open doors.

Chapter 22 Summary

Chapter 22 finishes Solomon's sayings and begins the words of the wise. A good name is worth more than riches, and rich and poor have one Maker. The prudent see trouble and hide, while the simple walk into it. Humility and the fear of the LORD usually bring blessing. Parents should train their children early in the right way, which is a general truth about what training usually produces, not a guarantee and not a verdict against parents of wandering children. The borrower is servant to the lender. The generous are blessed, and removing a mocker ends strife. Folly is bound up in a child's heart, and loving correction drives it out. The words of the wise are given so that our trust may be in the LORD. They warn us not to rob the poor, whose case the LORD takes up, not to befriend the angry, not to guarantee debts we cannot pay, and not to move old boundaries. A skilled worker will stand before kings.

Chapter 22 Study Questions

1. Why is a good name worth more than riches? (22:1)

2. What does verse 2 teach about rich and poor before God? (22:2)

3. What are the main ways of reading "according to his way" in verse 6? (22:6)

4. Is verse 6 a promise that every child raised well will follow God? How do you know? (22:6; Ezekiel 18:20)

5. What does verse 7 say about borrowing and lending? (22:7; Romans 13:8)

6. What is the purpose of the words of the wise, according to verse 19? (22:19)

7. Why does the LORD take up the case of the poor? (22:22-23)

8. What lion-in-the-street excuses do you use to avoid hard things? (22:13)

9. If you are a parent, how can you train your children in the LORD's way, and how can you pray for them now? (22:6)

10. Are you in debt in a way that makes you a servant? What first step could you take? (22:7)

Chapter 23: Do Not Envy Sinners

Scripture

23:1-18 When you sit down to eat with a ruler, you shall carefully consider what ***is*** before you, and put a knife to your throat if you ***are*** a master of appetite. Do not crave his delicacies, and it ***is*** bread of lies. Do not labor to gain riches; from your understanding cease. Will you make your eyes fly on it, and it ***is*** not? For it will surely make for itself wings; like an eagle it will fly ***to*** the heavens. Do not eat the bread of one evil of eye, and do not crave his delicacies; for as he calculates in his soul, so ***is*** he. "Eat and drink," he says to you, and his heart ***is*** not with you. Your morsel ***that*** you have eaten you will vomit up, and you will spoil your pleasant words. In the ears of a fool do not speak, for he will despise the prudence of your words. Do not displace an ancient boundary, and into the fields of fatherless ***ones*** do not go; for their Redeemer ***is*** strong; He will plead their case with you. Bring your heart to discipline, and your ear to words of knowledge. Do not withhold discipline from a youth; when you strike him with the rod, he will not die. You, with the rod you will strike him, and his soul from Sheol you will deliver. My son, if your heart is wise, my heart will rejoice, I also; and my kidneys will exult when your lips speak uprightness. Do not let your heart be jealous of sinners, but ***be*** in the fear of the LORD all the day; for surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.

23:19-35 Listen, you, my son, and be wise, and guide your heart in the way. Do not be among drunkards of wine, among gluttons of flesh for themselves; for a drunkard and a glutton will become poor, and drowsiness will clothe ***with*** rags. Listen to your father who fathered you, and do not despise your mother when she is old. Buy truth, and do not sell ***it***: wisdom and discipline and understanding. The father of a righteous ***one*** will surely be joyful, and he who fathers a wise ***one***, he will rejoice in him. Let your father and your mother rejoice, and let her who bore you be joyful. My son, give your heart to me, and let your eyes observe my ways. For a prostitute ***is*** a deep pit, and a foreign ***woman is*** a narrow well. Also she, like a robber, lies in wait, and she increases the treacherous among mankind. Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaint? Who has wounds without cause? Who has dullness of eyes? Those who linger over the wine, those who go to examine mixed wine. Do not look at wine when it is red, when it gives its eye in the cup, ***when*** it goes with smoothness. Its end: like a snake it will bite, and like a viper it will sting. Your eyes will see strange ***things***, and your heart will speak perversities. And you will be like one who lies down in the heart of the sea, and like one who lies down at the top of a mast. "They struck me; I was not hurt. They beat me; I did not know. When will I awake? I will add; I will seek it again."

Chapter 23 Preview

Chapter 23 continues the words of the wise that began at 22:17. The teacher speaks to his son with warnings for real life: how to behave at a ruler's table, why not to wear yourself out chasing riches that fly away like an eagle, why not to eat with a stingy man who counts every bite, and why not to move the boundary of the fatherless, whose Redeemer is strong. He tells parents not to hold back correction from a child.

At the center of the chapter is the call not to envy sinners, but to live in the fear of the LORD all day long, because there is a future and our hope will not be cut off. The father pleads with his son to give him his heart, so that his parents may rejoice. The chapter ends with the most vivid picture of drunkenness in the Bible: the woe, the wounds, the strange sights, the man who feels nothing and only wants another drink.

Chapter 23 Study

23:1-3 *When you sit down to eat with a ruler, you shall carefully consider what **is** before you, and put a knife to your throat if you **are** a master of appetite. Do not crave his delicacies, and it **is** bread of lies.*

"When you sit down to eat with a ruler, you shall carefully consider what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you are a master of appetite." If you are invited to eat with someone powerful, watch yourself. "Put a knife to your throat" is a strong way of saying, control your appetite. Do not gorge yourself.

"Do not crave his delicacies, and it is bread of lies." The ruler's fine food may come with strings attached. He may be testing you, or trying to buy your loyalty. Daniel refused the king's food for reasons of his own and kept his heart free (Daniel 1:8). Not every free dinner is free.

23:4-5 *Do not labor to gain riches; from your understanding cease. Will you make your eyes fly on it, and it **is** not? For it will surely make for itself wings; like an eagle it will fly **to** the heavens.*

"Do not labor to gain riches; from your understanding cease." This does not forbid hard work. Proverbs praises hard work everywhere. It forbids wearing yourself out to get rich, making wealth the goal of your life. Stop trusting your own cleverness to get ahead.

"Will you make your eyes fly on it, and it is not? For it will surely make for itself wings; like an eagle it will fly to the heavens." Money is here one moment and gone the next. You glance at it, and it has flown away like an eagle. Paul warns that those who want to be rich fall into many traps, and tells the rich not to set their hope on uncertain riches (1 Timothy 6:9, 17). Jesus said to store up treasure in heaven, where nothing is lost (Matthew 6:19-21).

23:6-8 *Do not eat the bread of one evil of eye, and do not crave his delicacies; for as he calculates in his soul, so **is** he. "Eat and drink," he says to you, and his heart **is** not with you. Your morsel **that** you have eaten you will vomit up, and you will spoil your pleasant words.*

"Do not eat the bread of one evil of eye, and do not crave his delicacies." An evil eye is the opposite of the good eye of 22:9. It is a stingy, grudging spirit.

"For as he calculates in his soul, so is he." He tells you, "Eat and drink," but "his heart is not with you." He is counting the cost of every bite. What a man thinks in his heart is what he really is. His words of welcome mean nothing.

"Your morsel that you have eaten you will vomit up, and you will spoil your pleasant words." Once you see what he is really like, the meal will turn your stomach, and the kind things you said to him will feel wasted.

23:9 *In the ears of a fool do not speak, for he will despise the prudence of your words.*

"In the ears of a fool do not speak, for he will despise the prudence of your words." Do not waste wisdom on someone who mocks it. Jesus said not to throw pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6). We will see in 26:4-5 that knowing when to speak to a fool takes wisdom.

23:10-11 *Do not displace an ancient boundary, and into the fields of fatherless **ones** do not go; for their Redeemer **is** strong; He will plead their case with you.*

"Do not displace an ancient boundary, and into the fields of fatherless ones do not go; for their Redeemer is strong; He will plead their case with you." This repeats 22:28 and adds the orphans. The fatherless had no one to stand up for them. But they do have a Redeemer. The Hebrew word is go'el, the close relative who was to buy back lost land, free a relative who was sold into slavery, and stand up for the family (Leviticus 25:25; Ruth 4:1-10). God Himself is the go'el of the fatherless. He is strong, and He will take their case against anyone who wrongs them. Jesus is our Redeemer, who bought us back with His own blood (1 Peter 1:18-19).

23:12 *Bring your heart to discipline, and your ear to words of knowledge.*

"Bring your heart to discipline, and your ear to words of knowledge." The teacher calls his son again to listen. Before he tells parents to correct their children, he tells the son to welcome correction himself.

23:13-14 *Do not withhold discipline from a youth; when you strike him with the rod, he will not die. You, with the rod you will strike him, and his soul from Sheol you will deliver.*

"Do not withhold discipline from a youth; when you strike him with the rod, he will not die. You, with the rod you will strike him, and his soul from Sheol you will deliver." "He will not die" means the correction will not kill him, but neglect may. Sheol is the place of the dead. A child left alone with his folly is on the road to death. A parent who corrects him lovingly helps save him from it.

As we saw at 13:24 and 22:15, the rod is a picture of correction, and in that world it included physical discipline. The heart of these verses is love: do not hold back correction because you are afraid it will hurt your child. It is not correction that ruins children. It is the lack of it. But these verses must never be used to defend anger, cruelty or abuse. Correction in Proverbs is controlled, measured and for the child's good. Paul tells fathers not to provoke their children to anger, but to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Godly parents today differ on whether to spank. They agree that a loving parent must correct a child firmly and patiently. If you were hurt as a child in the name of verses like these, what was done to you was wrong, and it was not what God meant.

23:15-16 *My son, if your heart is wise, my heart will rejoice, I also; and my kidneys will exult when your lips speak uprightness.*

"My son, if your heart is wise, my heart will rejoice, I also; and my kidneys will exult when your lips speak uprightness." The kidneys stood for the deepest feelings, as we speak of the heart. Nothing makes a godly parent happier than a child who walks in wisdom and speaks what is right. John said he had no greater joy than to hear that his children walk in the truth (3 John 4).

23:17-18 *Do not let your heart be jealous of sinners, but **be** in the fear of the LORD all the day; for surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.*

"Do not let your heart be jealous of sinners, but be in the fear of the LORD all the day." It is easy to look at the wicked who seem to get away with everything and feel jealous. Do not. Instead, live in the fear of the LORD all day long, at work, at home and in private.

"For surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off." Why not envy sinners? Because this life is not the end. There is a future. The sinner's success is short. The hope of the righteous lasts forever. Asaph almost slipped when he envied the wicked, until he went into God's sanctuary and saw their end (Psalm 73:2-3, 16-17). Our hope in Christ is a living hope that will not be cut off (1 Peter 1:3-4).

23:19-21 *Listen, you, my son, and be wise, and guide your heart in the way. Do not be among drunkards of wine, among gluttons of flesh for themselves; for a drunkard and a glutton will become poor, and drowsiness will clothe **with** rags.*

"Listen, you, my son, and be wise, and guide your heart in the way." The teacher calls again: listen, be wise, steer your heart down the right road.

"Do not be among drunkards of wine, among gluttons of flesh for themselves; for a drunkard and a glutton will become poor, and drowsiness will clothe with rags." Do not make heavy drinkers and heavy eaters your friends. Living for the belly leads to poverty. The drunkard and the glutton sleep it off, and their lives end in rags. The Law named the rebellious son as "a glutton and a drunkard" (Deuteronomy 21:20).

23:22-25 *Listen to your father who fathered you, and do not despise your mother when she is old. Buy truth, and do not sell **it**: wisdom and discipline and understanding. The father of a righteous **one** will surely be joyful, and he who fathers a wise **one**, he will rejoice in him. Let your father and your mother rejoice, and let her who bore you be joyful.*

"Listen to your father who fathered you, and do not despise your mother when she is old." Honor your parents all their lives, even when they grow old and weak (Exodus 20:12).

"Buy truth, and do not sell it: wisdom and discipline and understanding." Truth is worth any price. Get it, and never trade it away for anything.

"The father of a righteous one will surely be joyful, and he who fathers a wise one, he will rejoice in him. Let your father and your mother rejoice, and let her who bore you be joyful." A wise son is a joy to his parents. Give them that joy. It is one of the best gifts a child can give.

23:26-28 *My son, give your heart to me, and let your eyes observe my ways. For a prostitute **is** a deep pit, and a foreign **woman is** a narrow well. Also she, like a robber, lies in wait, and she increases the treacherous among mankind.*

"My son, give your heart to me, and let your eyes observe my ways." The father asks for his son's heart. He wants more than outward obedience. He wants his son's love and trust, so that his son will watch how he lives and follow it. God asks the same of us.

"For a prostitute is a deep pit, and a foreign woman is a narrow well." Here is why the son must give his heart to his father: there is a pit waiting. Sexual sin is a deep pit and a narrow well. It is easy to fall into and very hard to climb out of (22:14). The "foreign woman" is the adulteress, as in chapters 2 and 5 to 7.

"Also she, like a robber, lies in wait, and she increases the treacherous among mankind." She waits like a robber in ambush. She turns men into traitors to their wives and their God. The way out is not to go near (5:8).

23:29-30 *Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaint? Who has wounds without cause? Who has dullness of eyes? Those who linger over the wine, those who go to examine mixed wine.*

Now comes the longest picture of drunkenness in the Bible. It begins with six questions: "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaint? Who has wounds without cause? Who has dullness of eyes?" Misery, fights, complaining, injuries from brawls he cannot remember, and bloodshot eyes.

And the answer: "Those who linger over the wine, those who go to examine mixed wine." The ones who sit over their drinks for hours, and go looking for new kinds to try. Mixed wine was wine mixed with spices to make it stronger.

23:31-32 *Do not look at wine when it is red, when it gives its eye in the cup, **when** it goes with smoothness. Its end: like a snake it will bite, and like a viper it will sting.*

"Do not look at wine when it is red, when it gives its eye in the cup, when it goes with smoothness." Wine looks good. It sparkles in the cup. It goes down smoothly. That is the danger. The teacher says, do not even look at it with longing when it is drawing you in.

"Its end: like a snake it will bite, and like a viper it will sting." The smooth drink ends in a snake bite. It poisons the body, the mind and the home.

23:33-35 *Your eyes will see strange **things**, and your heart will speak perversities. And you will be like one who lies down in the heart of the sea, and like one who lies down at the top of a mast. "They struck me; I was not hurt. They beat me; I did not know. When will I awake? I will add; I will seek it again."*

"Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will speak perversities." The drunk sees things that are not there and says things he would never say sober. Some take "strange things" as strange women, since drink and sexual sin often go together.

"And you will be like one who lies down in the heart of the sea, and like one who lies down at the top of a mast." The drunk is like a man trying to sleep on a ship at sea, or at the top of the mast, swaying back and forth, sick and dizzy and in danger of falling.

"They struck me; I was not hurt. They beat me; I did not know. When will I awake? I will add; I will seek it again." This is the saddest line of all. He has been beaten and did not even feel it. And the first thing he thinks when he wakes is how to get another drink. That is what addiction is: the thing that hurts you is the thing you crave.

Scripture plainly forbids drunkenness (Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 5:21). As I noted at 20:1, believers differ on whether a Christian should drink at all. Some drink wine in moderation, and others choose not to drink. These verses speak to the drunkard, and they warn everyone about where wine can lead. If you are caught in this, there is hope. Christ sets people free, and many have found help through their church and through others who have walked the same road. Please do not try to fight it alone.

Chapter 23 Summary

Chapter 23 continues the words of the wise. At a ruler's table, control your appetite, for his food may be bread of lies. Do not wear yourself out to get rich, since riches fly away like an eagle. Do not eat with a stingy man whose heart is not with you, and do not waste wisdom on a fool. Do not move the boundary of the fatherless, for their Redeemer is strong. Parents must not withhold loving correction, which can save a child from death, and must never use it as an excuse for abuse. A wise child makes his parents glad. Do not envy sinners, but live in the fear of the LORD, for there is a future and your hope will not be cut off. Avoid drunkards and gluttons, buy truth and do not sell it, give your heart to your father and stay away from the pit of sexual sin. The chapter ends with a vivid warning about wine: it goes down smoothly, bites like a snake, and leaves the drunkard craving more.

Chapter 23 Study Questions

1. What warnings does the teacher give about eating at a ruler's table? (23:1-3)

2. How does verse 5 picture riches? (23:4-5; 1 Timothy 6:17)

3. Who is the Redeemer of the fatherless, and what does He do for them? (23:10-11)

4. What do verses 13-14 teach about correction, and what must they never be used to excuse? (23:13-14; Ephesians 6:4)

5. Why should we not envy sinners? (23:17-18; Psalm 73:16-17)

6. What does the father ask his son to give him, and why? (23:26-28)

7. List the troubles of the drunkard from verses 29-35. Which one stands out to you? (23:29-35)

8. Are you laboring to get rich in a way that is wearing you out? What would it look like to stop? (23:4)

9. Is there someone whose success you envy? How does the hope of verse 18 change that? (23:17-18)

10. If someone you love struggles with drinking, how can you pray for them and help them get help? (23:29-35)

Chapter 24: Do Not Fret Because of Evildoers

Scripture

24:1-22 Do not be jealous of men of evil, and do not desire to be with them; for their heart meditates violence, and their lips speak trouble. By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge the chambers are filled ***with*** all precious and pleasant wealth. A wise man ***is*** in strength, and a man of knowledge makes power firm; for by guidance you will make war for yourself, and victory ***is*** in a multitude of counselors. Wisdom ***is too*** high for a fool; in the gate he does not open his mouth. He who plans to do evil, they will call him a master of schemes. The wicked scheme of folly ***is*** sin, and an abomination to mankind ***is*** a mocker. ***If*** you show yourself slack in a day of trouble, your power ***is*** narrow. Deliver those taken to death, and those staggering to the slaughter, if you will hold back. If you say, "Look, we did not know this," does not He who weighs hearts, He, perceive ***it***? And He who guards your soul, He, know ***it***? And He will repay to mankind according to his work. My son, eat honey, for ***it is*** good, and honey from the comb ***is*** sweet on your palate. So know wisdom for your soul; if you find ***it***, then there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off. Do not lie in wait, wicked ***one***, against the dwelling of a righteous ***one***; do not devastate his resting place; for a righteous ***one*** will fall seven ***times*** and rise, and wicked ***ones*** will stumble in evil. When your enemy falls, do not rejoice, and when he stumbles, let your heart not be joyful, lest the LORD see, and it be evil in His eyes, and He turn back His anger from him. Do not fret yourself because of the evildoers; do not be jealous of the wicked; for there will be no future for the evil ***one***; the lamp of wicked ***ones*** will be put out. Fear the LORD, my son, and the king; with those who change do not get involved; for suddenly their calamity will arise, and the disaster of both of them, who knows?

24:23-34 These also ***are*** for wise ***ones***: to regard faces in judgment ***is*** not good. He who says to a wicked ***one***, "You ***are*** righteous," peoples will curse him, nations will denounce him. And for those who rebuke, it will be pleasant, and on them will come a blessing of good. He kisses lips, he who returns right words. Establish your work outside, and make it ready for yourself in the field; afterward, then build your house. Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, and will you deceive with your lips? Do not say, "Just as he has done to me, so I will do to him; I will repay to the man according to his work." By the field of a sluggardly man I passed, and by the vineyard of a man lacking sense; and look, it had all gone up ***in*** thorns; its surface was covered ***with*** nettles, and its wall of stones was broken down. And I looked, I myself; I set my heart; I saw; I received discipline: a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to lie down, and your poverty will come walking about, and your needs like a man with a shield.

Chapter 24 Preview

Chapter 24 finishes the words of the wise (22:17 to 24:22) and then adds a short appendix that begins, "These also are for wise ones" (24:23-34). Twice the chapter tells us not to envy evil men or fret because of them, because they have no future and their lamp will go out. It tells us that a house is built by wisdom, that a war is won by good counsel, and that a righteous man may fall seven times and still get up.

The chapter also gives one of the hardest calls in the book: rescue those who are being led away to death. We cannot say we did not know, because God weighs the heart. It warns us not to gloat when an enemy falls and not to pay back evil for evil. And it ends with a story. The teacher walks past a lazy man's field, sees the thorns and the broken wall, and learns a lesson for life: a little sleep, a little slumber, and poverty comes like an armed man.

Chapter 24 Study

24:1-2 *Do not be jealous of men of evil, and do not desire to be with them; for their heart meditates violence, and their lips speak trouble.*

"Do not be jealous of men of evil, and do not desire to be with them; for their heart meditates violence, and their lips speak trouble." Evil men can look attractive. They seem free, powerful, rich. Do not want what they have, and do not want to be part of their crowd. Look past the outside. Their hearts are full of violence and their mouths full of trouble. This is the same warning as 23:17, and it comes again in verse 19.

24:3-4 *By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge the chambers are filled **with** all precious and pleasant wealth.*

"By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge the chambers are filled with all precious and pleasant wealth." This speaks of a real house and of a family. A home is built and made strong by wisdom. Its rooms are filled with good things, not only furniture but love, peace and joy. Many homes are full of nice things and empty of these. Wisdom builds what money cannot (14:1). Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain (Psalm 127:1).

24:5-6 *A wise man **is** in strength, and a man of knowledge makes power firm; for by guidance you will make war for yourself, and victory **is** in a multitude of counselors.*

"A wise man is in strength, and a man of knowledge makes power firm; for by guidance you will make war for yourself, and victory is in a multitude of counselors." Wisdom is a kind of strength. It does more than muscle. Battles are won by good planning and wise advice (11:14; 20:18). Before a big decision, get counsel from many wise people.

24:7 *Wisdom **is too** high for a fool; in the gate he does not open his mouth.*

"Wisdom is too high for a fool; in the gate he does not open his mouth." The gate was where the elders met to judge and decide matters for the town. The fool has nothing to say there. Wisdom is out of his reach because he never reached for it.

24:8-9 *He who plans to do evil, they will call him a master of schemes. The wicked scheme of folly **is** sin, and an abomination to mankind **is** a mocker.*

"He who plans to do evil, they will call him a master of schemes." The man who always plots evil earns a name for it. People learn to watch out for him.

"The wicked scheme of folly is sin, and an abomination to mankind is a mocker." Even planning folly is sin. Jesus taught that sin begins in the heart before it reaches the hands (Matthew 5:28). And people cannot stand a mocker (lets). He makes himself hated.

24:10 ***If*** *you show yourself slack in a day of trouble, your power* ***is*** *narrow.*

"If you show yourself slack in a day of trouble, your power is narrow." Trouble shows what we are made of. If we fold under pressure, our strength was small to begin with. This verse calls us to be strong in the hard day, in the strength God gives (Isaiah 40:29-31; Philippians 4:13). It leads straight into the next two verses, where the hard day is someone else's.

24:11-12 *Deliver those taken to death, and those staggering to the slaughter, if you will hold back. If you say, "Look, we did not know this," does not He who weighs hearts, He, perceive* ***it****? And He who guards your soul, He, know* ***it****? And He will repay to mankind according to his work.*

"Deliver those taken to death, and those staggering to the slaughter, if you will hold back." Here is one of the strongest commands in the book. Some people are being led away to die, perhaps falsely condemned, perhaps victims of violence or injustice. Rescue them. Do not hold back.

Then the teacher answers our excuse before we can make it. We might say, "Look, we did not know this." God's answer comes in the rest of the verse: "does not He who weighs hearts, He, perceive it? And He who guards your soul, He, know it? And He will repay to mankind according to his work." We may claim ignorance. God knows whether we really did not know, or simply did not want to know.

Who are those taken to death in our day? The verse does not list them, and we should not shrink it to fit our own concerns. Believers have applied it to many: the innocent condemned unjustly, the unborn, the victims of trafficking and abuse, the persecuted church, the hungry and the forgotten. All of these fit the heart of the verse, and each of us must ask where God is calling us to act. There is also a deeper sense. Every person without Christ is walking toward eternal death. Jude tells us to save others, "snatching them out of the fire" (Jude 23). Jesus came to deliver us when we were staggering to the slaughter. Now He sends us to tell others. We cannot rescue everyone. But we cannot say, "we did not know."

24:13-14 *My son, eat honey, for* ***it is*** *good, and honey from the comb* ***is*** *sweet on your palate. So know wisdom for your soul; if you find* ***it****, then there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.*

"My son, eat honey, for it is good, and honey from the comb is sweet on your palate. So know wisdom for your soul; if you find it, then there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off." Honey was the sweetest thing they knew. Wisdom is like that: good for you and sweet to taste. David said God's words are sweeter than honey (Psalm 19:10). And wisdom gives what honey cannot: a future and a hope that will not be cut off (23:18).

24:15-16 *Do not lie in wait, wicked **one**, against the dwelling of a righteous **one**; do not devastate his resting place; for a righteous **one** will fall seven **times** and rise, and wicked **ones** will stumble in evil.*

"Do not lie in wait, wicked one, against the dwelling of a righteous one; do not devastate his resting place; for a righteous one will fall seven times and rise, and wicked ones will stumble in evil." Here the teacher turns and speaks to the wicked man directly. Do not plot against the righteous. It will not work. The righteous may be knocked down again and again, seven times, which means many times. But he gets up, because God lifts him (Psalm 37:23-24; Micah 7:8). The wicked stumble once and do not rise.

This verse is often used to mean that a believer may fall into sin many times and still get up. That is true elsewhere in Scripture (1 John 1:9). But here the fall is mainly trouble and attack from outside. Either way, the righteous are not finished when they fall. If you have been knocked down, get up. God is not done with you.

24:17-18 *When your enemy falls, do not rejoice, and when he stumbles, let your heart not be joyful, lest the LORD see, and it be evil in His eyes, and He turn back His anger from him.*

"When your enemy falls, do not rejoice, and when he stumbles, let your heart not be joyful, lest the LORD see, and it be evil in His eyes, and He turn back His anger from him." It is natural to be glad when someone who hurt us gets hurt. God says do not. Gloating is sin. It may even move God to turn His anger away from the enemy and toward us. Leave justice to God, and pray for your enemies (Matthew 5:44). Job could say he had not rejoiced at the ruin of the one who hated him (Job 31:29).

24:19-20 *Do not fret yourself because of the evildoers; do not be jealous of the wicked; for there will be no future for the evil **one**; the lamp of wicked **ones** will be put out.*

"Do not fret yourself because of the evildoers; do not be jealous of the wicked; for there will be no future for the evil one; the lamp of wicked ones will be put out." To fret is to burn inside with anger or worry. Do not let the wicked get under your skin. Their light is going out. David wrote a whole psalm on this, which begins with the same words, "Do not fret" (Psalm 37:1).

24:21-22 *Fear the LORD, my son, and the king; with those who change do not get involved; for suddenly their calamity will arise, and the disaster of both of them, who knows?*

"Fear the LORD, my son, and the king; with those who change do not get involved; for suddenly their calamity will arise, and the disaster of both of them, who knows?" Honor God first and the government He has set over you (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:17). "Those who change" are likely rebels, men who want to overthrow the order of things. Their end comes suddenly. "Both of them" may mean the punishment that comes from the LORD and from the king. This ends the words of the wise.

24:23-25 *These also **are** for wise **ones**: to regard faces in judgment **is** not good. He who says to a wicked **one**, "You **are** righteous," peoples will curse him, nations will denounce him. And for those who rebuke, it will be pleasant, and on them will come a blessing of good.*

A short appendix begins: "These also are for wise ones." Then the first saying: "to regard faces in judgment is not good." To regard faces is to play favorites. A judge must not favor someone because he is rich, powerful, or a friend (18:5).

"He who says to a wicked one," and the words he says are "You are righteous," that judge will be hated: "peoples will curse him, nations will denounce him." Everyone despises a judge who lets the guilty go free.

"And for those who rebuke, it will be pleasant, and on them will come a blessing of good." But those who have the courage to call wrong what it is will be blessed and respected.

24:26 *He kisses lips, he who returns right words.*

"He kisses lips, he who returns right words." An honest answer is like a kiss, a sign of real friendship. Flattery feels nice, but the truth spoken in love is the greater kindness (27:6; Ephesians 4:15).

24:27 *Establish your work outside, and make it ready for yourself in the field; afterward, then build your house.*

"Establish your work outside, and make it ready for yourself in the field; afterward, then build your house." First things first. A young man should prepare his fields and his living before he builds a house and starts a family. Get your work in order, then build. This is good counsel about planning, saving and order in life (Luke 14:28).

24:28-29 *Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, and will you deceive with your lips? Do not say, "Just as he has done to me, so I will do to him; I will repay to the man according to his work."*

"Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, and will you deceive with your lips?" Do not testify against someone without good reason, and do not lie about him.

And do not say, "Just as he has done to me, so I will do to him; I will repay to the man according to his work." This is the voice of revenge. It sounds fair. He hurt me, so I will hurt him. But repaying a man according to his work belongs to God (24:12), not to us. Jesus taught us not to resist an evil person with evil, but to overcome evil with good (Matthew 5:38-39; Romans 12:17-21).

24:30-34 *By the field of a sluggardly man I passed, and by the vineyard of a man lacking sense; and look, it had all gone up **in** thorns; its surface was covered **with** nettles, and its wall of stones was broken down. And I looked, I myself; I set my heart; I saw; I received discipline: a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to lie down, and your poverty will come walking about, and your needs like a man with a shield.*

The chapter ends with a little story. "By the field of a sluggardly man I passed, and by the vineyard of a man lacking sense; and look, it had all gone up in thorns; its surface was covered with nettles, and its wall of stones was broken down." The teacher walked past a field and saw what laziness does. Thorns and weeds had taken over. The stone wall that kept out animals and thieves had fallen down. No one did anything terrible. He just did nothing.

"And I looked, I myself; I set my heart; I saw; I received discipline." The teacher stopped, thought about it, and learned. We can learn from other people's mistakes, if we will stop and look.

"A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to lie down, and your poverty will come walking about, and your needs like a man with a shield." This is almost word for word the same as 6:10-11. Ruin does not come all at once. It comes a little at a time, a little sleep, a little rest, until one day poverty arrives like an armed man you cannot stop. The same is true of our spiritual lives. Neglect prayer and God's Word a little at a time, and the walls come down. Is there a field in your life that is going to thorns?

Chapter 24 Summary

Chapter 24 warns twice against envying or fretting over evil men, whose lamp will be put out. Wisdom builds a house and fills it with good things, and victory comes through many counselors. The fool has nothing to say in the gate, and the schemer earns a bad name. Trouble tests our strength. We are called to rescue those being led to death, and we cannot excuse ourselves by saying we did not know, because God weighs the heart. Wisdom is sweet like honey and gives a future and a hope. The righteous fall seven times and rise again. We must not gloat when an enemy falls or pay back evil for evil. An appendix warns against favoritism in judgment, praises honest answers, and counsels us to prepare our work before we build our house. The chapter ends with the lazy man's field, overgrown with thorns, and the lesson that a little slumber brings poverty like an armed man.

Chapter 24 Study Questions

1. Why should we not envy evil men? (24:1-2, 19-20)

2. What builds a house and fills its rooms? (24:3-4; Psalm 127:1)

3. What does verse 10 say a day of trouble shows about us? (24:10)

4. What does God say to the person who claims, "we did not know this"? (24:11-12)

5. What does it mean that a righteous one falls seven times and rises? (24:16)

6. Why should we not rejoice when an enemy falls? (24:17-18; Matthew 5:44)

7. What did the teacher learn from the lazy man's field? (24:30-34)

8. Who are the people "taken to death" that God may be calling you to help? (24:11-12)

9. Have you been knocked down recently? What would it look like to get up again with God's help? (24:16)

10. Is there a field in your life, spiritual, family or work, that is going to thorns from neglect? (24:30-34)

Chapter 25: The Proverbs Copied by Hezekiah's Men

Scripture

25:1-14 These also ***are*** the proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied: The glory of God ***is*** to conceal a matter, and the glory of kings ***is*** to search out a matter. The heavens for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings, ***there is*** no searching. Remove the dross from silver, and a vessel comes out for the refiner. Remove a wicked ***one*** before a king, and his throne will be established in righteousness. Do not honor yourself before a king, and in the place of great ***ones*** do not stand; for better ***is*** saying to you, "Come up here," than putting you low before a noble whom your eyes have seen. Do not go out quickly to contend, lest—what will you do at its end, when your neighbor puts you to shame? Plead your case with your neighbor, and do not reveal the secret of another, lest he who hears put you to shame, and your evil report not turn back. Apples of gold in settings of silver ***is*** a word spoken at its right times. A ring of gold and an ornament of fine gold ***is*** a wise reprover on a listening ear. Like the cold of snow on a day of harvest ***is*** a faithful envoy to those who send him, and he restores the soul of his masters. Clouds and wind, and ***there is*** no rain, ***is*** a man who boasts in a gift of falsehood.

25:15-28 By length of anger a ruler will be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break bone. ***If*** you have found honey, eat your sufficiency, lest you have your fill of it and vomit it up. Make your foot rare from the house of your neighbor, lest he have his fill of you and hate you. A war club and a sword and a sharpened arrow ***is*** a man who testifies against his neighbor ***as*** a witness of falsehood. A broken tooth and a slipping foot ***is*** the confidence of one who acts treacherously in a day of trouble. One who removes a garment on a day of cold, vinegar on soda, and one who sings songs on a sad heart. If one who hates you is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if ***he is*** thirsty, give him water to drink; for you are heaping burning coals on his head, and the LORD will repay you. The north wind brings forth rain, and indignant faces, a tongue of secrecy. Better ***is*** to dwell on a corner of a roof than ***with*** a woman of contentions and a house of association. Cool waters on a weary soul, and a good report from a land of distance. A fouled spring and a ruined fountain ***is*** a righteous ***one*** who sways before a wicked ***one***. To eat much honey ***is*** not good, and the searching out of their honor ***is*** honor. A city broken into, without a wall, ***is*** a man who has no restraint for his spirit.

Chapter 25 Preview

Chapter 25 opens a new section of the book. These are more proverbs of Solomon, copied and collected by the men of King Hezekiah of Judah, about two hundred and fifty years after Solomon's day. This collection runs through chapter 29. The style changes again. Many of these sayings are comparisons: "like" this, so is that. Apples of gold in silver settings, snow at harvest, clouds without rain, cold water to a thirsty soul. They paint pictures that stay in the mind.

The chapter begins with kings: God's glory is to hide a matter, and a king's glory is to search it out. It tells us not to push ourselves forward in a king's presence, but to wait to be invited up. It speaks of the right word at the right time, of not wearing out our welcome at a neighbor's house, and of the false witness who is like a club, a sword and an arrow. It gives the command that Paul quotes

in Romans 12: if your enemy is hungry, feed him. And it ends with a man without self-control, who is like a city with its walls broken down.

Chapter 25 Study

25:1 *These also **are** the proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied:*

"These also are the proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied." Hezekiah reigned about 715 to 686 B.C. He was one of the best kings of Judah. He cleaned out the temple, brought back true worship and trusted the LORD when Assyria came against Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:1-7; 2 Chronicles 29-31). His men gathered more of Solomon's sayings, likely from older written collections, and copied them. God used faithful men to preserve His Word, and He still does.

25:2-3 *The glory of God **is** to conceal a matter, and the glory of kings **is** to search out a matter. The heavens for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings, **there is** no searching.*

"The glory of God is to conceal a matter, and the glory of kings is to search out a matter." God does not explain everything. There are secret things that belong to Him (Deuteronomy 29:29), and His ways are past finding out (Romans 11:33). His glory is that He is greater than our understanding. A king's glory is the opposite: to search out the truth in every case so that he can judge rightly. Good leaders do their homework.

"The heavens for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings, there is no searching." A king's heart can be as hard to read as the sky is high and the earth is deep. Ordinary people cannot know all his reasons.

25:4-5 *Remove the dross from silver, and a vessel comes out for the refiner. Remove a wicked **one** before a king, and his throne will be established in righteousness.*

"Remove the dross from silver, and a vessel comes out for the refiner. Remove a wicked one before a king, and his throne will be established in righteousness." Dross is the waste that floats to the top when silver is melted. Skim it off, and pure silver is left for the craftsman to use. In the same way, a king must remove wicked advisers from his court. Then his rule will be just and will last. Leaders are shaped by the people around them.

25:6-7 *Do not honor yourself before a king, and in the place of great **ones** do not stand; for better **is** saying to you, "Come up here," than putting you low before a noble whom your eyes have seen.*

"Do not honor yourself before a king, and in the place of great ones do not stand." Do not push yourself forward in important company.

It is better to hear the words "Come up here," the verse says, "than putting you low before a noble whom your eyes have seen." It is better to be invited up than to be sent down in front of everyone. Jesus taught this very thing. When you are invited to a wedding feast, take the lowest place, so that your host may say, "Friend, come up higher" (Luke 14:8-11). Humility is honored. Self-promotion is often embarrassed.

25:8-10 *Do not go out quickly to contend, lest—what will you do at its end, when your neighbor puts you to shame? Plead your case with your neighbor, and do not reveal the secret of another, lest he who hears put you to shame, and your evil report not turn back.*

"Do not go out quickly to contend," the teacher warns, because you do not know how it will end, "when your neighbor puts you to shame." Do not rush to court or into a fight. You may find out you were wrong, and be shamed in public.

"Plead your case with your neighbor, and do not reveal the secret of another, lest he who hears put you to shame, and your evil report not turn back." If you have a problem with your neighbor, talk to him directly. Do not drag other people's secrets into it. If you do, you will get a name as someone who cannot be trusted, and that name will not go away. Jesus taught the same: go to your brother privately first (Matthew 18:15).

25:11-12 *Apples of gold in settings of silver **is** a word spoken at its right times. A ring of gold and an ornament of fine gold **is** a wise reprover on a listening ear.*

"Apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken at its right times." Picture fine gold fruit set in a silver tray or carving. That is what the right word at the right time is like: beautiful and precious. The same words at the wrong time can hurt. Timing matters (15:23).

"A ring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise reprover on a listening ear." Correction from a wise person, given to someone willing to listen, is like jewelry. It makes the hearer more beautiful. Both are needed: the wise one who corrects and the ear that hears.

25:13-14 *Like the cold of snow on a day of harvest **is** a faithful envoy to those who send him, and he restores the soul of his masters. Clouds and wind, and **there is** no rain, **is** a man who boasts in a gift of falsehood.*

"Like the cold of snow on a day of harvest is a faithful envoy to those who send him, and he restores the soul of his masters." This is not a snowstorm at harvest, which would be a disaster (26:1). It is like cold snow water brought down from the mountains to refresh hot workers in the field. A faithful messenger refreshes the one who sends him.

"Clouds and wind, and there is no rain, is a man who boasts in a gift of falsehood." In a dry land, clouds and wind raise hope of rain. Then nothing falls. That is the man who brags about what he will give and never gives it. Jude uses this picture for false teachers: clouds without water (Jude 12).

25:15 *By length of anger a ruler will be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break bone.*

"By length of anger a ruler will be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break bone." Patience persuades. A gentle tongue can break through the hardest resistance, like breaking a bone. We often think forceful words win. Proverbs says patience and gentleness win more often (15:1).

25:16-17 ***If*** *you have found honey, eat your sufficiency, lest you have your fill of it and vomit it up. Make your foot rare from the house of your neighbor, lest he have his fill of you and hate you.*

Two sayings about "too much." "If you have found honey, eat your sufficiency, lest you have your fill of it and vomit it up." Honey is good, but too much makes you sick. Even good things need limits.

"Make your foot rare from the house of your neighbor, lest he have his fill of you and hate you." The same is true of visits. Do not wear out your welcome. A good friend knows when to go home.

25:18-20 *A war club and a sword and a sharpened arrow* ***is*** *a man who testifies against his neighbor* ***as*** *a witness of falsehood. A broken tooth and a slipping foot* ***is*** *the confidence of one who acts treacherously in a day of trouble. One who removes a garment on a day of cold, vinegar on soda, and one who sings songs on a sad heart.*

Three word pictures. "A war club and a sword and a sharpened arrow is a man who testifies against his neighbor as a witness of falsehood." A false witness is a deadly weapon, striking up close and from far away.

"A broken tooth and a slipping foot is the confidence of one who acts treacherously in a day of trouble." Trusting an unfaithful man in a crisis is like biting on a broken tooth or stepping on a foot that gives way. He fails you just when you need him most.

"One who removes a garment on a day of cold, vinegar on soda, and one who sings songs on a sad heart." Soda here is a natural mineral used for washing, and vinegar poured on it fizzes and ruins it. Taking a man's coat on a cold day is cruel. Singing cheerful songs to someone grieving is just as unkind. When someone is hurting, sit with them first. Paul says, "weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15).

25:21-22 *If one who hates you is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if* ***he is*** *thirsty, give him water to drink; for you are heaping burning coals on his head, and the LORD will repay you.*

"If one who hates you is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you are heaping burning coals on his head, and the LORD will repay you." This is one of the high points of Old Testament ethics. Treat your enemy with kindness. Feed him. Give him a drink. Paul quotes these words in Romans 12:20: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for in doing this you will heap coals of fire on his head." Then he adds, "Do not be overcome by the evil, but overcome the evil with the good" (Romans 12:21).

What does "heaping burning coals on his head" mean? It does not mean we are kind in order to hurt him. The most common reading is that kindness makes the enemy burn with shame, which may lead him to regret and repentance. Some point to an old custom of carrying coals in a pan on the head, so that giving a neighbor coals to restart his fire was an act of help. Either way, the goal is to win the enemy, not to win the fight. And the LORD will repay you. Jesus went further still: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44). He did it Himself on the cross (Luke 23:34).

25:23 *The north wind brings forth rain, and indignant faces, a tongue of secrecy.*

"The north wind brings forth rain, and indignant faces, a tongue of secrecy." As surely as a certain wind brings rain, a gossiping tongue brings angry faces. Talk behind someone's back, and you will see hard looks when they find out. In Israel the rain usually came from the west, and some read this as a northwest wind. The point stays the same.

25:24 *Better **is** to dwell on a corner of a roof than **with** a woman of contentions and a house of association.*

"Better is to dwell on a corner of a roof than with a woman of contentions and a house of association." This repeats 21:9 word for word. As we said there, a home full of quarrels, whether the wife's or the husband's, is a hard place to live.

25:25 *Cool waters on a weary soul, and a good report from a land of distance.*

"Cool waters on a weary soul, and a good report from a land of distance." In days when news traveled slowly, word from a loved one far away was like cold water to a thirsty man. The best news ever to come from far away is the gospel, the good news from heaven (Isaiah 52:7).

25:26 *A fouled spring and a ruined fountain **is** a righteous **one** who sways before a wicked **one**.*

"A fouled spring and a ruined fountain is a righteous one who sways before a wicked one." A spring that people depend on, muddied and spoiled, is a sad sight. So is a righteous man who gives in to the wicked and compromises. People looked to him for clean water and now find mud. Stand firm, because others are drinking from your example.

25:27 *To eat much honey **is** not good, and the searching out of their honor **is** honor.*

"To eat much honey is not good, and the searching out of their honor is honor." The first line repeats verse 16. The second line is hard in the Hebrew. It may mean that seeking your own glory is not glory, just as too much honey is not good. That is how many translations read it. The SLB reads it as a positive line: searching out what is truly honorable is itself honor. Either way, the verse warns against overdoing what feels sweet, including praise.

25:28 *A city broken into, without a wall, **is** a man who has no restraint for his spirit.*

"A city broken into, without a wall, is a man who has no restraint for his spirit." A city without walls was open to every enemy. A man without self-control is the same. Anger, lust, greed, and every other temptation walk right in. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). Ask God to rebuild your walls.

Chapter 25 Summary

Chapter 25 begins the proverbs of Solomon copied by the men of Hezekiah. God's glory is to conceal a matter and a king's glory is to search it out. Wicked advisers must be removed for a throne to stand. We should not push ourselves forward but wait to be invited up. We should settle

a dispute privately and keep others' secrets. A word at the right time is like apples of gold in silver, and a faithful messenger is like cold water at harvest. Patience persuades and a soft tongue breaks bone. Even good things, like honey and visits, need limits. A false witness is a deadly weapon, a faithless man fails in the day of trouble, and singing to a heavy heart is cruel. We are to feed a hungry enemy, heaping coals on his head, as Paul teaches in Romans 12. Good news from far away refreshes the soul, a righteous man who gives in to the wicked is a muddied spring, and a man without self-control is like a city without walls.

Chapter 25 Study Questions

1. Who were the men of Hezekiah, and what did they do? (25:1)

2. What is the difference between the glory of God and the glory of kings in verse 2? (25:2; Deuteronomy 29:29)

3. How does Jesus' teaching in Luke 14 match verses 6-7? (25:6-7; Luke 14:8-11)

4. What does verse 11 teach about the timing of our words? (25:11)

5. What does verse 20 teach about how to treat someone who is grieving? (25:20; Romans 12:15)

6. How does Paul use verses 21-22, and what does heaping coals mean? (25:21-22; Romans 12:20-21)

7. Why is a righteous man who gives in to the wicked like a muddied spring? (25:26)

8. Who is an "enemy" in your life you could show kindness to this week? (25:21-22)

9. Is there a matter you need to take directly to a neighbor instead of talking about it to others? (25:9-10; Matthew 18:15)

10. In what area of your life are the walls of self-control broken down? (25:28)

Chapter 26: Fools, Sluggards and Whisperers

Scripture

26:1-12 Like snow in the summer and like rain at the harvest, so honor ***is*** not suitable for a fool. Like the bird in fluttering, like the swallow in flying, so a curse without cause, to him it will come. A whip ***is*** for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools. Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you become like him, you also. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes. Cutting off feet, drinking violence, ***is*** he who sends words by the hand of a fool. The legs hang limp from the lame, and a proverb in the mouth of fools. Like binding a stone in a sling, so ***is*** he who gives honor to a fool. A thorn goes up into the hand of a drunkard, and a proverb in the mouth of fools. An archer who wounds everyone, and he who hires a fool, and he who hires those who pass by. Like a dog that returns to its vomit, a fool repeats his folly. Have you seen a man wise in his own eyes? Hope for a fool ***is*** more than for him.

26:13-28 A sluggard says, "A lion ***is*** in the road, a lion ***is*** between the squares!" The door turns on its hinge, and a sluggard on his bed. A sluggard hides his hand in the dish; he is weary to bring it back to his mouth. A sluggard ***is*** wiser in his own eyes than seven who reply ***with*** discernment. Taking hold of the ears of a dog ***is*** one passing by who becomes furious over a dispute ***that is*** not his. Like a madman who shoots firebrands, arrows, and death, so ***is*** a man ***who*** has deceived his neighbor and says, "Am I not jesting?" With no wood a fire goes out, and with no whisperer strife becomes quiet. Charcoal to burning coals and wood to fire, and a man of contentions to kindle strife. The words of a whisperer ***are*** like delicacies, and they go down ***into*** the chambers of the belly. Silver of dross overlaid on earthenware ***are*** burning lips and an evil heart. He who hates disguises himself with his lips, and in his inner being he sets deceit. When he makes his voice gracious, do not trust in him, for seven abominations ***are*** in his heart. Hatred covers itself with deception; his wickedness will be revealed in the assembly. He who digs a pit will fall in it, and he who rolls a stone, it will return to him. A tongue of falsehood hates its crushed ***ones***, and a smooth mouth makes ruin.

Chapter 26 Preview

Chapter 26 is a gallery of three kinds of people we would rather not become. Verses 1 to 12 are about the fool (kesil): honor does not fit him, a proverb in his mouth is useless, and he goes back to his folly like a dog to its vomit. In the middle of these sayings stand two verses that seem to contradict each other: do not answer a fool according to his folly, and answer a fool according to his folly. They are placed side by side on purpose, and they teach us how wisdom works.

Verses 13 to 16 are about the sluggard, with his lion in the road and his door turning on its hinges. Verses 17 to 28 are about the troublemaker: the meddler, the man who deceives and says he was only joking, the whisperer who keeps the fire of strife burning, and the hater who hides behind smooth words. The chapter ends with a warning that the one who digs a pit will fall into it himself.

Chapter 26 Study

26:1 *Like snow in the summer and like rain at the harvest, so honor **is** not suitable for a fool.*

"Like snow in the summer and like rain at the harvest, so honor is not suitable for a fool." In Israel, snow in summer was unheard of, and rain at harvest could ruin the crop (1 Samuel 12:17-18). Both are out of place and can do harm. So is giving honor or a high position to a fool. It does not fit him, and it does damage.

26:2 *Like the bird in fluttering, like the swallow in flying, so a curse without cause, to him it will come.*

"Like the bird in fluttering, like the swallow in flying, so a curse without cause, to him it will come." Birds flit about and never land. Most translations read this to say that an undeserved curse is like that: it flies around and never lands on the one cursed. The SLB follows a reading of the Hebrew that says "to him it will come," which may mean that the curse comes back on the one who spoke it. Either way, the innocent need not fear a curse that has no cause. God is their protection (Numbers 23:8).

26:3 *A whip **is** for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools.*

"A whip is for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools." Animals that will not listen to reason need a whip or a bridle. A fool who will not learn by words learns by pain (10:13; 19:29). This saying is about the fool, not a child. David said, do not be like the horse or mule without understanding, which must be held in with bit and bridle (Psalm 32:9).

26:4-5 *Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you become like him, you also. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.*

These two verses stand together, and they are among the most important in the book for learning how to read Proverbs.

"Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you become like him, you also." Do not argue with a fool on his terms. If he shouts, do not shout back. If he insults, do not trade insults. If he twists your words, do not twist his. If you answer folly with folly, you have become a fool too.

"Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes." Then the very next verse says the opposite. Answer him. Show him the folly of what he said, in a way that fits his folly. If you say nothing, he will think he has won and that he is wise.

Is the Bible contradicting itself? No. These two sayings were placed side by side on purpose, and anyone reading them could see that. Each has its own reason attached. Verse 4 guards you: do not become like him. Verse 5 guards him and others: do not let him think he is wise. Both are true. The question is which one fits the moment, and that takes wisdom.

How do we know which to use? Some teachers see the difference in the two phrases. In verse 4, "according to his folly" means in the manner of his folly: do not copy his ways. In verse 5, it means

in answer to his folly: expose it as it deserves. Others see the difference in the situation. Sometimes a fool's words do little harm, and it is best to let them go. Sometimes his words are leading others astray, or are about God's truth, and they must be answered.

Jesus did both. When the chief priests asked Him by what authority He acted, He answered with a question that exposed them, and when they would not answer, He refused to tell them (Matthew 21:23-27). When Herod questioned Him at length, He gave no answer at all (Luke 23:9). But when the Sadducees mocked the resurrection, He answered them fully and showed their error from Scripture (Matthew 22:23-33). Paul also answered the boasting of the false apostles by "boasting" himself, in a way that showed how foolish their boasting was (2 Corinthians 11:16-21; 12:11).

This pair also shows us why proverbs are not rigid laws. A proverb is a tool. A wise person must know which tool fits the job. This is true of every proverb in the book. Wisdom is not just knowing sayings. It is knowing when they apply.

For us today, this is a word about online arguments, family fights and conversations with people who mock the faith. Ask yourself: Will answering make me like him? Then be quiet, or answer gently. Will silence leave him or others thinking folly is wisdom? Then answer, but answer with grace and truth, not with his weapons (Colossians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:15).

26:6-10 *Cutting off feet, drinking violence,* ***is*** *he who sends words by the hand of a fool. The legs hang limp from the lame, and a proverb in the mouth of fools. Like binding a stone in a sling, so* ***is*** *he who gives honor to a fool. A thorn goes up into the hand of a drunkard, and a proverb in the mouth of fools. An archer who wounds everyone, and he who hires a fool, and he who hires those who pass by.*

Five sayings about what happens when fools are given things to do. "Cutting off feet, drinking violence, is he who sends words by the hand of a fool." Sending a message by a fool is like cutting off your own feet. The message will not get there, or it will get there wrong. You will drink the trouble that follows.

"The legs hang limp from the lame, and a proverb in the mouth of fools." A lame man's legs are there but useless. A wise saying in a fool's mouth is the same. He can quote it, but he cannot use it.

"Like binding a stone in a sling, so is he who gives honor to a fool." A stone tied into a sling cannot be thrown. It is pointless, and it may swing back and hurt you. Honoring a fool is just as silly.

"A thorn goes up into the hand of a drunkard, and a proverb in the mouth of fools." A drunk waving a thornbush hurts himself and everyone near him. A fool using a proverb can do real harm. Even Scripture in the wrong hands, used without wisdom, can wound people. Satan quoted Scripture to Jesus (Matthew 4:6).

"An archer who wounds everyone, and he who hires a fool, and he who hires those who pass by." Hiring a fool or a stranger off the street without checking him is like an archer shooting at random. Someone will get hurt. This verse is hard in the Hebrew, and translations differ, but the warning about hiring fools is clear.

26:11-12 *Like a dog that returns to its vomit, a fool repeats his folly. Have you seen a man wise in his own eyes? Hope for a fool **is** more than for him.*

"Like a dog that returns to its vomit, a fool repeats his folly." This is a disgusting picture, and it is meant to be. The fool goes right back to the sin that made him sick. Peter uses this verse for those who know the way of righteousness and turn back to the filth of the world (2 Peter 2:20-22).

"Have you seen a man wise in his own eyes? Hope for a fool is more than for him." After eleven verses about the fool, here is a surprise. There is someone worse: the man who thinks he is wise. The fool might still learn. The proud man thinks he has nothing to learn. Jesus told the Pharisees that because they said "We see," their sin remained (John 9:41). Humility is the door to wisdom.

26:13-16 *A sluggard says, "A lion **is** in the road, a lion **is** between the squares!" The door turns on its hinge, and a sluggard on his bed. A sluggard hides his hand in the dish; he is weary to bring it back to his mouth. A sluggard **is** wiser in his own eyes than seven who reply **with** discernment.*

Four sayings about the sluggard. "A sluggard says," and what he says is his old excuse: "A lion is in the road, a lion is between the squares!" We saw this at 22:13. He always has a reason not to go out to work.

"The door turns on its hinge, and a sluggard on his bed." A door swings back and forth and never goes anywhere. So does the lazy man rolling over in bed.

"A sluggard hides his hand in the dish; he is weary to bring it back to his mouth." This is close to 19:24. He is too tired even to feed himself.

"A sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven who reply with discernment." Here is the sluggard's worst problem. He thinks he is wiser than seven wise men. He has an answer for every argument. Laziness and pride go together. He cannot be helped because he will not admit he needs help.

26:17 *Taking hold of the ears of a dog **is** one passing by who becomes furious over a dispute **that is** not his.*

"Taking hold of the ears of a dog is one passing by who becomes furious over a dispute that is not his." Grab a stray dog by the ears, and you will get bitten. Jump into a fight that is not yours, and you will get hurt. There are times to step in as a peacemaker. But meddling in other people's quarrels usually makes things worse.

26:18-19 *Like a madman who shoots firebrands, arrows, and death, so **is** a man **who** has deceived his neighbor and says, "Am I not jesting?"*

"Like a madman who shoots firebrands, arrows, and death, so is a man who has deceived his neighbor" and then asks, "Am I not jesting?" The man who tricks someone and then says "just kidding" is like a madman shooting flaming arrows into a crowd. A joke that hurts someone is not harmless just because we laugh. Words can wound, even in fun (Ephesians 5:4).

26:20-22 *With no wood a fire goes out, and with no whisperer strife becomes quiet. Charcoal to burning coals and wood to fire, and a man of contentions to kindle strife. The words of a whisperer **are** like delicacies, and they go down **into** the chambers of the belly.*

Three sayings about the whisperer. "With no wood a fire goes out, and with no whisperer strife becomes quiet." Take away the wood, and the fire dies. Take away the gossip, and the quarrel dies down. If you want to end strife, stop feeding it.

"Charcoal to burning coals and wood to fire, and a man of contentions to kindle strife." Some people add fuel wherever they go. The quarrelsome man keeps the fire burning.

"The words of a whisperer are like delicacies, and they go down into the chambers of the belly." This repeats 18:8 word for word. Gossip tastes good and goes down deep. Stop it before it starts.

26:23-26 *Silver of dross overlaid on earthenware **are** burning lips and an evil heart. He who hates disguises himself with his lips, and in his inner being he sets deceit. When he makes his voice gracious, do not trust in him, for seven abominations **are** in his heart. Hatred covers itself with deception; his wickedness will be revealed in the assembly.*

Four sayings about the hater who hides behind words. "Silver of dross overlaid on earthenware are burning lips and an evil heart." A clay pot coated with a thin silver glaze looks valuable, but it is cheap underneath. "Burning lips" are warm, eager words. When they cover an evil heart, they are a cheap coating. Jesus called the Pharisees whitewashed tombs (Matthew 23:27).

"He who hates disguises himself with his lips, and in his inner being he sets deceit." He says kind things and hides hatred inside.

"When he makes his voice gracious, do not trust in him, for seven abominations are in his heart." Seven means complete. His heart is full of evil. Do not be fooled by a sweet voice. Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss (Luke 22:47-48).

"Hatred covers itself with deception; his wickedness will be revealed in the assembly." He can hide for a while, but one day his evil will be exposed in front of everyone. Nothing hidden will stay hidden (Luke 12:2-3).

26:27-28 *He who digs a pit will fall in it, and he who rolls a stone, it will return to him. A tongue of falsehood hates its crushed **ones**, and a smooth mouth makes ruin.*

"He who digs a pit will fall in it, and he who rolls a stone, it will return to him." The trap we set for others catches us. The stone we roll at others rolls back on us. Haman built the gallows he hung on (Esther 7:10). God has built this kind of justice into His world (Psalm 7:15-16).

"A tongue of falsehood hates its crushed ones, and a smooth mouth makes ruin." Liars hate the people they hurt. Flattery ruins. We tend to hate the people we have wronged, because they remind us of our guilt. The chapter ends where it has spent its last half: with the damage done by lying, smooth and hateful words.

Chapter 26 Summary

Chapter 26 shows three kinds of people. The fool should not be honored; a proverb in his mouth is useless or harmful, and he returns to his folly like a dog to its vomit. We must sometimes not answer a fool, so we do not become like him, and sometimes answer him, so he does not think he is wise, and wisdom knows which fits the moment. Worse than a fool is the man wise in his own eyes. The sluggard makes excuses, turns in his bed like a door on its hinge, and thinks he is wiser than seven wise men. The troublemaker meddles in others' fights, deceives and says he was joking, and feeds strife like wood on a fire. The hater hides behind warm words, but his evil will be exposed. The one who digs a pit falls into it, and a lying tongue brings ruin.

I answer foolishly all the time. I speak without thinking, and sometimes without processing what was said. Proverbs 26 tells me there is a time to answer and a time to stay quiet. I am still learning which is which.

Chapter 26 Study Questions

1. Why is honor not fitting for a fool? (26:1, 8)

2. What does verse 4 say about answering a fool, and what reason does it give? (26:4)

3. What does verse 5 say, and what reason does it give? (26:5)

4. How did Jesus show both verses 4 and 5 in His own life? (Matthew 21:23-27; 22:23-33; Luke 23:9)

5. Why is a man wise in his own eyes worse off than a fool? (26:12; John 9:41)

6. What excuses does the sluggard make, and what does he think of himself? (26:13-16)

7. What happens to strife when the whisperer is gone? (26:20)

8. When was the last time you answered someone foolishly? When should you have stayed quiet, and when should you have spoken? (26:4-5)

9. Have you ever hurt someone and then said you were only joking? How should you make it right? (26:18-19)

10. Is there a fire of strife in your life that you keep adding wood to? (26:20-21)

Chapter 27: Do Not Boast About Tomorrow

Scripture

27:1-14 Do not boast yourself about the day of tomorrow, for you do not know what a day will bring forth. Let a stranger praise you, and not your mouth; a foreigner, and not your lips. The heaviness of a stone and the weight of the sand, and the provocation of a fool ***is*** heavier than both of them. The cruelty of rage and the flood of anger, and who will stand before jealousy? Better ***is*** an uncovered rebuke than hidden love. Faithful ***are*** the wounds of one who loves, and abundant ***are*** the kisses of one who hates. A satisfied soul tramples honey, and ***to*** a hungry soul every bitter thing ***is*** sweet. Like a bird that wanders from its nest, so ***is*** a man who wanders from his place. Oil and incense make the heart glad, and the sweetness of his friend ***is*** from counsel of ***the*** soul. Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father, and do not go ***into*** the house of your brother on the day of your calamity; better ***is*** a neighbor ***who is*** near than a brother far away. Be wise, my son, and make my heart glad, and let me reply ***with*** a word ***to*** him who taunts me. A prudent ***one*** has seen evil; he hides himself; simple ***ones*** pass on; they are punished. Take his garment, for he has stood surety for a stranger, and for a foreign ***woman*** hold it in pledge. He who blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, a curse it will be reckoned to him.

27:15-27 A continual dripping on a day of persistent rain and a wife of contentions are alike. Those who hide her have hidden ***the*** wind, and his right hand meets oil. Iron grows sharp by iron, and a man sharpens the face of his neighbor. He who keeps a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who guards his master will be honored. As ***in*** the water the face ***is*** to the face, so the heart of man ***is*** to man. Sheol and Abaddon are not satisfied, and the eyes of man are not satisfied. A crucible ***is*** for silver, and a furnace for gold, and a man according to his praise. If you pound the fool in the mortar among the grain with the pestle, his folly will not depart from him. You shall surely know the face of your flock; set your heart on the herds; for wealth ***is*** not forever, and ***is*** a crown to generation and generation? The grass has disappeared, and new grass appears, and the plants of the mountains are gathered. Lambs ***are*** for your clothing, and goats ***are*** the price of a field, and enough milk of goats for your food, for the food of your household, and life for your maidens.

Chapter 27 Preview

Chapter 27 begins with a warning that James picks up in the New Testament: do not boast about tomorrow, because you do not know what a day will bring. The chapter is full of sayings about friendship. Open rebuke is better than hidden love. The wounds of a friend are faithful, but the kisses of an enemy are many. A neighbor nearby is better than a brother far away. And as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

The chapter also speaks of praise, jealousy, a quarrelsome home and the never-satisfied eyes of man. It shows that praise tests a man the way fire tests silver. It ends with a short poem about a shepherd and farmer who knows the condition of his flocks, because riches do not last forever, but faithful work on what God has given will feed a whole household.

Chapter 27 Study

27:1 *Do not boast yourself about the day of tomorrow, for you do not know what a day will bring forth.*

"Do not boast yourself about the day of tomorrow, for you do not know what a day will bring forth." We make plans as if tomorrow were ours. It is not. James says we are a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes, so we ought to say, "If the Lord wills" (James 4:13-15). Jesus told of a rich man who planned for many years and died that night (Luke 12:16-20). Plan, but plan humbly. And do not put off what matters most. Today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2).

27:2 *Let a stranger praise you, and not your mouth; a foreigner, and not your lips.*

"Let a stranger praise you, and not your mouth; a foreigner, and not your lips." Self-praise is empty. If you have done well, let someone else say so. If no one does, God still sees (Matthew 6:4).

27:3-4 *The heaviness of a stone and the weight of the sand, and the provocation of a fool **is** heavier than both of them. The cruelty of rage and the flood of anger, and who will stand before jealousy?*

"The heaviness of a stone and the weight of the sand, and the provocation of a fool is heavier than both of them." Stones and sand are heavy to carry. The irritation a fool causes is heavier still. Being around a fool wears a person out.

"The cruelty of rage and the flood of anger, and who will stand before jealousy?" Anger is cruel and can sweep over a person like a flood. But jealousy is worse. Anger may pass. Jealousy burns on and is very hard to stand against (6:34; Song of Songs 8:6). Cain's jealousy led to the first murder (Genesis 4:5-8).

27:5-6 *Better **is** an uncovered rebuke than hidden love. Faithful **are** the wounds of one who loves, and abundant **are** the kisses of one who hates.*

"Better is an uncovered rebuke than hidden love." A friend who loves you but never tells you the truth is not much help. A friend who cares enough to tell you that you are wrong is worth more.

"Faithful are the wounds of one who loves, and abundant are the kisses of one who hates." A true friend may hurt you with honest words, but those wounds are faithful. They come from love and they heal. An enemy may smother you with flattery, but his kisses are false. Judas kissed Jesus (Matthew 26:48-49). Paul rebuked Peter to his face because he loved him and loved the truth (Galatians 2:11). Do you have friends who will wound you faithfully? Are you that kind of friend?

27:7 *A satisfied soul tramples honey, and **to** a hungry soul every bitter thing **is** sweet.*

"A satisfied soul tramples honey, and to a hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet." When you are full, even honey does not tempt you. When you are starving, even bitter food tastes good. Our appetite shapes how we see things. This is true spiritually too. The person who is full of God's goodness can turn down sin's sweets. The person who is starving inside will take almost anything.

27:8 *Like a bird that wanders from its nest, so **is** a man who wanders from his place.*

"Like a bird that wanders from its nest, so is a man who wanders from his place." A bird away from its nest is exposed and its young are left alone. A man who leaves his home, his family and his duties is in danger, and so are those he leaves behind. There is a time to go, as Abraham did at God's call. But wandering out of restlessness is another matter.

27:9-10 *Oil and incense make the heart glad, and the sweetness of his friend **is** from counsel of **the** soul. Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father, and do not go **into** the house of your brother on the day of your calamity; better **is** a neighbor **who is** near than a brother far away.*

"Oil and incense make the heart glad, and the sweetness of his friend is from counsel of the soul." Perfume and fragrant oil were a joy in that world. So is the advice of a friend who speaks from the heart. A friend's honest counsel is a sweet gift.

"Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father, and do not go into the house of your brother on the day of your calamity; better is a neighbor who is near than a brother far away." Keep your old friends, even your family's old friends. They are a treasure. And when trouble comes, a friend close by can help you faster than a relative far away. Family matters greatly. But when a brother lives far off, or is not close in heart, a nearby neighbor may be the one God uses (Luke 10:36-37).

27:11 *Be wise, my son, and make my heart glad, and let me reply **with** a word **to** him who taunts me.*

"Be wise, my son, and make my heart glad, and let me reply with a word to him who taunts me." A father's best answer to his critics is a wise son. When people mock a parent, a child's godly life is the answer. Paul said the believers he led to Christ were his letter of recommendation (2 Corinthians 3:2).

27:12-13 *A prudent **one** has seen evil; he hides himself; simple **ones** pass on; they are punished. Take his garment, for he has stood surety for a stranger, and for a foreign **woman** hold it in pledge.*

"A prudent one has seen evil; he hides himself; simple ones pass on; they are punished." This repeats 22:3. The prudent see trouble ahead and take cover. The simple (peti) walk right into it.

"Take his garment, for he has stood surety for a stranger, and for a foreign woman hold it in pledge." This repeats 20:16. Do not guarantee the debts of strangers. Some warnings need to be heard twice.

27:14 *He who blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, a curse it will be reckoned to him.*

"He who blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, a curse it will be reckoned to him." Picture a man who bangs on his neighbor's door at dawn and shouts a cheerful greeting. Good words at the wrong time and too loud are not welcome. Even blessings need good timing and good sense. Overdone praise also sounds false.

27:15-16 *A continual dripping on a day of persistent rain and a wife of contentions are alike. Those who hide her have hidden **the** wind, and his right hand meets oil.*

"A continual dripping on a day of persistent rain and a wife of contentions are alike." A leaky roof on a rainy day drips and drips and never stops. A quarrelsome spouse is like that (19:13).

"Those who hide her have hidden the wind, and his right hand meets oil." Trying to restrain her is like trying to hold back the wind or grab oil in your hand. It cannot be done. As we said at 21:9, these sayings warn against strife in the home, and they apply to husbands as well as wives.

27:17 *Iron grows sharp by iron, and a man sharpens the face of his neighbor.*

"Iron grows sharp by iron, and a man sharpens the face of his neighbor." A blade is sharpened by rubbing it against another piece of iron. There is friction and there are sparks. That is how the edge gets sharp. People are the same. We grow sharper through honest friendship, hard questions and loving correction. Sharpening is not always comfortable. Iron on iron makes sparks.

"The face of his neighbor" may mean his look, his appearance, the way his face shows his character. Good friends shape who we are. This is why believers need each other: to stir one another up to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24-25). Who sharpens you? Whom do you sharpen?

27:18 *He who keeps a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who guards his master will be honored.*

"He who keeps a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who guards his master will be honored." The man who takes care of his fig tree gets to eat the figs. The servant who faithfully looks after his master will be honored. Faithful work is rewarded in time (Matthew 25:21; Colossians 3:23-24).

27:19 *As **in** the water the face **is** to the face, so the heart of man **is** to man.*

"As in the water the face is to the face, so the heart of man is to man." Look into still water, and you see your own face. The heart is like that. A man's heart shows who he really is. It may also mean that in looking at other people's hearts, we see our own. People are much alike inside.

27:20 *Sheol and Abaddon are not satisfied, and the eyes of man are not satisfied.*

"Sheol and Abaddon are not satisfied, and the eyes of man are not satisfied." Sheol is the place of the dead, and Abaddon means destruction. Death never says "enough." Neither do human eyes. We always want more. Only God can satisfy the heart (Ecclesiastes 1:8; John 4:13-14). If you are always wanting more, the problem is not what you have. It is what you are looking for.

27:21 *A crucible **is** for silver, and a furnace for gold, and a man according to his praise.*

"A crucible is for silver, and a furnace for gold, and a man according to his praise." The first two lines are the same as 17:3. Silver and gold are tested by fire. A man is tested by praise. How does he handle it? Does he grow proud, or does he give glory to God? Some people do well in hard times and fall apart in success. Praise can be a harder test than trouble. Herod took the praise that belonged to God and was struck down (Acts 12:21-23).

27:22 *If you pound the fool in the mortar among the grain with the pestle, his folly will not depart from him.*

"If you pound the fool in the mortar among the grain with the pestle, his folly will not depart from him." Grain was pounded in a mortar until the husk came off. You could pound a fool that way and still not separate him from his folly. His folly is not on the outside. It is in his heart, and only a changed heart can change him.

27:23-27 *You shall surely know the face of your flock; set your heart on the herds; for wealth **is** not forever, and **is** a crown to generation and generation? The grass has disappeared, and new grass appears, and the plants of the mountains are gathered. Lambs **are** for your clothing, and goats **are** the price of a field, and enough milk of goats for your food, for the food of your household, and life for your maidens.*

The chapter ends with a little poem for a farmer and shepherd. "You shall surely know the face of your flock; set your heart on the herds; for wealth is not forever, and is a crown to generation and generation?" Know the condition of your flocks. Pay attention to what God has given you to care for. Money can disappear, and even a crown does not last from one generation to the next. But faithful care of what you have keeps on providing.

"The grass has disappeared, and new grass appears, and the plants of the mountains are gathered." The seasons turn. The hay is cut and the new grass comes up. God provides through the steady rhythm of the year.

"Lambs are for your clothing, and goats are the price of a field, and enough milk of goats for your food, for the food of your household, and life for your maidens." If you care for the flock, it will care for you: wool for clothes, goats to sell for land, milk for the whole household, even the servant girls. This is a picture of steady, faithful work that feeds a family. It is not get-rich-quick. It is enough.

There is a lesson here for every kind of work, and for pastors too. Peter tells elders to shepherd the flock of God among them (1 Peter 5:2). Know the faces of those in your care. And Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep by name (John 10:14).

Chapter 27 Summary

Chapter 27 warns us not to boast about tomorrow and not to praise ourselves. A fool's provocation is heavier than stone, and jealousy is harder to stand against than anger. Open rebuke is better than hidden love, the wounds of a friend are faithful and the kisses of an enemy are false. A man who wanders from his place is like a bird away from its nest. We should keep old friends, and a near neighbor can help more than a brother far off. A wise son answers those who taunt his father. Loud blessings at the wrong time sound like curses, and a quarrelsome home is like a dripping roof. As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. Faithful work is rewarded, the heart shows the man, and human eyes are never satisfied. Praise tests a man as fire tests gold, and folly cannot be pounded out of a fool. The chapter ends by calling us to know the condition of our flocks, since riches do not last, but faithful care feeds the household.

Chapter 27 Study Questions

1. Why should we not boast about tomorrow? (27:1; James 4:13-15)

2. Why is an open rebuke better than hidden love? (27:5-6)

3. How is a near neighbor better than a far brother? (27:10)

4. What does "iron grows sharp by iron" mean for friendships? (27:17; Hebrews 10:24-25)

5. How does praise test a person? (27:21)

6. Why are human eyes never satisfied, and where can we find real satisfaction? (27:20; John 4:13-14)

7. What does the poem at the end of the chapter teach about work and wealth? (27:23-27)

8. Who in your life loves you enough to tell you the truth? Do you thank them? (27:6)

9. Who sharpens you, and whom are you sharpening? (27:17)

10. What "flock" has God given you to care for, at home, at work or at church? Do you know its condition? (27:23)

Chapter 28: The Righteous Are Bold as a Lion

Scripture

28:1-14 The wicked flee, and there is no one pursuing, and the righteous, like a young lion, are confident. By the transgression of a land its princes ***are*** many, and by a man who understands ***and*** knows right, it will last long. A poor man who oppresses ***the*** poor ***is*** a rain that sweeps away, and there is no food. Those who forsake ***the*** law praise the wicked, and those who keep ***the*** law contend with them. Men of evil do not understand justice, and those who seek the LORD understand everything. Better ***is*** a poor ***man*** who walks in his integrity than one perverse of two ways, and he ***is*** rich. He who keeps ***the*** law ***is*** a son who understands, and he who associates with gluttons shames his father. He who increases his wealth by interest and usury gathers it for one who shows favor to ***the*** poor. He who turns aside his ear from hearing ***the*** law, even his prayer ***is*** an abomination. He who leads upright ***ones*** astray in an evil way, into his own pit he will fall, and blameless ***ones*** will inherit good. A rich man ***is*** wise in his own eyes, and a poor ***man*** who understands searches him out. When righteous ***ones*** rejoice, glory ***is*** great, and when wicked ***ones*** arise, man is searched for. He who covers his transgressions will not prosper, and he who confesses and forsakes ***them*** will be shown mercy. How blessed ***is*** the man who fears continually, and he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

28:15-28 A roaring lion and a rushing bear ***is*** a wicked ruler over a poor people. A leader lacking understanding and great ***in*** oppressions; he who hates unjust gain will prolong ***his*** days. A man oppressed by the blood of a soul will flee to the pit; let them not lay hold of him. He who walks blameless will be saved, and he who is crooked ***in*** two ways will fall at once. He who tills his ground will be satisfied ***with*** bread, and he who pursues empty ***things*** will be satisfied ***with*** poverty. A man of faithfulness ***will be*** great ***in*** blessings, and he who hastens to become rich will not go unpunished. To regard faces ***is*** not good, and for a piece of bread a man will transgress. A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth, and he does not know that want will come to him. He who reproves a man will afterward find favor more than he who makes ***his*** tongue smooth. He who robs his father and his mother and says, "There is no transgression," he ***is*** a companion to a man who destroys. He who is arrogant of soul stirs up strife, and he who trusts in the LORD will be made fat. He who trusts in his own heart, he ***is*** a fool, and he who walks in wisdom, he will be delivered. He who gives to the poor ***will have*** no lack, and he who hides his eyes ***will be*** great ***in*** curses. When wicked ***ones*** arise, man hides himself, and when they perish, righteous ***ones*** increase.

Chapter 28 Preview

Chapter 28 opens with a famous contrast: the wicked run when no one is chasing them, but the righteous are bold as a lion. Guilt makes cowards. A clean conscience makes people brave. The chapter speaks more than any other in Proverbs about "the law," God's teaching, and it shows how keeping or forsaking God's law shapes a person, a family and a whole nation.

Several sayings deal with leaders: a land full of sin has many rulers, a wicked ruler is like a roaring lion and a charging bear, and when the wicked rise, people hide. Others deal with money:

a poor man with integrity is better than a crooked rich man, the one who hurries to get rich will not go unpunished, and the one who gives to the poor will not lack. At the heart of the chapter is one of the clearest verses in the Old Testament on confession: he who covers his sins will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find mercy.

Chapter 28 Study

28:1 *The wicked flee, and there is no one pursuing, and the righteous, like a young lion, are confident.*

"The wicked flee, and there is no one pursuing, and the righteous, like a young lion, are confident." A guilty conscience makes a person jumpy. He hears footsteps that are not there (Leviticus 26:17, 36). The righteous have nothing to hide, so they can stand firm, like a lion that fears nothing. Peter and John stood boldly before the council that had crucified Jesus (Acts 4:13). That kind of courage comes from a clean heart and a close walk with God.

28:2 *By the transgression of a land its princes **are** many, and by a man who understands **and** knows right, it will last long.*

"By the transgression of a land its princes are many, and by a man who understands and knows right, it will last long." When a nation is full of sin, its leaders come and go quickly. The northern kingdom of Israel had nineteen kings in about two hundred years, many of them murdered by the next (1 Kings 15-16; 2 Kings 15). A wise and just leader brings stability.

28:3 *A poor man who oppresses **the** poor **is** a rain that sweeps away, and there is no food.*

"A poor man who oppresses the poor is a rain that sweeps away, and there is no food." Rain should bring a crop, but a flood washes everything away. A poor man who gains a little power and then crushes others who are poor is like that. He should understand them best, and he treats them worst. Jesus told of a servant forgiven a huge debt who then choked a fellow servant over a small one (Matthew 18:28-34).

28:4-5 *Those who forsake **the** law praise the wicked, and those who keep **the** law contend with them. Men of evil do not understand justice, and those who seek the LORD understand everything.*

"Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, and those who keep the law contend with them." "The law" here is the Hebrew torah, which means instruction or teaching, and in Israel it meant God's law given through Moses. Those who throw off God's teaching end up cheering for the wicked. Those who keep it stand against them (Romans 1:32). For believers today, the Law is fulfilled in Christ (Romans 10:4). We are not saved by keeping it, but its moral heart still shows us what pleases God, and we walk in it because we have been saved (Ephesians 2:8-10).

"Men of evil do not understand justice, and those who seek the LORD understand everything." Evil blinds a person to what is right. Those who seek the LORD understand what matters. This does not mean they know every fact. It means they understand what is right and wrong, and what life is about (1 Corinthians 2:15; 1 John 2:20).

28:6-7 *Better **is** a poor **man** who walks in his integrity than one perverse of two ways, and he **is** rich. He who keeps **the** law **is** a son who understands, and he who associates with gluttons shames his father.*

"Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than one perverse of two ways, and he is rich." "Two ways" pictures a man who walks two roads at once, a double life. Honest poverty is better than crooked riches (19:1).

"He who keeps the law is a son who understands, and he who associates with gluttons shames his father." A son who keeps God's teaching is wise. A son who runs with the party crowd brings shame on his family (23:20-21).

28:8 *He who increases his wealth by interest and usury gathers it for one who shows favor to **the** poor.*

"He who increases his wealth by interest and usury gathers it for one who shows favor to the poor." The Law forbade Israelites to charge interest to a fellow Israelite who was poor (Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:35-37). Getting rich by squeezing the needy is wrong. God will see that such money ends up in the hands of someone who will be kind to the poor. Believers today differ on how these laws apply to ordinary business loans, but all agree that profiting from someone's desperation is sin.

28:9 *He who turns aside his ear from hearing **the** law, even his prayer **is** an abomination.*

"He who turns aside his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination." If we will not listen to God, why should He listen to us? Prayer is not a way to get what we want while we ignore what He says. The one who turns from God's Word cannot expect his prayers to be heard (Isaiah 1:15-17; 1 John 3:22). But the door is always open for the one who turns back (verse 13).

28:10 *He who leads upright **ones** astray in an evil way, into his own pit he will fall, and blameless **ones** will inherit good.*

"He who leads upright ones astray in an evil way, into his own pit he will fall, and blameless ones will inherit good." Leading good people into sin is a terrible thing. Jesus said it would be better for such a person to have a millstone hung around his neck and be thrown into the sea (Matthew 18:6). The tempter will fall into his own trap (26:27).

28:11 *A rich man **is** wise in his own eyes, and a poor **man** who understands searches him out.*

"A rich man is wise in his own eyes, and a poor man who understands searches him out." Money can make a man think he is smart. But a poor man with understanding can see right through him. Being rich and being wise are not the same thing.

28:12 *When righteous **ones** rejoice, glory **is** great, and when wicked **ones** arise, man is searched for.*

"When righteous ones rejoice, glory is great, and when wicked ones arise, man is searched for." When the righteous do well, the whole land celebrates. When the wicked come to power, people go into hiding, and the rulers search them out. This saying is repeated in different words in verse 28 and in 29:2.

28:13 *He who covers his transgressions will not prosper, and he who confesses and forsakes **them** will be shown mercy.*

"He who covers his transgressions will not prosper, and he who confesses and forsakes them will be shown mercy." This is one of the most hopeful verses in the book. We all want to hide our sins. Adam and Eve hid among the trees (Genesis 3:8). David tried to cover his sin with Bathsheba, and his body wasted away under the weight of it (Psalm 32:3-4). Covering sin never works.

But there is another way. Confess your sin to God, which means agree with Him that it is sin. And forsake it, which means turn away from it. That is what repentance is. And the one who does will be shown mercy. David found this. He said, "My sin I made known to You, and my iniquity I did not cover," and the LORD forgave the iniquity of his sin (Psalm 32:5). John promises the same: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). No sin is too big for God's mercy in Christ. Is there something you have been covering? Bring it into the light today.

28:14 *How blessed **is** the man who fears continually, and he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.*

"How blessed is the man who fears continually, and he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity." The fear here is the fear of the LORD, a tender heart that takes God and sin seriously. It is the opposite of a hard heart. Pharaoh hardened his heart again and again until disaster came (Exodus 8:15, 32). Hebrews warns, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7-8). A soft heart is a blessed heart.

28:15-17 *A roaring lion and a rushing bear **is** a wicked ruler over a poor people. A leader lacking understanding and great **in** oppressions; he who hates unjust gain will prolong **his** days. A man oppressed by the blood of a soul will flee to the pit; let them not lay hold of him.*

"A roaring lion and a rushing bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people." A wicked ruler is as dangerous to his people as a wild animal. The poor suffer most.

"A leader lacking understanding and great in oppressions; he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days." A foolish leader oppresses his people. A leader who hates dishonest gain will last.

"A man oppressed by the blood of a soul will flee to the pit; let them not lay hold of him." A murderer is weighed down by the guilt of the life he took. He will run until he reaches the grave. The second line likely means, do not help him escape justice. Under the Law, murder carried the

death penalty (Genesis 9:6; Numbers 35:31). Even so, the gospel reaches murderers too. Paul once approved of killing believers, and God saved him (1 Timothy 1:13-15).

28:18 *He who walks blameless will be saved, and he who is crooked **in** two ways will fall at once.*

"He who walks blameless will be saved, and he who is crooked in two ways will fall at once." The man of integrity is kept safe. The double-dealer will fall suddenly. Again we see the "two ways," the double life that cannot last.

28:19-20 *He who tills his ground will be satisfied **with** bread, and he who pursues empty **things** will be satisfied **with** poverty. A man of faithfulness **will be** great **in** blessings, and he who hastens to become rich will not go unpunished.*

"He who tills his ground will be satisfied with bread, and he who pursues empty things will be satisfied with poverty." Steady work feeds you. Chasing fantasies and schemes fills you only with want (12:11).

"A man of faithfulness will be great in blessings, and he who hastens to become rich will not go unpunished." Faithfulness over time brings many blessings. Trying to get rich fast usually leads to cutting corners, and to trouble (13:11; 1 Timothy 6:9-10).

28:21-22 *To regard faces **is** not good, and for a piece of bread a man will transgress. A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth, and he does not know that want will come to him.*

"To regard faces is not good, and for a piece of bread a man will transgress." Favoritism is wrong. And it does not take much to corrupt some people, just a piece of bread. How cheaply some sell their integrity.

"A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth, and he does not know that want will come to him." The stingy, greedy man rushes after money and does not see that poverty is coming. The evil eye is the opposite of the good eye of 22:9.

28:23 *He who reproves a man will afterward find favor more than he who makes **his** tongue smooth.*

"He who reproves a man will afterward find favor more than he who makes his tongue smooth." Honest correction may sting at first, but in the end people respect it more than flattery (27:5-6). The key word is "afterward." Telling the truth in love takes patience.

28:24 *He who robs his father and his mother and says, "There is no transgression," he **is** a companion to a man who destroys.*

"He who robs his father and his mother," and says of it, "There is no transgression," that son "is a companion to a man who destroys." A son who takes from his parents and tells himself it is not really stealing is no better than a vandal. Jesus rebuked those who used religious excuses to avoid caring for their parents (Mark 7:10-13).

28:25-26 *He who is arrogant of soul stirs up strife, and he who trusts in the LORD will be made fat. He who trusts in his own heart, he **is** a fool, and he who walks in wisdom, he will be delivered.*

"He who is arrogant of soul stirs up strife, and he who trusts in the LORD will be made fat." Pride starts fights. Trust in the LORD brings a full, rich life. "Made fat" in that world meant prospering, being well fed. It is a picture of blessing, not a promise of wealth.

"He who trusts in his own heart, he is a fool, and he who walks in wisdom, he will be delivered." Our world tells us to trust our hearts. Proverbs says that is foolish. The heart is deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9). Trust the LORD, and walk in His wisdom (3:5-6).

28:27 *He who gives to the poor **will have** no lack, and he who hides his eyes **will be** great **in** curses.*

"He who gives to the poor will have no lack, and he who hides his eyes will be great in curses." The generous will be cared for. Those who look away from the poor will be cursed. This is a general truth about God's care for the generous, not a promise of riches. God sees who helps and who hides their eyes (19:17; 21:13).

28:28 *When wicked **ones** arise, man hides himself, and when they perish, righteous **ones** increase.*

"When wicked ones arise, man hides himself, and when they perish, righteous ones increase." The chapter ends as verse 12 did. When the wicked rule, good people hide. When the wicked fall, the righteous grow in number and in strength. Pray for your leaders, and pray for righteousness in your land (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Chapter 28 Summary

Chapter 28 contrasts the guilty who flee when no one pursues with the righteous who are bold as a lion. A sinful land has many rulers, but a wise leader brings stability. Those who forsake God's law praise the wicked, while those who keep it oppose them. Honest poverty is better than crooked riches, and wealth gained from the poor will end up with the generous. The prayer of one who will not hear God's law is an abomination. He who covers his sins will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find mercy, and blessed is the one whose heart stays tender. Wicked rulers are like lions and bears to the poor. Steady work and faithfulness bring blessing, while hurrying to get rich and greedy eyes bring want. Honest rebuke wins more favor than flattery. Trusting your own heart is foolish, but trusting the LORD brings deliverance. The generous will not lack, and when the wicked rule, people hide.

Chapter 28 Study Questions

1. Why do the wicked flee when no one pursues, while the righteous are bold? (28:1; Acts 4:13)

2. What does verse 2 say about a land full of sin and its rulers? (28:2)

3. Why is the prayer of one who will not hear God's law an abomination? (28:9)

4. What two things does verse 13 say we must do with our sins, and what is the result? (28:13; 1 John 1:9)

5. How is a tender heart different from a hard heart? (28:14; Hebrews 3:7-8)

6. What happens to the one who hurries to get rich? (28:20, 22)

7. Why is trusting your own heart foolish? (28:26; Jeremiah 17:9)

8. Is there a sin you have been covering instead of confessing? What keeps you from bringing it to God? (28:13)

9. Where do you need the boldness of the righteous right now? (28:1)

10. How are you treating the poor around you? Are your eyes open or hidden? (28:27)

Chapter 29: Where There Is No Vision

Scripture

29:1-14 A man of rebukes who hardens ***his*** neck will suddenly be broken, and there is no healing. When righteous ***ones*** increase, the people rejoice, and when a wicked ***one*** rules, a people sighs. A man who loves wisdom makes his father glad, and he who associates with prostitutes destroys wealth. A king by justice establishes a land, and a man of contributions tears it down. A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his footsteps. In the transgression of an evil man ***is*** a snare, and a righteous ***one*** sings aloud and rejoices. A righteous ***one*** knows the cause of ***the*** poor; a wicked ***one*** does not understand knowledge. Men of scoffing inflame a town, and wise ***ones*** turn away anger. A wise man ***who*** enters into judgment with a foolish man, and he rages and he laughs, and there is no rest. Men of blood hate a blameless ***one***, and upright ***ones*** seek his life. A fool sends forth all his spirit, and a wise ***one*** stills it back. A ruler who pays attention to a word of falsehood, all his ministers ***are*** wicked. A poor ***man*** and a man of oppressions meet together; the LORD gives light ***to*** the eyes of both of them. A king who judges ***the*** poor in truth, his throne will be established forever.

29:15-27 A rod and rebuke give wisdom, and a youth let loose puts his mother to shame. When wicked ***ones*** increase, transgression increases, and righteous ***ones*** will look on their downfall. Discipline your son, and he will give you rest, and he will give delights to your soul. When there is no vision, a people is let loose, and he who keeps ***the*** law, how blessed ***is*** he! By words a slave will not be disciplined, for he will understand, and there is no answering. Have you seen a man hasty in his words? Hope for a fool ***is*** more than for him. He who pampers his slave from youth, and his end will be trouble. A man of anger stirs up strife, and a master of rage ***is*** great ***in*** transgression. The pride of a man will bring him low, and ***one*** lowly of spirit will lay hold of honor. He who shares with a thief hates his own soul; he hears the oath and does not tell. The trembling of man sets a snare, and he who trusts in the LORD will be set on high. Many seek the face of a ruler, and the justice of a man ***is*** from the LORD. An abomination of righteous ***ones is*** a man of injustice, and an abomination of the wicked ***is*** one upright of way.

Chapter 29 Preview

Chapter 29 closes the collection copied by Hezekiah's men. It opens with a sober warning: the man who is rebuked often and keeps stiffening his neck will suddenly be broken beyond healing. Much of the chapter is about leaders and the people they lead. When the righteous increase, the people rejoice. When the wicked rule, the people groan. A king who judges the poor faithfully will have a lasting throne, and a ruler who listens to lies will soon have only liars around him.

The chapter also speaks to parents about correcting their children, and gives the well known saying, "When there is no vision, a people is let loose." Vision here means God's word revealed, not a leader's plan. The chapter warns against the angry man, the proud man and the man who speaks too fast. It tells us that the fear of man is a snare, but the one who trusts in the LORD is set safely on high. And it ends by saying that the righteous and the wicked find each other disgusting, because they walk such different roads.

Chapter 29 Study

29:1 *A man of rebukes who hardens **his** neck will suddenly be broken, and there is no healing.*

"A man of rebukes who hardens his neck will suddenly be broken, and there is no healing." "Hardens his neck" is the picture of a stubborn ox that will not bow to the yoke. This man has been warned again and again, and he will not listen. One day his ruin will come all at once, and it will be too late. God is patient, but His patience does have an end (2 Peter 3:9-10). If God is warning you, listen now.

29:2 *When righteous **ones** increase, the people rejoice, and when a wicked **one** rules, a people sighs.*

"When righteous ones increase, the people rejoice, and when a wicked one rules, a people sighs." The character of leaders affects everyone under them. Good leaders bring joy. Wicked leaders bring groaning (28:12, 28). This is why we pray for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

29:3 *A man who loves wisdom makes his father glad, and he who associates with prostitutes destroys wealth.*

"A man who loves wisdom makes his father glad, and he who associates with prostitutes destroys wealth." The wise son brings joy. The son who chases immoral women throws his money away, as the prodigal son did (Luke 15:13, 30). Sexual sin destroys more than money. It destroys families and lives (6:26).

29:4 *A king by justice establishes a land, and a man of contributions tears it down.*

"A king by justice establishes a land, and a man of contributions tears it down." "A man of contributions" is a ruler greedy for gifts, either heavy taxes or bribes. Justice builds a nation. Greed tears it down. Solomon's son Rehoboam lost most of his kingdom by promising heavier burdens on the people (1 Kings 12:13-16).

29:5-6 *A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his footsteps. In the transgression of an evil man **is** a snare, and a righteous **one** sings aloud and rejoices.*

"A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his footsteps." Flattery is a trap. The flatterer wants something. Be careful when someone praises you too much.

"In the transgression of an evil man is a snare, and a righteous one sings aloud and rejoices." The wicked man gets caught in his own sin. The righteous man is free and sings for joy. Sin traps. Righteousness frees.

29:7 *A righteous **one** knows the cause of **the** poor; a wicked **one** does not understand knowledge.*

"A righteous one knows the cause of the poor; a wicked one does not understand knowledge." The righteous care about justice for the poor. They take time to understand their situation. The wicked do not care to know. Job said he searched out the case of the one he did not know (Job 29:16). Caring about the poor is a mark of righteousness.

29:8-9 *Men of scoffing inflame a town, and wise **ones** turn away anger. A wise man **who** enters into judgment with a foolish man, and he rages and he laughs, and there is no rest.*

"Men of scoffing inflame a town, and wise ones turn away anger." Mockers stir up a whole city. Wise men calm it down. One troublemaker can set a community on fire. One wise voice can put it out.

"A wise man who enters into judgment with a foolish man, and he rages and he laughs, and there is no rest." Try to settle a matter with a fool, and he either rages or laughs. Nothing gets settled. This is part of what 26:4 warns about.

29:10 *Men of blood hate a blameless **one**, and upright **ones** seek his life.*

"Men of blood hate a blameless one, and upright ones seek his life." Violent men hate the innocent. The second line may mean that the upright seek to protect the life of the blameless. Cain hated Abel because his own deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous (1 John 3:12).

29:11 *A fool sends forth all his spirit, and a wise **one** stills it back.*

"A fool sends forth all his spirit, and a wise one stills it back." The fool lets all his anger out, whenever he feels it. The wise man holds it back and calms it down. Self-control does not mean we never feel anger. It means anger does not rule us (Ephesians 4:26).

29:12 *A ruler who pays attention to a word of falsehood, all his ministers **are** wicked.*

"A ruler who pays attention to a word of falsehood, all his ministers are wicked." If a leader listens to lies, liars will gather around him. If he loves the truth, truthful people will serve him. Leaders set the tone for everyone under them.

29:13-14 *A poor **man** and a man of oppressions meet together; the LORD gives light **to** the eyes of both of them. A king who judges **the** poor in truth, his throne will be established forever.*

"A poor man and a man of oppressions meet together; the LORD gives light to the eyes of both of them." The poor man and the one who oppresses him live in the same world, and both owe their life and sight to the LORD (22:2). The oppressor should remember that he too depends on God every day.

"A king who judges the poor in truth, his throne will be established forever." A king who gives the poor real justice will have a lasting throne. This points ahead to the Messiah, the Son of David, who will judge the poor with righteousness (Isaiah 11:4) and whose throne will last forever (Luke 1:32-33).

29:15 *A rod and rebuke give wisdom, and a youth let loose puts his mother to shame.*

"A rod and rebuke give wisdom, and a youth let loose puts his mother to shame." Correction, both in action and in words, helps a child become wise. A child who is left to himself brings shame to his family. As we saw at 13:24, 22:15 and 23:13-14, the rod is a picture of correction. The heart of this verse is that a child must not be left without guidance. Loving correction, never in anger and

never abuse, gives wisdom (Ephesians 6:4). Godly parents today differ on spanking, and they agree that children need firm, loving correction.

29:16 *When wicked **ones** increase, transgression increases, and righteous **ones** will look on their downfall.*

"When wicked ones increase, transgression increases, and righteous ones will look on their downfall." When the wicked grow in number, sin spreads. But it will not last. The righteous will see them fall. Do not lose heart when evil seems to be winning (Psalm 37:34-36).

29:17 *Discipline your son, and he will give you rest, and he will give delights to your soul.*

"Discipline your son, and he will give you rest, and he will give delights to your soul." Correcting a child takes work now, but it brings peace and joy later. A child who is trained well becomes a joy. This is the general pattern, as we saw at 22:6, not a guarantee.

29:18 *When there is no vision, a people is let loose, and he who keeps **the** law, how blessed **is** he!*

"When there is no vision, a people is let loose, and he who keeps the law, how blessed is he!" This verse is often quoted to mean that a group needs goals and long-range plans. That is not what it means. "Vision" is the word for a prophet's vision, God's word revealed (1 Samuel 3:1; Isaiah 1:1). When there is no word from God, people throw off restraint and run wild, like Israel at the golden calf (Exodus 32:25), or in the days of the judges when everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25).

The second line makes the meaning clear. The opposite of having no vision is keeping God's law. Blessed is the one who keeps His Word. Today God has spoken to us fully in His Son and in the Scriptures (Hebrews 1:1-2). A people without the Word of God will run wild. A people who hear and keep it will be blessed.

29:19-21 *By words a slave will not be disciplined, for he will understand, and there is no answering. Have you seen a man hasty in his words? Hope for a fool **is** more than for him. He who pampers his slave from youth, and his end will be trouble.*

"By words a slave will not be disciplined, for he will understand, and there is no answering." In that world, many households had servants or slaves, often people who had sold themselves to pay a debt (Leviticus 25:39-43). This saying observes that a stubborn servant may understand an order and still refuse to respond. Words alone are not always enough.

"Have you seen a man hasty in his words? Hope for a fool is more than for him." This is like 26:12. The man who speaks before he thinks is in worse shape than a fool. James says to be quick to hear and slow to speak (James 1:19).

"He who pampers his slave from youth, and his end will be trouble." A servant who is spoiled from his youth may end up taking over, or becoming a burden. The word for "trouble" is hard in the Hebrew, and some read it as "a son" or heir. The general point is that indulgence without discipline leads to trouble, whether with servants, employees or children.

These sayings describe life as it was in that day. They do not approve of slavery. The Law limited the servitude of Hebrew servants and protected them (Exodus 21:2, 26-27), and it was not the race-based chattel slavery of later centuries. The New Testament calls masters to treat servants justly, knowing they too have a Master in heaven (Colossians 4:1), and tells us that in Christ there is neither slave nor free (Galatians 3:28).

29:22-23 *A man of anger stirs up strife, and a master of rage **is** great **in** transgression. The pride of a man will bring him low, and **one** lowly of spirit will lay hold of honor.*

"A man of anger stirs up strife, and a master of rage is great in transgression." An angry man starts fights and piles up sins. Anger opens the door to many other sins (Ephesians 4:26-27).

"The pride of a man will bring him low, and one lowly of spirit will lay hold of honor." Pride brings a person down. Humility leads to honor. Jesus said that whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Luke 14:11).

29:24 *He who shares with a thief hates his own soul; he hears the oath and does not tell.*

"He who shares with a thief hates his own soul; he hears the oath and does not tell." A partner in crime is destroying himself. Under the Law, when a curse was pronounced on anyone who knew of a crime and did not speak, the one who stayed silent was guilty (Leviticus 5:1). Keeping quiet to protect a thief makes you part of the sin.

29:25 *The trembling of man sets a snare, and he who trusts in the LORD will be set on high.*

"The trembling of man sets a snare, and he who trusts in the LORD will be set on high." "The trembling of man" is the fear of what people think, or of what they can do to us. It is a trap. It makes us say yes when we should say no, and stay quiet when we should speak. Peter denied Jesus out of fear of a servant girl (Matthew 26:69-75). But the one who trusts in the LORD is lifted up out of reach, as in a high tower (18:10). Jesus said do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul (Matthew 10:28). Whom do you fear more, people or God?

29:26 *Many seek the face of a ruler, and the justice of a man **is** from the LORD.*

"Many seek the face of a ruler, and the justice of a man is from the LORD." People line up to win the favor of the powerful, hoping for help. But true justice comes from the LORD. Earthly rulers may fail us. God will not. Seek Him first.

29:27 *An abomination of righteous **ones is** a man of injustice, and an abomination of the wicked **is** one upright of way.*

"An abomination of righteous ones is a man of injustice, and an abomination of the wicked is one upright of way." The righteous are disgusted by injustice. The wicked are disgusted by uprightness. The two roads are so different that those who walk them cannot stand each other. Jesus warned that the world would hate His followers because it hated Him first (John 15:18-19). This is the last verse of Solomon's proverbs in the book. It leaves us with a clear choice of roads.

Chapter 29 Summary

Chapter 29 warns that the one who stiffens his neck after many rebukes will suddenly be broken. The righteous bring joy to a people, while wicked rulers bring groaning, and justice establishes a land while greed tears it down. Flattery is a net, and sin is a snare. The righteous know the cause of the poor, and a king who judges the poor faithfully will have a lasting throne, a picture fulfilled in the Messiah. Mockers inflame a town, but the wise calm it. A fool lets out all his anger, and a wise man holds it back. Parents should correct their children with love, never abuse, and a child left to himself brings shame. Where there is no word from God, people run wild, but the one who keeps God's law is blessed. Hasty speech, anger and pride bring trouble, while humility brings honor. The fear of man is a snare, but the one who trusts the LORD is safe. Justice comes from the LORD, and the righteous and the wicked cannot stand each other's ways.

Chapter 29 Study Questions

1. What happens to the man who keeps hardening his neck after many rebukes? (29:1)

2. How does the character of leaders affect a people? (29:2, 4, 12)

3. What does verse 7 say a righteous person knows? (29:7)

4. What is the difference between how a fool and a wise man handle anger? (29:11)

5. What does "vision" mean in verse 18, and how does the second line help explain it? (29:18; 1 Samuel 3:1)

6. What does verse 25 say about the fear of man and trust in the LORD? (29:25; Matthew 10:28)

7. Why do the righteous and the wicked find each other's ways disgusting? (29:27; John 15:18-19)

8. Is God warning you about something you keep ignoring? (29:1)

9. Where does the fear of what people think trap you? What would trusting the LORD look like there? (29:25)

10. How can you keep God's Word at the center of your home and church, so that you are not "let loose"? (29:18)

Chapter 30: The Words of Agur

Scripture

30:1-16 The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle. The utterance of the man to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal: For I ***am*** more stupid than ***any*** man, and the understanding of a man ***is*** not mine. And I have not learned wisdom, and the knowledge of ***the*** Holy One I ***do not*** know. Who has gone up ***to the*** heavens and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped the waters in the garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What ***is*** his name, and what ***is*** the name of his son? Surely you know! Every word of God ***is*** refined; He ***is*** a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be proved a liar. Two ***things*** I have asked from You; do not withhold ***them*** from me before I die: Emptiness and a word of lies put far from me; poverty and wealth do not give to me; feed me the food of my portion, lest I be satisfied and deny ***You*** and say, "Who ***is*** the LORD?" and lest I be poor and steal, and seize the name of my God. Do not slander a slave to his master, lest he curse you and you be held guilty. A generation curses its father and does not bless its mother. A generation pure in its own eyes, and it has not been washed from its filth. A generation, how lofty are its eyes, and its eyelids are lifted up! A generation, its teeth ***are*** swords and its jawbones ***are*** knives, to devour the afflicted from the earth and the needy from mankind. The leech has two daughters: "Give, give." Three ***things*** are not satisfied; four do not say, "Enough": Sheol, and the barrenness of ***the*** womb, land ***that*** is not satisfied ***with*** water, and fire ***that*** does not say, "Enough."

30:17-33 An eye ***that*** mocks a father and despises obedience to a mother, the ravens of the wadi will pluck it out, and the young of an eagle will eat it. Three ***things*** are too wonderful for me, and four I do not know: the way of the eagle in the heavens, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the heart of the sea, and the way of a man with a young woman. Thus ***is*** the way of an adulterous woman: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, "I have not done evil." Under three ***things*** the earth quakes, and under four it is not able to bear up: under a slave when he becomes king, and a senseless ***one*** when he is satisfied ***with*** food, under a hated ***woman*** when she is married, and a female servant when she dispossesses her mistress. Four ***things*** are small ***things*** of the earth, and they ***are*** wise, made wise: the ants ***are*** a people not strong, and they prepare their food in the summer; rock badgers ***are*** a people not mighty, and they make their home in the rock; the locust has no king, and it goes out dividing, all of it; a lizard you grasp with ***your*** hands, and it ***is*** in the palaces of a king. Three ***things*** are doing well ***in*** step, and four are doing well ***in*** walking: a lion, mighty among the animals, and it does not turn back from before anything; a rooster of loins, or a male goat, and a king, a band of soldiers with him. If you have been foolish in exalting yourself, and if you have plotted, hand to mouth! For the pressing of milk brings forth curds, and the pressing of the nose brings forth blood, and the pressing of anger brings forth strife.

Chapter 30 Preview

Chapter 30 gives us the words of a man named Agur, the son of Jakeh. We know nothing about him except what this chapter tells us. He begins very humbly. He says he is more stupid than any man and has not learned wisdom. Then he asks a set of questions that point to God the Creator:

Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? What is His name, and what is the name of His Son? He answers with a confession of faith: every word of God is refined, and He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.

Agur prays one of the most balanced prayers in the Bible: give me neither poverty nor riches, only the bread I need. Then he gives a series of number sayings, built on the pattern of three things and then four, which list things that are never satisfied, things too wonderful to understand, things that make the earth shake, small creatures that are very wise, and things that walk with stately steps. Agur looks closely at God's world and finds lessons everywhere.

Chapter 30 Study

30:1 *The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle. The utterance of the man to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal:*

"The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle." An oracle is a weighty message, often a message from God. "The utterance of the man to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal." Ithiel and Ucal seem to be the names of the men Agur was speaking to, perhaps his students or sons. Some scholars read the Hebrew letters of these names differently, as words meaning something like this: I am weary, God, I am weary and worn out. That reading fits the humble words that follow. Either way, Agur speaks as a man who knows his limits. Scripture does not tell us who he was. Some Jewish teachers thought Agur was another name for Solomon, but nothing in the text says so.

30:2-3 *For I **am** more stupid than **any** man, and the understanding of a man **is** not mine. And I have not learned wisdom, and the knowledge of **the** Holy One I **do not** know.*

"For I am more stupid than any man, and the understanding of a man is not mine. And I have not learned wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One I do not know." Agur is not really saying he cannot think. He is comparing himself to God. Next to the Holy One, all our wisdom is foolishness (1 Corinthians 3:19). The second verse is a confession. He has not learned wisdom, and he does not have the knowledge of the Holy One by his own effort. That knowledge has to come from God Himself. Either way, humility is where true wisdom starts. The book began by saying that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge (1:7). Agur shows us what that looks like.

30:4 *Who has gone up **to the** heavens and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped the waters in the garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What **is** his name, and what **is** the name of his son? Surely you know!*

"Who has gone up to the heavens and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped the waters in the garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth?" These questions are like the ones God asked Job (Job 38:4-11). No man has done these things. Only God has. He holds the wind. He wraps the clouds like water in a cloak. He set the boundaries of the earth.

"What is his name, and what is the name of his son? Surely you know!" Agur asks about the name of the Creator, and then about the name of His son. In the Old Testament, Israel is called God's son

(Exodus 4:22), and so is the king from David's line (Psalm 2:7). Many teachers see more here. They see a question that points ahead to Christ, God's eternal Son. Jesus is the One who came down from heaven and went back up (John 3:13; Ephesians 4:9-10). He commanded the wind and the waves, and they obeyed Him (Mark 4:39-41). All things were made through Him (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16). The New Testament gives us the answer to Agur's question: His name is Jesus, and God has given Him the name above every name (Philippians 2:9-11).

Agur may not have known all that his question pointed to. But God, who inspired these words, knew.

30:5-6 *Every word of God **is** refined; He **is** a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be proved a liar.*

"Every word of God is refined; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him." After the hard questions comes the answer of faith. God's word is refined, like silver that has been through the fire and has no impurity left (Psalm 12:6; 18:30). Every word of it is true. And God Himself is a shield to all who run to Him.

"Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be proved a liar." Since God's word is pure, we must not add to it. Moses gave the same warning (Deuteronomy 4:2), and so does the last chapter of the Bible (Revelation 22:18-19). This is a warning to every Bible teacher, including me. We can explain God's Word, but we must never put our own words in His mouth. Many false teachings begin by adding to Scripture: new revelations, new rules, new books said to stand beside the Bible. God's Word is enough (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

30:7-9 *Two **things** I have asked from You; do not withhold **them** from me before I die: Emptiness and a word of lies put far from me; poverty and wealth do not give to me; feed me the food of my portion, lest I be satisfied and deny **You** and say, "Who **is** the LORD?" and lest I be poor and steal, and seize the name of my God.*

"Two things I have asked from You; do not withhold them from me before I die." This is the only prayer in the book of Proverbs. Agur asks for two things.

"Emptiness and a word of lies put far from me." First, keep me from falsehood, both from lying and from being deceived.

"Poverty and wealth do not give to me; feed me the food of my portion." Second, give me neither too little nor too much. Just give me what I need. Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11).

Then Agur tells us why. If he is too rich, he might feel he does not need God: he might "deny You and say," and the words he fears he would say are "Who is the LORD?" That was Pharaoh's proud question (Exodus 5:2). If he is too poor, he might steal, "and seize the name of my God," dishonoring God's name by his sin. Both riches and poverty have their own temptations. Agur wants to stay close to God. Paul learned to be content with much or with little (Philippians 4:11-13).

30:10 *Do not slander a slave to his master, lest he curse you and you be held guilty.*

"Do not slander a slave to his master, lest he curse you and you be held guilty." Do not tell tales about a servant to his master. He has little power to defend himself. If you wrong him, his curse may be deserved, and God will hold you guilty. God cares for those with little power.

30:11-14 *A generation curses its father and does not bless its mother. A generation pure in its own eyes, and it has not been washed from its filth. A generation, how lofty are its eyes, and its eyelids are lifted up! A generation, its teeth **are** swords and its jawbones **are** knives, to devour the afflicted from the earth and the needy from mankind.*

Agur describes four kinds of people, each called "a generation," which here means a class or kind of people. "A generation curses its father and does not bless its mother." Those who dishonor their parents.

"A generation pure in its own eyes, and it has not been washed from its filth." Those who think they are clean but are not. This is self-righteousness, the sin of the Pharisee who thanked God he was not like other men (Luke 18:11).

"A generation, how lofty are its eyes, and its eyelids are lifted up!" The proud, who look down on everyone.

"A generation, its teeth are swords and its jawbones are knives, to devour the afflicted from the earth and the needy from mankind." The cruel, who eat up the poor like wild animals. Paul lists them among the signs of the last days (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

30:15-16 *The leech has two daughters: "Give, give." Three **things** are not satisfied; four do not say, "Enough": Sheol, and the barrenness of **the** womb, land **that** is not satisfied **with** water, and fire **that** does not say, "Enough."*

"The leech has two daughters," and their names, it seems, are the same cry: "Give, give." A leech sucks blood and never stops. Its daughters stand for greed that is never full.

"Three things are not satisfied; four do not say," the word "Enough." Here is the first of Agur's number sayings. The pattern of three and then four is a way of saying, here are several, and here is one more to finish the list. What are the four? "Sheol, and the barrenness of the womb, land that is not satisfied with water, and fire that does not say," the word "Enough" again. The grave keeps taking. A woman longing for a child keeps longing (Genesis 30:1). Dry ground soaks up every rain. Fire burns everything you give it. All of these are pictures of the greedy heart. Only God can satisfy it (Psalm 107:9).

30:17 *An eye **that** mocks a father and despises obedience to a mother, the ravens of the wadi will pluck it out, and the young of an eagle will eat it.*

"An eye that mocks a father and despises obedience to a mother, the ravens of the wadi will pluck it out, and the young of an eagle will eat it." This is a harsh picture. In that world, the worst end was to die and lie unburied, with birds eating the body. The child who scorns his parents is

headed for a shameful end. The saying uses strong words because God takes honor for parents seriously (Exodus 20:12; see also verse 11). This is a word picture of judgment, not a command for anyone to carry out.

30:18-20 *Three **things** are too wonderful for me, and four I do not know: the way of the eagle in the heavens, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the heart of the sea, and the way of a man with a young woman. Thus **is** the way of an adulterous woman: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, "I have not done evil."*

"Three things are too wonderful for me, and four I do not know: the way of the eagle in the heavens, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the heart of the sea, and the way of a man with a young woman." Agur marvels. An eagle in the sky, a snake on a rock and a ship on the sea leave no track behind them. How do they find their way? And the fourth is the greatest mystery of all: the way a man and a young woman are drawn to each other and come together in love. God made love between a man and a woman, and it is a wonder (Genesis 2:23-24; Song of Songs 8:6-7).

"Thus is the way of an adulterous woman: she eats and wipes her mouth" and says, "I have not done evil." Then comes the dark side of that wonder. The adulteress sins as casually as eating a meal. She wipes her mouth and says she has done nothing wrong. Like the ship and the eagle, she leaves no visible track, and she feels no guilt. Sin can make a conscience numb (1 Timothy 4:2; Ephesians 4:19). What God made beautiful, sin twists.

30:21-23 *Under three **things** the earth quakes, and under four it is not able to bear up: under a slave when he becomes king, and a senseless **one** when he is satisfied **with** food, under a hated **woman** when she is married, and a female servant when she dispossesses her mistress.*

"Under three things the earth quakes, and under four it is not able to bear up: under a slave when he becomes king, and a senseless one when he is satisfied with food, under a hated woman when she is married, and a female servant when she dispossesses her mistress." These are four things that upset the order of life. A servant who suddenly gains power and has no wisdom to use it. A fool who is well fed and grows even more full of himself. A woman who was unloved and finally marries, and now takes revenge for the years of rejection. A servant girl who takes her mistress's place, as Hagar looked down on Sarah (Genesis 16:4). Power, plenty or position without character makes life hard for everyone around.

30:24-28 *Four **things** are small **things** of the earth, and they **are** wise, made wise: the ants **are** a people not strong, and they prepare their food in the summer; rock badgers **are** a people not mighty, and they make their home in the rock; the locust has no king, and it goes out dividing, all of it; a lizard you grasp with **your** hands, and it **is** in the palaces of a king.*

"Four things are small things of the earth, and they are wise, made wise." Agur turns to four small creatures that teach big lessons.

"The ants are a people not strong, and they prepare their food in the summer." Ants are tiny and weak, but they plan ahead (6:6-8). Wisdom prepares.

"Rock badgers are a people not mighty, and they make their home in the rock." The rock badger, or hyrax, is a small, shy animal. It cannot fight, so it lives among the rocks where enemies cannot reach it. Wisdom knows where to hide. Our Rock is the LORD (Psalm 18:2).

"The locust has no king, and it goes out dividing, all of it." Locusts have no leader, yet they move together in ranks like an army (Joel 2:7-8). Wisdom works together.

"A lizard you grasp with your hands, and it is in the palaces of a king." A lizard is easy to catch, yet it finds its way into a king's palace. Wisdom gets in where strength cannot. Small and weak is not the same as foolish. God uses the weak things of the world (1 Corinthians 1:27).

30:29-31 *Three **things** are doing well **in** step, and four are doing well **in** walking: a lion, mighty among the animals, and it does not turn back from before anything; a rooster of loins, or a male goat, and a king, a band of soldiers with him.*

"Three things are doing well in step, and four are doing well in walking: a lion, mighty among the animals, and it does not turn back from before anything; a rooster of loins, or a male goat, and a king, a band of soldiers with him." Agur ends his lists with four things that walk with stately confidence. A lion that backs down from nothing. A strutting rooster. A male goat leading the flock. A king marching with his army behind him. These are pictures of dignity, confidence and order. The Hebrew of "a rooster of loins" is uncertain, and some read it as a greyhound or war horse.

30:32-33 *If you have been foolish in exalting yourself, and if you have plotted, hand to mouth! For the pressing of milk brings forth curds, and the pressing of the nose brings forth blood, and the pressing of anger brings forth strife.*

"If you have been foolish in exalting yourself, and if you have plotted, hand to mouth!" After the stately king, a warning. If you have puffed yourself up or plotted evil, put your hand over your mouth. Stop talking. Job did this when God spoke to him (Job 40:4).

"For the pressing of milk brings forth curds, and the pressing of the nose brings forth blood, and the pressing of anger brings forth strife." The same Hebrew word, "pressing," is used three times. Churn milk, and you get butter. Squeeze a nose, and you get blood. Press anger, keep pushing and provoking, and you get a fight. If you keep stirring, something will come out. Agur ends with a call to humility and peace.

Chapter 30 Summary

Chapter 30 gives the words of Agur, a humble man who confesses that next to the Holy One he has no wisdom of his own. He asks who has gone up to heaven and come down, who holds the wind and set the ends of the earth, and what is His name and the name of His Son, a question many teachers see answered in Christ. Every word of God is refined, God is a shield to those who trust Him, and no one should add to His words. Agur prays to be kept from lies and given neither poverty nor riches, only daily bread. He describes four kinds of people: those who curse parents, the self-righteous, the proud and the cruel. In number sayings he lists things never satisfied,

things too wonderful to understand, the casual sin of the adulteress, things that shake the earth, small creatures that are very wise, and things that walk with stately steps. He ends by warning that pride should cover its mouth and that pressing anger brings strife.

Chapter 30 Study Questions

1. How does Agur describe himself, and why does that humility matter? (30:2-3; 1:7)

2. What questions does Agur ask in verse 4, and how does the New Testament help answer them? (30:4; John 3:13)

3. What does verse 5 say about God's word and about God Himself? (30:5)

4. Why must we not add to God's words? (30:6; Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18-19)

5. What two things does Agur ask for, and why? (30:7-9)

6. What do the four creatures of verses 24-28 teach? (30:24-28)

7. What does verse 33 teach about pressing anger? (30:33)

8. Could you pray Agur's prayer of verses 8-9 honestly? What makes it hard? (30:8-9)

9. Which of the four "generations" in verses 11-14 do you see in our day? In yourself? (30:11-14)

10. Where is God calling you to put your hand over your mouth? (30:32)

Chapter 31: The Words of Lemuel and the Wife of Strength

Scripture

31:1-9 The words of Lemuel the king, an oracle which his mother taught him: What, my son? And what, son of my womb? And what, son of my vows? Do not give your strength to women, and your ways to wiping out kings. ***It is*** not for kings, Lemuel, not for kings to drink wine, and for rulers, "Where ***is*** strong drink?" lest he drink and forget what is decreed, and change the cause of all the sons of affliction. Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those bitter of soul. He will drink and forget his poverty, and he will not remember his trouble again. Open your mouth for the mute, for the cause of all the sons of passing away. Open your mouth, judge ***in*** righteousness, and plead the cause of ***the*** afflicted and needy.

31:10-31 A wife of strength, who will find? And her price ***is*** far beyond jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will not lack spoil. She repays him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax, and she works in the delight of her hands. She is like the ships of a merchant; from afar she brings her food. And she rises while ***it is*** still night, and gives food to her household, and an allotted portion to her maidens. She considers a field and buys it; from the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. She girds her loins with strength, and makes her arms strong. She tastes that her profit ***is*** good; her lamp does not go out in the night. She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her palms grasp the spindle. She spreads out her palm to the afflicted, and stretches out her hands to the needy. She is not afraid for her household from snow, for all her household ***is*** clothed ***in*** scarlet. She makes coverings for herself; her clothing ***is*** fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits with the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells ***them***, and she supplies belts to the merchant. Strength and majesty ***are*** her clothing, and she laughs at the day to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the instruction of steadfast love ***is*** on her tongue. She watches over the ways of her household, and she does not eat the bread of sluggishness. Her sons rise up and call her blessed; her husband, and he praises her: "Many daughters have done ***deeds of*** strength, and you have gone up above all of them." Charm ***is*** falsehood, and beauty ***is*** vanity; a woman ***who*** fears the LORD, she will be praised. Give to her from the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

Chapter 31 Preview

The last chapter of Proverbs has two parts. In verses 1 to 9, a king named Lemuel passes on what his mother taught him. She warns her son not to waste his strength on women, not to cloud his judgment with wine, and to open his mouth for those who cannot speak for themselves. It is striking that the book, which so often says "my son" in a father's voice, ends with a mother's voice.

Verses 10 to 31 are a poem about "a wife of strength." It is an acrostic: each of its twenty-two verses begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, from the first letter to the last. It describes a woman who fears the LORD, whose husband trusts her, who works hard, runs her household well, does business, helps the poor and speaks with wisdom and kindness. The book of

Proverbs opened with wisdom pictured as a noble woman calling in the streets (1:20; 8:1). It closes with a real woman who lives that wisdom out in her home and her town.

Chapter 31 Study

31:1 *The words of Lemuel the king, an oracle which his mother taught him:*

"The words of Lemuel the king, an oracle which his mother taught him." We know nothing about King Lemuel outside this chapter. His name means belonging to God. Some Jewish teachers thought Lemuel was another name for Solomon, which would make his mother Bathsheba. The text does not say so, and we cannot be sure. What we do know is that this king's wisdom came from his mother, and he was not ashamed to say so. Timothy too learned faith from his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5). Mothers, your teaching matters more than you know.

31:2-3 *What, my son? And what, son of my womb? And what, son of my vows? Do not give your strength to women, and your ways to wiping out kings.*

"What, my son? And what, son of my womb? And what, son of my vows?" We can hear a mother's love and worry in these words. She seems to ask, what shall I tell you, my son? "Son of my vows" may mean she had prayed and made vows to God for him, as Hannah did for Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11).

"Do not give your strength to women, and your ways to wiping out kings." Her first warning is about women. A king could have a large harem, and many kings were ruined by their lusts. Solomon's many wives turned his heart away from the LORD (1 Kings 11:1-4), and David's sin with Bathsheba brought great sorrow (2 Samuel 12:9-12). The Law warned the king not to multiply wives for himself (Deuteronomy 17:17). Do not waste yourself on what destroys kings.

31:4-7 ***It is*** *not for kings, Lemuel, not for kings to drink wine, and for rulers, "Where* ***is*** *strong drink?" lest he drink and forget what is decreed, and change the cause of all the sons of affliction. Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those bitter of soul. He will drink and forget his poverty, and he will not remember his trouble again.*

"It is not for kings, Lemuel, not for kings to drink wine, and for rulers," the question "Where is strong drink?" Her second warning is about drink. A ruler needs a clear head. "Lest he drink and forget what is decreed, and change the cause of all the sons of affliction." A drunk ruler forgets the law and twists justice for the poor. Leaders must stay sober (Ecclesiastes 10:17).

"Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those bitter of soul. He will drink and forget his poverty, and he will not remember his trouble again." This is hard to read. It seems to say that strong drink belongs to the dying and to those in deep pain, as a kind of comfort or medicine, not to kings who need clear minds. In that world, wine was one of the few pain relievers. An old Jewish tradition, drawn from these very verses, says that women of Jerusalem gave drugged wine to men about to be executed, to ease their pain, and Jesus was offered wine mixed with myrrh on the cross, and refused it (Mark 15:23). Some teachers take the verses as a sharp contrast: wine may numb the dying, but a king must not numb himself. Others see

compassion for the suffering. These verses are not a prescription for anyone to drown sorrow in drink. As we saw at 20:1 and 23:29-35, drunkenness is forbidden, and believers differ on whether to drink at all. The real cure for a bitter soul is the Lord who heals the brokenhearted (Psalm 147:3).

31:8-9 *Open your mouth for the mute, for the cause of all the sons of passing away. Open your mouth, judge **in** righteousness, and plead the cause of **the** afflicted and needy.*

"Open your mouth for the mute, for the cause of all the sons of passing away." Her third word is the most important. The king must speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves: the poor, the weak, the dying, the forgotten. "The sons of passing away" are those who are perishing, who have no one to stand up for them.

"Open your mouth, judge in righteousness, and plead the cause of the afflicted and needy." Use your power and your voice for justice. This is the heart of godly leadership. It is also a calling for every believer (Isaiah 1:17; James 1:27). Jesus came to proclaim good news to the poor and freedom to the oppressed (Luke 4:18). Whose voice is not being heard where you live? Can you open your mouth for them?

31:10-12 *A wife of strength, who will find? And her price **is** far beyond jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will not lack spoil. She repays him good and not evil all the days of her life.*

Now begins the poem. "A wife of strength, who will find? And her price is far beyond jewels." The Hebrew phrase is 'eshet hayil. Hayil is a strong word. It is used for strength, ability, wealth and even the valor of soldiers. Other translations say a virtuous wife, an excellent wife, a capable wife. All are part of it. She is a woman of strong character and real ability. Boaz used the same phrase of Ruth (Ruth 3:11). "Who will find?" means she is rare and precious, worth more than jewels, like wisdom itself (3:15; 8:11).

"The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will not lack spoil." Her husband has complete confidence in her. He does not have to check up on her. And because of her, his household has plenty. "Spoil" is a strong word, the goods won after a battle. Her work brings in real gain.

"She repays him good and not evil all the days of her life." She is faithful all the way through, not just at the start of the marriage. Day after day, year after year, she does him good.

31:13-15 *She seeks wool and flax, and she works in the delight of her hands. She is like the ships of a merchant; from afar she brings her food. And she rises while **it is** still night, and gives food to her household, and an allotted portion to her maidens.*

"She seeks wool and flax, and she works in the delight of her hands." She gathers the raw materials for cloth, wool for warm clothing and flax for linen, and she enjoys her work. She does not work grudgingly.

"She is like the ships of a merchant; from afar she brings her food." She shops wisely and goes the distance to get good things for her family, like a trading ship bringing goods from far away.

"And she rises while it is still night, and gives food to her household, and an allotted portion to her maidens." She is up before dawn to make sure everyone is fed, including the servant girls. She plans the day's work and gives each one her share. She leads her household well.

31:16-18 *She considers a field and buys it; from the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. She girds her loins with strength, and makes her arms strong. She tastes that her profit **is** good; her lamp does not go out in the night.*

"She considers a field and buys it; from the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard." She thinks carefully before she buys. Then she invests what she has earned and plants a vineyard. This woman does business. She makes decisions about land and money. Proverbs praises her for it.

"She girds her loins with strength, and makes her arms strong." To gird the loins was to tuck up a long robe into the belt so you could work or run. She gets ready for hard work, and she is strong.

"She tastes that her profit is good; her lamp does not go out in the night." She sees that her work is paying off. Her lamp burning through the night may mean she works late when needed, or it may mean her household is never in want. In that world, a lamp going out was a picture of disaster (13:9). Her house has light.

31:19-20 *She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her palms grasp the spindle. She spreads out her palm to the afflicted, and stretches out her hands to the needy.*

"She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her palms grasp the spindle." The distaff and spindle were tools for spinning thread. Her hands are busy with the ordinary work of the home.

"She spreads out her palm to the afflicted, and stretches out her hands to the needy." The same hands that hold the spindle reach out to the poor. Notice the words: "stretches out her hands" in both verses. She works hard, and she gives freely. Her success does not make her selfish. Dorcas was this kind of woman, "full of good works and charitable deeds" (Acts 9:36).

31:21-22 *She is not afraid for her household from snow, for all her household **is** clothed **in** scarlet. She makes coverings for herself; her clothing **is** fine linen and purple.*

"She is not afraid for her household from snow, for all her household is clothed in scarlet." Winter does not worry her. She has already prepared. Her family is clothed in scarlet, likely warm, quality wool dyed red.

"She makes coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple." She takes care of herself too. Fine linen and purple were the clothes of the well-to-do. But as we will see, her real beauty is not in her clothes.

31:23 *Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits with the elders of the land.*

"Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits with the elders of the land." The gate was where the leaders of the town met. Her husband is respected there. Part of the reason is her. A wise wife helps her husband's good name, just as a foolish one can bring shame (12:4).

31:24-25 *She makes linen garments and sells **them**, and she supplies belts to the merchant. Strength and majesty **are** her clothing, and she laughs at the day to come.*

"She makes linen garments and sells them, and she supplies belts to the merchant." She runs a business, making and selling clothing and belts to traders. Lydia, the seller of purple, was also a businesswoman (Acts 16:14).

"Strength and majesty are her clothing, and she laughs at the day to come." Her real clothing is her character: strength and dignity. And she laughs at the future. She is not anxious about what tomorrow may bring, because she has prepared and, more than that, because she trusts the LORD (27:1; Matthew 6:34).

31:26-27 *She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the instruction of steadfast love **is** on her tongue. She watches over the ways of her household, and she does not eat the bread of sluggishness.*

"She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the instruction of steadfast love is on her tongue." Her words are wise and kind. The "instruction of steadfast love" (hesed) means teaching given with loyal, gracious love. She teaches her children and others with wisdom and with kindness. Here the woman of strength sounds just like Lady Wisdom in chapters 1 to 9.

"She watches over the ways of her household, and she does not eat the bread of sluggishness." She keeps watch over everything in her home. She is never lazy. She is the opposite of the sluggard we met so often in this book.

31:28-29 *Her sons rise up and call her blessed; her husband, and he praises her: "Many daughters have done **deeds of** strength, and you have gone up above all of them."*

"Her sons rise up and call her blessed; her husband, and he praises her." Her family sees her worth and says so. Husbands, do you praise your wife out loud? Children, do you thank your mother?

Her husband's words are these: "Many daughters have done deeds of strength, and you have gone up above all of them." There are many good women in the world, he says, but you are the best of them all.

31:30-31 *Charm **is** falsehood, and beauty **is** vanity; a woman **who** fears the LORD, she will be praised. Give to her from the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.*

"Charm is falsehood, and beauty is vanity; a woman who fears the LORD, she will be praised." Here is the key to the whole poem. Charm can deceive, and beauty fades. Neither lasts. What lasts is the fear of the LORD. This woman's strength, work, generosity and wisdom all grow out of that root. Peter says the same: a woman's true beauty is "the hidden man of the heart," a gentle and quiet spirit, "which is of great worth before God" (1 Peter 3:3-4). And so the book that began with "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (1:7) ends with a woman who fears the LORD.

"Give to her from the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates." Give her the credit she has earned. Let her deeds speak for her in the public square. Her life is her praise.

How should we read this poem? First, it is a real ideal. It describes a godly wife and mother, and it honors women's work, wisdom, faith and ability. It shows a woman who manages a household, does business, buys land, helps the poor, teaches with kindness and is trusted and praised by her husband. That is a high view of women, much higher than the world around Israel often held.

Second, it is wisdom's picture. The book began with Lady Wisdom, and it ends with the woman of strength. She is wisdom with hands and feet, the fear of the LORD lived out in daily life. In that sense, the poem speaks to every reader, man or woman. We are all called to be people of strength, faithfulness, hard work, generosity and wise, kind speech. Some teachers also see in her a picture of the church, the bride of Christ, but that is not the plain meaning, and we should not lean on it.

Third, it is not a checklist to shame women. No one woman does all of this every day, and the poem is not a list of duties to measure every woman against. It sums up a whole life, likely over many years, in the pattern of an alphabet, from A to Z. Women in different seasons, single or married, with children or without, working at home or outside it, can all find in her a picture of what the fear of the LORD looks like. If you have ever read this chapter and felt you could never measure up, hear verse 30: what God praises most is a woman who fears the LORD. That is open to every woman. And if you are a husband, the poem is not given to you as a standard to hold over your wife. It is given to show you what to praise in her (verses 28-29).

Chapter 31 Summary

Chapter 31 gives the words King Lemuel's mother taught him. She warns him not to waste his strength on women, not to drink wine and forget justice, and to open his mouth for the mute and plead the cause of the poor and needy. Then comes the acrostic poem of the wife of strength, whose worth is far above jewels. Her husband trusts her, and she does him good all her life. She works with willing hands, rises early to feed her household, buys a field and plants a vineyard, runs a business, and reaches out her hands to the poor. Her household is ready for winter, and she laughs at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom and teaches with steadfast love. Her children call her blessed and her husband praises her. Charm deceives and beauty fades, but a woman who fears the LORD will be praised. The book that began with the fear of the LORD ends with a woman who lives it.

Chapter 31 Study Questions

1. What three warnings does Lemuel's mother give him? (31:3-9)

2. Why must kings and rulers be careful with wine? (31:4-5)

3. What does it mean to "open your mouth for the mute"? (31:8-9)

4. What does "a wife of strength" mean, and where else is that phrase used? (31:10; Ruth 3:11)

5. How does the woman of strength show both hard work and generosity? (31:13-20)

6. What is the key to the whole poem, according to verse 30? (31:30; 1 Peter 3:3-4)

7. How does this woman remind us of wisdom in chapters 1 to 9? (31:26; 1:20; 8:1)

8. Who taught you the faith when you were young? Have you thanked them? (31:1; 2 Timothy 1:5)

9. Husbands and children, how can you praise the women in your life this week? Women, which part of this picture encourages you most? (31:28-31)

10. Who in your community has no voice? How could you open your mouth for them? (31:8-9)

Conclusion

Proverbs is a book about two roads. From the first chapter to the last, it sets them side by side: the way of wisdom and the way of folly, the path of the righteous and the path of the wicked, the house built on understanding and the house that falls. It speaks about the things we deal with every day: our words, our work, our money, our friends, our anger, our marriages and our children. And it keeps bringing us back to the same starting point. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (1:7). Wisdom is not first a matter of being clever. It begins with knowing God, trusting Him and taking Him seriously.

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and to read each book as the kind of writing it is. Proverbs gives us wise sayings that tell us how life usually works under God. They are true, because God gave them, but they are not promises that hold in every single case. We saw this at 10:27, at 22:6, and in the two sayings about answering a fool that stand side by side in 26:4-5. Wisdom is not only knowing the sayings. It is knowing which one fits the moment, and living it out with a heart that trusts the LORD. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and on your own understanding do not lean. In all your ways know Him, and He will make your paths straight" (3:5-6).

Proverbs also shows us that we need more than good advice. Solomon taught wisdom, but he did not always live it. Agur confessed that next to the Holy One he had no wisdom of his own, and he asked, "What is his name, and what is the name of his son?" (30:4). The New Testament answers that question. Jesus is the One greater than Solomon (Matthew 12:42). He is the wise Son who lived every line of this book without failing. And for everyone who comes to Him, He "became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30). The path of wisdom that Proverbs describes leads, in the end, to Him. He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God and help you grow in your walk with Him. Proverbs is meant to be lived, not just read. Take one saying with you each day. Watch your words. Work faithfully. Choose your friends with care. Be generous to the poor. Correct your children with love. Listen when you are corrected. And above all, fear the LORD and trust Him. The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of

my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow and serve alongside other believers, because the one who walks with the wise will become wise (Proverbs 13:20).

Bibliography

The following source was consulted throughout this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

Green, Jay P., Sr. (ed.). The Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-Greek-English. Hendrickson Publishers, 1986 (2nd ed.; printing used 2005). ISBN 1-56563-977-4.