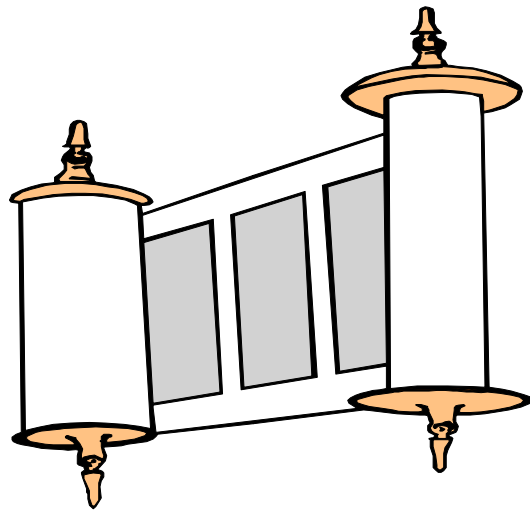


PROVERBS



“The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; to know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment and equity; to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.”
(Proverbs 1:1-4)

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**All the verses noted in these outlines from Proverbs are taken from the New King James version of the Bible. Sometimes other versions render a verse differently because the Hebrew phrases are a little ambiguous. If you are studying these lessons with a different translation that may explain why some of the verses don't seem to fit the points in the outline.

INTRODUCTION TO PROVERBS

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (1:7)

Introduction—*“The book of Proverbs is one Old Testament book that has received less than its share of attention at the hands of Christians. The reason for this is to be found in the fact that most want to relegate it to an abrogated law. This is a mistake. For there is very little peculiar to the Mosaic economy that characterizes the wisdom of Solomon... he did not write for the Jew alone. This is a **tragic** mistake, because his practical knowledge is one of the greatest needs of our hour... His concern is the everyday need of an applied religion. He helps us deal with today’s task, today’s trial, today’s dilemma, and today’s opportunity.” (Maurice A. Meredith, *Studies In Proverbs*, p.4).*

I. AUTHORS OF PROVERBS

- A. Solomon (see 1:1; 10:1; 25:1).
- B. The Wise Men (22:17-24:34).
- C. Agur (30). The name means “gatherer” or “collector”.
- D. Lemuel (31). The name means “dedicated unto God” and may have also referred to Solomon (2 Samuel 12:24-25).

II. BACKGROUND OF SOLOMON

- A. His Acquisition of Wisdom (1 Kings 3:5-15).
- B. His Fame for Wisdom (1 Kings 3:16-28; 4:29-34; 10:1-10,24-25; cf. Matthew 12:42).
- C. His Downfall (1 Kings 11:1-13). Is it possible for a man to have wisdom, yet not use it? Does that detract from the strength of his words of wisdom?

III. THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

- A. What is a Proverb? The word ‘proverb’ (*mischele*) means “to be like, a comparison; noting likeness in things unlike.” What would you say a ‘proverb’ is? Name a modern-day proverb which illustrates your definition.
- B. Characteristics of a Proverb. Proverbs are brief, concrete, and pithy. They illustrate general truths and have diverse applications. Can you name any other characteristics of a proverb?
- C. What is the Main Theme of Proverbs (4:7)?
- D. What is the Purpose of Proverbs (1:1-6)?
- E. Proverbs are Intensely Practical. In what ways? What does the book of Proverbs emphasize in our lives?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *How did Solomon obtain his wisdom? How do we obtain our wisdom (cf. James 1:5-8; 3:13-18)?*
- 2) *Is the book of Proverbs an accumulation of many intelligent observations on life, an inspired book of instructions important to man’s moral education, or both?*

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- 3) *Why are proverbs beneficial tools for teaching and learning (what beneficial features do they possess)?*
 - 4) *Are proverbs statements of unchangeable truth and immovable promises of God?*
 - 5) *What areas of life do the Proverbs cover? Which ages, groups, and social classes are instructed in this collection of wisdom?*
 - 6) *How are the Proverbs able to span years, locations, and cultures, and still be relevant to all people?*
 - 7) *Why should **we** study the book of Proverbs? What are we supposed to learn from all these little bits and pieces of wisdom in this book (1:1-6)?*
 - 8) *Is a **smart** person necessarily a **wise** person? Explain.*
 - 9) *Jesus said, “Indeed a greater than Solomon is here” (Luke 11:31; Matthew 12:42). What does that statement imply about Jesus’ relationship to the wisdom of the Old Testament?*
 - 10) *Give a brief, general outline of the book of Proverbs (scan the sections listed for you below for a hint to their groupings).*
 - *Proverbs 1-9—*
 - *Proverbs 10:1-22:16—*
 - *Proverbs 22:17-24:22—*
 - *Proverbs 25-29—*
 - *Proverbs 30—*
 - *Proverbs 31—*
 - 11) *Think of a time when you used some wisdom in your life. It doesn’t have to be some fabulous display of profundity. Try to think of some simple event where God’s wisdom helped you. Relate that incident to the class.*

WISDOM

"Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom." (4:7)

INTRODUCTION—*"In the Bible, wisdom is always God-oriented and practical. It is not entirely coextensive with knowledge, for a knowledgeable person may be very deficient in wisdom. Wisdom is the right use of one's knowledge, insight and skill to the glory of God. It originates in the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7; 9:10; cf. Job 28:28; Psa. 111:10). Thus the Bible defines wisdom in terms of one's relationship with God rather than formal education or attainments before men (cf. James 3:13-18). Worldly wisdom is knowledge apart from divine revelation and is often God-opposing in nature. True wisdom is the ordering of one's life by God given counsel." (Rubel Shelley, A Book By Book Study of the Old Testament, p.81).*

I. WISDOM ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE

- A. Definition: *"Wisdom... enables one to turn every good thing in life to its rightful purpose. It is something more than wit, shrewd common-sense, or even worldly prudence. It is something more than intellectual excellence, in that it implies a spiritual and moral quality of heart, will and life; and is the practical application of knowledge to its best ends." (Maurice A. Meredith, Studies In Proverbs, p. 9).*
- B. Wisdom is not something to do, rather it is a **way** of doing things. Wisdom is finding, in **your own circumstances**, any specific opportunity to use a proverb—then following through in your actions with what was before only a general principle or abstract idea.

II. DISCOURSE ON WISDOM (Proverbs 1-9)

- A. The Call of Wisdom (1:20-33; 8:1-11; cf. 15:24). What is the price for the rejection of wisdom? For acceptance?
- B. The Value of Wisdom (2:1-9; 3:13-18; 8:10-11; 16:16; 24:13-14). What do the proverbs say about godly wisdom? What is more precious for daily living?
- C. The Security of Wisdom (2:10-22; 3:21-26; 4:1-9). How does wisdom keep one secure and protected? From what things does wisdom protect us?
- D. The Rewards of Wisdom (3:13-18; 8:32-36).
- E. The Way of Wisdom vs. the Way of Folly (9:1-18; 19:8). To whom do wisdom and folly both call out and summon? What does each individually have to offer us?
- F. God's Relation to Wisdom (3:19-20; 8:22-31). Describe God's relationship with wisdom. What does that tell us about our source for acquiring such wisdom?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *What is wisdom (in your own words)?*
- 2) *Where does wisdom originate (2:6)? How is wisdom acquired... what is necessary on our part (1:7; 9:10)? Explain.*
- 3) *Does **having** wisdom guarantee we will **live by** wisdom? What else does wisdom need besides knowledge?*

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- 4) *Someone has suggested seven pillars which uphold wisdom (9:1; 1:2-6). Explain each of these pillars and describe what each contributes to wisdom:*
- *Understanding –*
 - *Knowledge –*
 - *Prudence –*
 - *Shrewdness –*
 - *Instruction –*
 - *Discretion –*
 - *Perception –*
- 5) *Who can benefit most from the wisdom contained within this book... the simple and inexperienced or the mature (cf. 1:4-5)?*
- 6) *List some of the rewards of wisdom (3:13-18; 8:32-36).*
- 7) *Is the wise man the man who knows it all, or the man who knows he does not know it all (3:5-7; 13:1; 26:12)?*
- 8) *The wise man knows how to acquire wisdom in anything. Along with God's help, where else does he turn (13:20; 10:8)?*
- 9) *Elaborate on the importance of the Divine wisdom, which is related in the book of Proverbs, to our personal lives. Compare any New Testament references to wisdom that you can find.*

THE FOLLY OF FOOLS

“Like the legs of the lame that hang limp is a proverb in the mouth of fools.” (26:7)

INTRODUCTION—The tendency in Proverbs is to overemphasize the simplicity in the character of human nature, by generalizing the categories and summarizing the wide variety of men as either wise or fools. There is no flattering category in between—the only other category being the “simple.” These “simple” people are those depicted as standing at the crossroads and having to choose a path of wisdom or folly. Each person will possess differing degrees of wisdom or folly, but the book of Proverbs classifies **all** men in one of these three categories (see Proverbs 9). Therefore, the most important question for each of us to consider is “Where am I?”

I. WHAT IS A FOOL?

- A. Definition: *“The word is used in Scriptures with respect to **moral** more than to intellectual deficiencies. The ‘fool’ is not so much one lacking in mental powers, as one who misuses them... In Scriptures the ‘fool’... is the person who casts off the fear of God, and thinks and acts as if he could safely disregard the eternal principles of God’s righteousness (Psa. 14:1; 92:5-6; Prov. 14:9).” (Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p.375).*
- B. Definition: *“One ‘who acts without counsel, and whose will is too hard for his understanding; he hath no reason for what he doth, but because he hath a mind to do it.’” (Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies, p.172).*

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF A FOOL

- A. Trusts in Himself (12:15; 28:26). Why is that the mark of a fool? What are some of the dangers inherent in trusting in self? In whom should we trust (3:5-6)?
- B. Deaf to Instruction (1:7; 15:5; 23:9; 24:7). Not only is he deaf to it but he despises the instruction **anyone** tries to give him. He cannot stand to have anyone “preach to him.” But that is his downfall (10:21). Why does he despise wisdom?
 - 1. He is a Know-it-all (18:13).
 - 2. He is Opinionated (18:2; 14:33). He does not listen and learn even though his opinions may be obviously foolish (12:23; 13:16).
 - 3. He is a Talker Rather Than a Listener (10:8; cf. 15:7).
- C. Cannot be Disciplined (12:1; 17:10; 16:22). He is not moved by the consequences of his folly. Rods of instruction do not phase him (cf. 19:29; 26:3).
- D. Impulsive (14:29; 17:24). He does not act on principle, but on impulse. Therefore, he is uncontrollable, ruled only by his emotions (29:11).
- E. Commits Evil (10:23; 13:19; 14:9). He has rejected the fear of God and wisdom, and therefore exalts in his folly.
- F. Virtually Unchangeable (27:22; 26:11).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *What are the three categories of human nature as depicted in the book of Proverbs?*

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- 2) *What things does a fool lack according to the book of Proverbs?*
 - 3) *Though both the simple (naive) and foolish may share many similar characteristics, why is there hope for the simple and none for the fool?*
 - 4) *Combine the characteristics of a fool. Then describe this kind of person so we will know what to look for (in ourselves and others).*
 - 5) *Why doesn't a fool ever learn?*
 - 6) *Is it possible for the fool to recognize his own folly? Who does a fool blame for his condition (19:3)? What are your chances of convicting a fool of his condition?*
 - 7) *Is a man's foolishness usually a very well-kept secret (12:23; 13:16)?*
 - 8) *How morally dangerous are fools (17:12)?*
 - 9) *Can you ever win an argument with a fool (29:9)? Why?*
 - 10) *How should we respond to fools (26:4-5; 29:9)?*

Related Passages—3:35; 10:13-14; 13:20; 14:1,3,7-8,15-18,24; 15:14,20-21; 17:16,25; 18:6-7; 19:13; 26:1-12

THE HUMAN HEART—Pride

“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” (16:18)

INTRODUCTION—*“There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. I have heard people admit that they are bad-tempered, or that they cannot keep their head about girls or drink, or even that they are cowards. I do not think I have ever heard anyone who is not a Christian accuse himself of this vice. And at the same time I have very seldom met anyone, who was not a Christian, who showed the slightest mercy to it in others. There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it in ourselves, the more we dislike it in others.*

*“The vice I am talking about is Pride or Self-Conceit; and the virtue opposite to it, in Christian morals, is called Humility... it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.” (C.S.Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp.197-198).*

I. COMPANIONS OF PRIDE

- A. Haughtiness (18:12; 21:4; 16:18). Haughtiness is being disdainfully or contemptuously proud. Why does pride show such contempt for others?
- B. Scoffing (21:24). Why does he scoff? It is his way of letting you know **his** superiority and **your** inferiority.
- C. Boasting (27:2; 20:6; 17:19). Pride’s greatest fear is that someone else will not notice the greatness it sees in itself. Therefore, it boasts of itself (cf. 25:14).

II. PRIDE VS. GOD

- A. Pride is the Ultimate Sin Against God (3:5-7). It is the assumption that man is self-sufficient and important enough to compete with God’s greatness, magnitude, strength and wisdom.
- B. Pride Opposes the First Principle of Wisdom (8:13; 15:33; 22:4). That principle is the *“fear of the Lord.”* How does it oppose this principle?
- C. Pride is an Abomination to God (16:5; 6:16-19). It claims honor for itself, but only God can bestow honor and He does so in response to man’s humility rather than his pride (29:23; 15:33).

III. CONSEQUENCES OF PRIDE

- A. Shame (11:2; 25:27). It is ironic that pride seeks glory for itself, yet receives shame.
- B. Contention (13:10; 28:25). What kinds of relationships experience conflict, strife, and contention because of pride?
- C. Destruction (15:25; 16:18-19; 18:12). God brings the man who challenges Him to ruin. He has no need to even compete with man for glory.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) Are **you** looking to identify pride in yourself or in others?
- 2) Why is it so difficult to see pride in ourselves but so easy to detect it in others?

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- 3) *Why do God and pride not mix? What is it that causes the enmity between the two? How did Satan's pride cause the enmity between himself and God (1 Timothy 3:6)?*
 - 4) *What is the beginning of wisdom (9:10)? What does the proud man lack (8:13; 22:4)? Therefore what is he?*
 - 5) *Why can't pride admit that it is wrong?*
 - 6) *In what way is pride competitive?*
 - 7) *Does pride receive more pleasure from having what it wants or from having more than the next person?*
 - 8) *From what one thing—more than anything else—does pride receive the most enjoyment?*
 - 9) *Why can two proud people never resolve their differences or work together?*
 - 10) *Why does the proud man 'scoff' at others (21:24)?*
 - 11) *Many vices will sometimes bring people together—you may find fellowship, joking, and friends among drunkards or unchaste people. Does pride ever bring people together?*
 - 12) *Is there any positive kind of pride that we should have?*
 - 13) *Someone has said, 'Humility is an elusive quality, because once you think you finally got it, you just lost it.' Why is that true?*

Related Passages—12:9; 14:3; 25:6-7; 26:12

THE HUMAN HEART—Anger

“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.” (16:32)

INTRODUCTION—*“The tragedy of the modern world is that man is the master of so many things, yet has not learned to master himself. In the broadest sense, self-control describes the mastery of appetites... Guided by godly wisdom and knowledge, the wise man disciplines his appetites and makes them his servant rather than his master.”* (Thomas L. Seals, *Proverbs--Wisdom For All Ages*, pp. 108-109).

*“The fact is that there are no damaging or destructive motives **per se**. Our emotional makeup is totally from God. All emotions however, can **become** destructive when we fail to express them in harmony with Biblical limitations and structures.”* (Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, p.349).

I. ANGER

- A. Not Always Bad. Like all other emotions, God built anger into man to motivate him to action. Feeling anger is not wrong... responding to anger is not wrong... responding to anger hastily and irresponsibly is wrong (14:29; 16:32; 19:11; 29:11). The man who is “slow to anger” (not the man “lacking anger”) is praised in contrast with the quick-tempered man who improperly expresses his anger (cf. Mark 3:1-6; Matthew 21:12-13; Ephesians 4:26-27).
- B. Reactions to Anger. These characteristics refer more to one’s control or lack of control, rather than inborn character traits of passion or passivity.
 1. Quick-Tempered. This man has no control over his spirit (25:28).
 - a. Ventilates His Anger (29:11; 12:16; 14:17). This man is likely to “blow up”!
 - Speaks foolish words (29:20).
 - Stirs up strife (30:33; 15:18; 29:22).
 - Is not seeking a solution to the problem, just a sounding board to voice his dissatisfaction.
 - b. Internalizes His Anger (Ephesians 4:26-27; Ecclesiastes 7:9). This man is likely to “clam up.”
 - Hurts himself (18:14; 27:3). He makes himself sick, tense, miserable, and self-pitying, whether he even realizes it or not.
 - Hurts others. He turns bitter, resentful, unforgiving—the very things he must “put off” (Ephesians 4:26-27,31-32).
 2. Slow to Wrath. This man has his hottest passions under control (16:32). He controls his anger. How does he do it?
 - a. Understanding (14:29). What does he understand?
 - b. Discretion (19:11).

II. HANDLING ANGER PROPERLY

- A. In Ourselves. How are we able to control anger and its destructive effects within ourselves?
 1. Break Underlying Patterns (19:19). Otherwise you will have the same problem over and over.
 2. Guard our Mouths (17:27-28; 21:23). “What” we say and “how” we say it pose the greatest problems with our anger.
 3. Overlook Transgressions (19:11; cf. Ecclesiastes 7:20-22; Ephesians 4:31-32).

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4. Get Rid of Anger (Ephesians 4:26-27,31-32). Don't allow it to fester and build grudges.
 5. Redirect our Anger to the Problem and Not the People (Ephesians 4:29).
- B. In Others (29:8). How are we able to control anger and its destructive effects within others?
1. Respond Gently, Not in Kind (15:1,18,28; 25:15).
 2. Bring a Peace Offering (21:14; cf. Matthew 5:23-24).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Is anger ever a commanded response?*
- 2) *Should a man's emotions be his master or his servant? How can he allow them to be his master? How can He make them his servant?*
- 3) *Does the solution to the sinful abuse of anger lie in attempting to turn off the emotion? Must it be turned off or controlled?*
- 4) *How can anger actually be constructive? How can it be destructive? Does the answer to those questions lie in **where** anger is directed? How does that make such a difference?*
- 5) *When one 'blows up' where is all his anger directed? When one 'clams up' where is all his anger directed? Do either of these people tend to be good, pleasant company?*
- 6) *Where should anger be directed?*
- 7) *What does vented anger produce? What does internalized anger produce?*
- 8) *Is anything constructive ever said when people are angry (14:17; 15:18; 29:20)?*
- 9) *Can anger ever be appeased by going head to head against someone else's anger (15:18)?*
- 10) *Why can the self-disciplined man be trusted to rule others (16:32)?*

Related Passages—16:14; 21:19; 22:8,24-25

THE HUMAN HEART—Broken Spirit

“A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.” (15:13)

INTRODUCTION—Most people are motivated—either for good or bad—more from their emotions than their intellect—not because emotion is **stronger** than intellect, but because such motivation is the **easier** of the two. Emotional motivation is not necessarily a good thing (cf. 28:26).

The complexities of life are so great and the problems so heavy that the more we face them, the more ‘mixed-up’ we become. Therefore, it is **imperative** to keep our hearts and emotions under control rather than being ruled by them (4:23).

I. A BROKEN SPIRIT

- A. People Can Become Exasperated and Give Up (15:13; 17:22; cf. Colossians 3:21). The heart is overly sorrowful and the spirit broken. If a person’s spirit (will, desire, and vitality) is broken, what positive things is he capable of doing?
 - 1. He cannot help himself (18:14).
 - 2. Others cannot help him (18:14).
 - a. Difficult to share in (14:10,13). Because a man’s most inward feelings are known only to himself and God, and sometimes he camouflages those feelings.
 - b. Difficult to cheer up (25:20). Attempts to help often make things worse.

II. WHAT CAN BREAK ONE’S SPIRIT?

- A. Fear (29:25; 28:1). Fear cripples our confidence, enthusiasm, and optimism. Our own phobias (fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of inadequacy, etc.) become stronger than our fear of God (cf. 3:21,24-26). A guilty conscience sometimes causes fear (28:1). It can result in great emotional distress, paranoia, and produce one’s own fantasy world.
- B. Anxiety (12:25). Constant fretfulness produces a depressing anxiety that eats away at the spirit and consumes it (cf. Psalm 37:1-11). Worries and troubles weigh us down until they break us (cf. Matthew 6:25-34; 1 Peter 5:7).
- C. Depression (12:25; 15:15). Depression (which is often self-inflicted, then worsened by neglecting responsibilities, resentment, self-pity, etc.) is a downward spiral that ultimately causes a person to break his own spirit (15:13).

III. PUTTING THE PIECES BACK TOGETHER AGAIN

- A. Trust in God (16:3; 29:25; 23:26; 28:26).
- B. Wisdom (3:21-26).
- C. Hope, Faith, and Love (13:12,19).
- D. Positive Mental Outlook (14:30; 15:15,30; 17:22).
- E. Talk and Listen to Friends (27:9). Don’t just make it a ‘pity party’.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *What do we mean when talking about a “broken spirit”?*
- 2) *What kinds of things can break one’s spirit?*
- 3) *What things will help cast out fear (1 John 4:17-18; Matthew 8:26)?*
- 4) *“The fear of God is the one fear that removes all others”. True or false? Why?*
- 5) *In what ways are love and fear mutually opposed (cf. 1 John 4:17-18)?*
- 6) *How can anxiety wear us down?*
- 7) *How does Cain effectively illustrate the downward spiral of depression (Genesis 4:1-15)? Show how his actions degenerated from his first to his last.*
- 8) *Do the sorrows of the mind contribute to the sickliness of the body (17:22)?*
- 9) *Does this kind of person have very many ‘good days’ (15:15)?*
- 10) *Why don’t others always fully understand our problems (14:10)? Are they, therefore, incapable of helping us (27:9)?*
- 11) *How difficult is it to heal the bruised spirit (18:14; 25:20)? Who can heal **your** crushed spirit (cf. Matthew 12:18-21)?*

THE HUMAN HEART—Hatred

“Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins.” (10:12)

INTRODUCTION—Good people hate the evil and their evil deeds. That seems like a natural enough human response (14:17; 24:24-25). But there is also a dark, ugly side to this emotion—a side directly related to Satan (1 John 3:10-15). Hatred first reared its ugly head in Cain’s heart, giving him the notorious distinction as the first murderer (Genesis 4:1-15).

Murder is a heinous crime, rarely mentioned among God’s people, but hatred is commonplace. Yet, the man who hates and the man who kills are guilty of the same crime, for the sin lies in the inward disposition—of which the act is only the outward expression (1 John 3:15).

I. THE DARK SIDE OF HATRED

- A. Evil Men Hate Good Men (29:10; 21:10). Understandably the good hate the evil and their deeds, but why would the evil hate the good (cf. 9:8; John 3:19-21)?
- B. Disguises Itself (26:24-26; 10:18). It hides behind flattery, lies, and kind speech. Hatred will make one a hypocrite, blessing with his mouth and cursing with his heart.
- C. Stirs Up Strife (10:12; 26:20-21). Without fuel the fire goes out. Hatred fuels strife, contention, and dissension.
- D. Comes Back on You (26:27 [note the context 26:24-28]). It is merciless to others, it will be merciless to you.

II. MANIFESTATIONS OF HATRED (Note the New Testament passages where these sins are grouped together [Galatians 5:19-21,26; Titus 3:3; James 3:10-18; 1 Peter 2:1; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7]). Hatred is a common link to all these sins.

- A. Envy and Jealousy (14:30; 6:34-35; 21:25-26). Not only does envy want what another person has, but it hates him for having it (cf. Romans 12:15).
- B. Lying (26:28; 10:18). Hatred spreads gossip, rumors, slander, innuendoes, and lies which destroy the one it hates. It can smite its enemy secretly when his defenses are down.
- C. Retaliation (20:22; 24:29). What are some ways that we retaliate against others? Is this a wise reaction? Take a look:
 - 1. Displeasing to God (17:5; 24:17). Why would such rejoicing be wrong?
 - 2. A Losing Response (26:27).
 - 3. The Proper Response (25:21-22). How would we do this?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *What are some of hatred’s attendant evils? Why are these things mentioned together so often (cf. Galatians 5:19-21; Titus 3:3; etc.)?*
- 2) *Why is hatred equivalent to murder (1 John 3:10-15)?*

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- 3) *Why is hatred sure to come back to you (26:27)?*
 - 4) *How does hatred disguise itself (26:24-28)?*
 - 5) *Did envy or jealousy ever produce any positive results between Cain and Abel, Sarah and Hagar, Rachel and Leah, or Joseph and his brothers?*
 - 6) *Does love ever cause envy (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4)? In what way does hatred cause envy?*
 - 7) *Why is it wrong to rejoice at the calamity of others (17:5; 24:17)?*
 - 8) *Can money, possessions, pleasures, or anything compensate for having to live with hatred (15:17)?*
 - 9) *Why is the poor man hated (14:20; 19:6-7)? Would you say hatred is a selfish emotion?*
 - 10) *What is the solution to hatred?*

THE HUMAN HEART—Self-control

“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.” (4:23)

INTRODUCTION—The emphasis on the inward man is the key point which separates Christianity from all other religions. The control of the inner man is the secret to a righteous life. Free-spirited, spontaneous living is irresponsible and destructive. The book of Proverbs encourages us to exercise self-control, because disciplined living refines and strengthens character.

Proper living is developed and controlled at the source of one’s actions—the impulses of his heart (4:23; 23:7). This may be man’s most difficult challenge, but it will be his greatest victory!!

I. NECESSITY OF SELF-CONTROL

- A. Because the Heart Controls the Man (4:23; 23:7; 27:19). Actually, the heart **is** the man. It is his control center. *“The soul of man is the fountainhead of life, and when it is contaminated, so is life. For when the heart is corrupted, the streams of life are polluted, since all of life stems from this one spring.”* (Maurice Meredith, *Studies In Proverbs*, p. 39). See also Matthew 12:33-35; Mark 7:14-23.
- B. Because Of Man’s Inadequacy.
 - 1. Man Cannot Deliver Himself. The only standard he knows is his own judgment (12:15; 14:12,14; 16:2; 21:2). His greatest traitor can be his own heart, if it is ignorant of God’s will (28:26). The standard of right and wrong must be somewhere besides our own hearts. Therefore, we must gain control of ourselves, then subject our will to God’s will.
 - 2. Man Must Give His Heart to God (23:26; 3:5-8; 19:21).

II. ACHIEVING SELF-CONTROL

- A. Through Discipline and Instruction (10:8; 15:5,31-32; 23:12). He receives both without arrogantly scorning them. The wise man **profits** by advice and discipline he receives:
 - 1. From God (3:11; 10:17; 16:9; 17:3; 19:3).
 - 2. From Parents (2:1-2; 6:20-22; 7:1-3; 13:1). Once we become adults, we are not given liberty to scorn and refuse our parents’ discipline and instruction but to wisely apply it.
 - 3. From Others (12:1; cf. 9:7-9; 15:10,32; 29:1). Man’s ability to improve depends on his willingness to heed advice and reproof. The wise man humbly accepts advice, not viewing it as unkind or an attempt to undermine him (27:5-6).
- B. Through Self-Restraint (16:32; 25:28). The man who restrains himself is the mightiest man alive!
 - 1. Resists and Flees Temptation (4:14-17,20-27; 23:1-7,17; 24:1).
 - 2. Responsible Behavior (20:5; 23:19). He thinks before acting or reacting, then guides his heart in the right way. He does not engage his mouth before his mind is in gear (13:3; 15:28; 16:23; 21:23).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Why does the Bible emphasize the heart of the inner man so much?*

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- 2) *With so many passionate and conflicting emotions prompting men to action, what is our responsibility to those actions?*
 - 3) *Does the man under control think or act first (20:5; 23:19)?*
 - 4) *Is a disciplined life really as boring as the “free-spirits” make it out to be? Why?*
 - 5) *What is the greatest human display of strength (16:32; 25:28)?*
 - 6) *Is the wise man one who never makes mistakes or one who profits from his mistakes?*
 - 7) *What quality does the wise man possess which enables him to listen and profit from advice and reproof (15:31-33)?*
 - 8) *Do those who **give** the most advice generally **heed** the advice of others? Are **you** an advice-giver or an advice-receiver?*
 - 9) *How can man achieve self-control?*
 - 10) *In what areas are **you** out of control? Where will you find your solutions?*

THE NATURE OF GOD

“The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.” (15:3)

INTRODUCTION—Even though the book of Proverbs is full of wisdom for living, much is also said about God who is the source of wisdom. It is the knowledge of God, and the fear and respect which such knowledge produces, that produces wisdom in man (1:7; 9:10).

Perhaps the revelation of God’s nature, found in the book of Proverbs, helps motivate wise living better than anything else (15:3; 21:30). God is far above and beyond man (30:2-6). Only the spiritual fool could learn these things about God and then refuse to serve Him.

I. THE NATURE OF GOD

- A. Creator (16:4). God proved the value and power of wisdom, by using it in the process of creating the world (3:19-20; 8:12,22-36), and man (22:2; 20:12).
- B. Wise (19:21; 21:30). It is arrogance to think that man’s wisdom can even compete with God’s (cf. 30:2-4). We are wise to listen to the inspired wisdom of Proverbs.
- C. Providential (16:1,9,33; 21:1). The ‘casting of lots’ was not gambling or superstition, rather it was a way to have God, who can control the lot, express His will in the matter (cf. Joshua 18:10; Acts 1:26).

II. THE NATURE OF GOD’S RELATIONSHIP WITH MEN

- A. Knows Men (15:3,11). Man’s life and heart is an open book before the Lord.
- B. Demands Righteousness and Heartfelt Service (21:3; 15:8-9). Being able to know man’s life and heart, God demands purity and the proper spirit (28:9).
- C. Hates Wickedness in Men (11:20; 15:9). He hates all forms of evil in men. They are an abomination to Him (cf. 6:16-19; 8:7; 11:1; 12:22; 15:8,26; 16:5; 17:15; 20:10; 21:27; 28:9).
- D. Judges Men (16:2; 21:2). To ‘weigh the spirit’ would be to determine the amount of truth and righteousness within it—which decides its value and worth.
 - 1. Tests and Tries the Heart (17:3). Man is given the opportunity to mature, develop character, and purify his life.
 - 2. Passes Judgment on Men’s Lives (11:31; 24:12).
 - a. Rewards the Righteous (3:1-2; 10:22,27; 16:7).
 - b. Punishes the Wicked (10:27-29).
- E. Preserves the Needy and the Faithful (15:25; 23:10-11; 22:22-23). God takes it as a personal attack against Him, when the needy and poor are oppressed.
 - 1. *“God is referred to in Proverbs 23:10-11 as ‘Redeemer’ (Hebrew--goel), originally the next of kin who avenges the estate of the dead kinsman, or who raises up posterity for him (cf. Deuteronomy 25:5-10; Ruth 2:20; 3:9; 4:4-6; Leviticus 25:25; Numbers 5:8). The redeemer was also the kinsman who came to the rescue of one who had fallen into slavery or oppressions (cf. Leviticus 25:48; Proverbs 23:10-11). Here, the thought seems to be that as destitute as the poor, the orphans, and the widows might be, there is one who claims them as next of kin and will defend them, that individual being the Lord God.” (Thomas L. Seals, Proverbs—Wisdom For All Ages, p.63)*

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2. Guides and Protects His People (2:7-8; 3:6,23-24; 10:3,30; 11:8; 12:21; 14:26; 20:22; 21:31; 24:16).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Knowing that God sees and knows all we do, should that knowledge make us afraid? Or comforted? Or both?*
- 2) *In what ways can knowing God—the way He is depicted in Proverbs—motivate us to live wisely (1:7; 9:10)?*
- 3) *If wisdom empowered God to create the world (8:22-31), what can it do for us (8:32-36)?*
- 4) *List some of the forms of wickedness which the wise man says are an “abomination” to the Lord.*
- 5) *Why does the Lord test our hearts before passing judgment?*
- 6) *How can it be possible that by living righteously our enemies can become our friends (16:7)?*
- 7) *Why is God so concerned about the treatment of the poor and down-trodden (23:10-11; 22:22-23)?*
- 8) *How is God able to keep the righteous from stumbling and falling (2:7-8; 3:23-24)?*
- 9) *Besides trusting in God, what must we do for God to deliver us (21:31)?*

ADULTERY

"Can a man take fire into his bosom, and his clothes not get burned?" (6:27)

INTRODUCTION—Much of the book of Proverbs is devoted to warnings against sexual sins. Verse for verse, more consideration is given to this subject than is found in any other book. Obviously, the great sage perceived in the seductress, the greatest hazard to young, unsuspecting male victims.

Wisdom calls the simple to the way of **life** (9:1-12), whereas the adulteress calls the simple to the way of **death** (9:13-18). Understanding her evil ways can safeguard young men from destruction (2:10-22; esp. vv.16-19). Adultery is a fatal, self-inflicted wound (6:32).

I. INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT ADULTERY

- A. The Deception of Adultery (5:1-6). It is full of empty promises. It promises pleasure, love, and fulfillment, but in the end gives pain, suffering, and destruction.
 - 1. Her art of seduction—she uses flattering words (5:3; 6:24; 7:14-21) and sex appeal (6:25).
 - 2. Things she delivers—bitterness (5:4), destruction (5:5) and instability (5:6).
- B. The Price of Adultery (5:7-14). Adulterous love appears to be free, but it has its price which is more than we bargained for (cf. Galatians 6:7-8).
 - 1. Lose one's honor and dignity (5:9).
 - 2. Sacrifices all the years of one's labor (5:10; 29:3). Everything is cut off from him but her—a woman who is devoid of real love.
 - 3. Body consumed with disease (5:11). Husband and wife do not transmit such venereal diseases when they are faithful to one another.
 - 4. Filled with remorse after it is too late (5:12-13).
 - 5. Total ruin (5:14). Disgrace, humiliation, and even death.
- C. The Deterrent to Adultery (5:15-20). A happy and honorable marriage (cf. Hebrews 13:4). The adulteress has no charm when a man is spell-bound with his wife's love.
 - 1. Look for love at home (5:15). Adultery and sensual passions are counterfeits (5:16-18).
 - 2. Fall in love again with your spouse (5:19-20; Song of Solomon 4:9-16). Make sure that love relationship cannot be improved on.
- D. The Price of Adultery (6:20-35). The 'no-strings-attached' love he was offered proves to have 'great chains' with heavy burdens.
 - 1. Reduced to poverty and emptiness (6:26).
 - 2. He is burned (6:27-29). A burn brings injury, leaves permanent scars and continual pain—so does adultery.
 - 3. Irremovable reproach (6:33). The stigma of 'wife-stealer' or 'home-wrecker' cannot be erased.
 - 4. The fury of a jealous husband (6:30-35).
- E. The Enticements of an Adulteress (7:6-23). She is crafty and manipulative. Beware of her temptations.
 - 1. She appeals to men with her attire (7:10).
 - 2. She is restless, looking for excitement (7:11).
 - 3. She is forward (7:12-13).
 - 4. She flatters him because **she** came looking for **him** (7:14-15).
 - 5. She has set the mood for their love feast (7:16-18).
 - 6. Her husband is gone (7:19-20).

7. She enticed him through flattery (7:21-23).

F. The Warning (7:24-27). As beautiful and appealing as she may be, her house is a battlefield, strewn with the corpses of many strong men, and her door is a gate to hell!!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *What are some factors which contribute to adultery's great temptation?*
- 2) *Adultery sounds like fun, but what are some of the consequences of sexual immorality?*
- 3) *Why is "playing with fire" (6:27-28) such an appropriate figure to describe adultery?*
- 4) *Many strong men have been slain by the adulteress (7:26-27). Can you think of any Bible examples?*
- 5) *Nothing can ruin a promising career so quickly as an illicit affair. Give some present day examples of such people.*
- 6) *What are the two great safeguards against adultery (5:8; 6:20-24)?*
- 7) *How can we overcome the temptation of adultery?*
 - 5:1-2—
 - 5:8—
 - 5:15-20—
 - 5:21-22—
 - 6:20-21—
 - 4:23—
- 8) *Can the guilt of adultery ever be hidden from God (5:21-23)?*
- 9) *In what sense is a harlot a "deep pit" (22:14; 23:27)?*
- 10) *What is one of the most amazing characteristics of an adulterous woman (30:20)?*
- 11) *Adultery is one of those cruel sins whose pain and destruction strikes twice. When will its consequences be experienced (5:7-14; 6:23-35; 7:24-27; Galatians 5:19-21)?*

DRINKING

“Wine is a mocker, intoxicating drink arouses brawling, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.” (20:1)

INTRODUCTION—The problem of drinking and drunkenness today is ‘staggering.’ Wine has a hypnotizing quality—it is delectable, sparkling and smooth, and seduces the unwary man, much like the seductress (23:31; 6:24-25). Both fascinate and offer the same promise of pleasure and enjoyment... but both have the same fatal sting “*in the end*” (23:32; 5:4). We must beware!!

I. REASONS FOR DRINKING

- A. Momentary Pleasure (23:31; Ecclesiastes 10:19).
- B. Escape Problems and Forget (31:7). It may bring **temporary** relief, but then comes the bitter return to reality.
- C. Bitterness (31:6). It releases anxieties and burdens.
- D. Friends (23:20-21). Social drinking is the manner in which most people begin drinking.

II. EFFECTS OF WINE (23:32)

- A. Produces Woe and Sorrow (23:29). For the one who drinks and for his family.
- B. Produces Contentment (23:29; 20:1). Wine releases one’s inhibitions. Thinking he now possesses greater strength, he becomes boisterous and obnoxious.
- C. Physical Problems (23:29).
- D. Hallucinations (23:33). Loses touch with reality, becoming prey to fantasies and illusions.
- E. Dulls the Senses (23:34-35). Even though he is lying still, he feels like he is tossed about and swaying. He is anesthetized and beyond sensations of pain or feeling.
- F. Addicting (23:35). The greatest sting is wine’s addictive power.
- G. Breeds Irresponsibility (31:4-5). Distorts thinking and perverts justice. Sober bodies and minds are essential for ruling and leading.
- H. Brings One to Poverty (23:20-21; 21:17). Wine is a **taker** not a **giver**.
- I. Leads One Down the Wrong Path (23:19-21). The “way” which is mentioned here, is the way of wisdom which calls for a clear head and steady walk (23:19). The implied contrast is with the ‘staggering’ way of the drunkard (23:20-21).

III. DRINKING

- A. Drunkenness is a Sin (Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 5:11-13; Romans 13:11-14). It is always condemned as excessive, indulgent, uncontrolled and sensual!
- B. Social Drinking is a Sin (1 Peter 4:3-4; Romans 12:1-2).
- C. Does the Bible Say Taking a Drink is a Sin? Yes or no? What does the Bible say about taking a drink?

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1. Wine is one of the good things **God** gave to cheer the heart (Judges 9:13; Psalm 104:14-15; Ecclesiastes 10:19). When they drank wine, they were rejoicing in the fruits of their God-given harvest. What little alcohol was in it was incidental. When men drink alcoholic beverages today, the emphasis is on the alcoholic content and the effects it will have on him, rather than glorifying God.
 2. Does man have a license to drink whenever and whatever he wants (Romans 14:15,17,21)?
 3. With so many negatives associated with wine, is it any wonder Paul had to convince Timothy to take just a little? Timothy refused to drink any until then (1 Timothy 5:23; Titus 1:15).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *How are men deceived by the influence of strong drink (20:1)?*
- 2) *How does wine “sting like a viper” (23:32)?*
- 3) *Why are just a few drinks deceptive?*
- 4) *How can alcohol bring one to poverty?*
- 5) *What positive effects does drinking have? What negative effects?*
- 6) *Am I **ever** the **only** person affected by my drinking?*
- 7) *Why are leaders not to be “given to wine” (31:4-5; 1 Timothy 3:2-3)?*
- 8) *Explain how wine can be one of the good things God has given us, yet we are condemned for drunkenness or social drinking.*
- 9) *Should we indulge ourselves in an occasional beer or glass of wine? What would be the advantages? What would be the disadvantages? Which outweighs the other?*
- 10) *What do you believe about social drinking in light of what the Bible says?*
- 11) *What should a Christian do when he finds himself in a situation where he is encouraged to drink socially?*

THE TONGUE

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” (18:21)

INTRODUCTION—It is a fire, a world of iniquity, an unruly evil, full of deadly poison, set on fire by hell—the power and influence of the human tongue is awesome (18:21; 11:11; cf. James 3:1-12). It is one of the most volatile things in existence and remains generally untamed—but when controlled can be of great benefit (15:4).

I. THE POWER OF THE TONGUE

A. It Can Be Destructive. Both to itself and others (10:19; 11:9; 18:6-7; 12:13).

1. Lying.

- a. Abomination to God (12:22; 6:16-19; 19:5,9).
- b. Fostered by Hatred for Another (10:18; 26:24-26,28).
- c. Is Short-Lived (12:19; 21:6; 20:17). Whereas lying may appear to be beneficial for present circumstances, in the end it is still destructive.

2. Flattery.

- a. Guileful Flattery (26:28; 29:5; 28:23). Not the kind of flattery which compliments, but which deceitfully wins another’s favor and manipulates others.
- b. Used Effectively by the Adulteress (6:24; 7:21).

3. Tale-Bearer (Gossip, Slanderer, Whisperer)

- a. Betrays and Destroys Friendships (16:28; 17:9; cf. 11:13).
- b. Creates Strife (16:27-30; 26:20-22).
- c. Destroys Character and Integrity (11:9; 25:9-10). Whether the tales are true or not is incidental. Spreading those tales—being ‘truthful’ or ‘blunt’—is not always in the other’s best interest.

4. Cursing.

- a. Self-destructive (20:20; 30:10-11).

B. It Can Be Constructive. The tongue has power for good too (15:4).

1. Good Words.

- a. Pleasing to Those Who Hear (10:11,20-21; 16:24; 25:11). Such words are precious because they are refreshing, life-giving, encouraging, and edifying.
- b. Timely Words (15:23; 12:25; cf. 15:28). Sometimes **when** you say something is just as important as **what** you say.

2. Control.

- a. Benefit to Guarding Our Mouths (13:2-3; 21:23; cf. 16:23; 17:27-28). The untamable tongue must be checked.
- b. Where There is no Wood the Fire Burns Out (26:20-28).

II. THE POWER OF THE EAR

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- A. People are Hungry for Gossip (18:8; 26:22). Such is a sad commentary on humanity. Men like to hear, and are always ready to believe the worst.
 - B. Listener and Tale-Bearer Alike are Corrupt (17:4; cf. 20:19). He may never spread the story, but he allowed it to be spread, and his attitude toward the person is forever changed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Why is the tongue emphasized so much in Proverbs?*
- 2) *How powerful is the tongue? Is it inherently evil?*
- 3) *Why do some people sometimes lie about others (10:18; 26:24-26,28)?*
- 4) *Distinguish between honest praise and the kind of flattery emphasized in Proverbs.*
- 5) *Can one sometimes do as much damage with the truth as he can with a lie? How?*
- 6) *If gossip is not necessarily lying, what makes it so bad?*
- 7) *Why should we refuse to listen to gossip, rumors, and innuendoes?*
- 8) *Why is it as wrong to listen to the whisperer as it is to be one?*
- 9) *Why is it such a sad commentary on human nature that we love to hear gossip (18:8)?*
- 10) *What are some other sins of the tongue not mentioned in the outline?*
- 11) *How can the tongue be used positively?*

Related Passages—10:31-32; 12:14,17-19; 14:3; 15:1-2; 17:7; 18:4,13; 19:22; 25:15,18,23; 26:18-19; 29:20

POVERTY AND WEALTH

"The rich and the poor have this in common, the Lord is the maker of them all." (22:2)

INTRODUCTION—In the world there are rich people and poor people. Some can afford all of life's luxuries, others have to struggle to make ends meet, while many others are destitute. That is a fact of life not likely to change (22:2; 29:13; cf. Matthew 26:11).

Unlike men, God is impartial—neither man is better than the other. So wealth is not an end in itself, but an aid to achieving a prosperous life. It is ultimately righteousness, not wealth, which delivers us from death (10:2; 11:4,28).

I. ADVANTAGES OF WEALTH AND DISADVANTAGES OF POVERTY

- A. Wealth Gives a Man Security (10:15; 18:11; cf. 13:8).
- B. Wealth Brings a Man Friends (14:20; 19:4,6-7). Friendships with the poor are too demanding. People have enough troubles without taking on a poor man's troubles too. So people are drawn to the wealthy.
- C. Wealth Brings a Man Power (22:7).
- D. Wealth Lets a Man Say What he Wants (18:23).

II. WHY POVERTY COMES

- A. Some People are Victims of Poverty.
 - 1. Greed and Oppression. The greed of others is the source of their distress (22:16; 30:14; 28:3).
 - a. God takes that as a personal insult (14:31; 17:5; cf. Matthew 25:41-46)!!
 - b. God will settle the account (15:25; 22:22-23).
- B. Some People Have Only Themselves to Blame.
 - 1. Idleness (10:4; 14:23; 20:13; cf. 6:6-11; 24:30-34).
 - 2. Sensuous Self-Indulgences (21:17; 23:21).
 - 3. Use No Wisdom (13:18; 21:20).
 - 4. Waste Time and Energy on Frivolous Things (12:11; 28:19).

III. WISE ACQUISITION AND USE OF WEALTH

- A. Best and Most Enduring Wealth is That Which is Gradually Acquired (13:11; 10:4). Like the shepherd, his prosperity is self-perpetuating (27:23-27). Often the wealth gained in a short time is lost in the same short time (20:21; 28:20).
- B. Wealth Acquired Unscrupulously is Temporary and Bitter (20:17; 21:5-6; 28:8; 15:27; 10:2). God will take it away from him (13:22).
- C. Our Own Priorities in Acquiring Wealth (11:28; 28:11; 23:4-5). While wealth is a good thing to have, and even comes as a blessing from God (10:22), there are still things which are much "better" to have in life:
 - 1. Wisdom and Knowledge (8:10-11,18-19; 16:16; 20:15; 24:4).
 - 2. Fear of the Lord (15:16).
 - 3. Good Name (22:1).
 - 4. Integrity (28:6; 19:1).

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5. Honesty (19:22).
 6. Righteousness (16:8,19).

We must be sure that wealth does not blind us to those things that far excel it! What is important is not whether we are rich or poor, but whether we stand upright before God (30:7-9).

- D. Caring for the Poor (11:24-26; 13:7). The great benefit of riches is not **having** them but **using** them. The reason the giver will be requited for his gifts and generosity is because he is lending to the Lord (19:17; 22:9; 28:27). We cannot help the poor too much—God sees to that. God listens to the cries of those who listen to the cries of others (21:13).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Why did the wise man not suggest or propose programs for bringing financial equality to all men and women?*
- 2) *Does wealth have its advantages? Is ‘money the root of all evil’ (1 Timothy 6:10)?*
- 3) *Why do the rich oppress the poor? Why do the poor sometimes oppress the poor (28:3)?*
- 4) *How do some people bring poverty on themselves? Is poverty always the fault of the poor?*
- 5) *What things are “better” than money? Should men completely withdraw from the pursuit of wealth?*
- 6) *How may one make himself rich through greed, vanity, and selfishness, yet still have nothing worthwhile (13:7,11)?*
- 7) *What are the dangers of worldly prosperity (30:7-9)? Of poverty? Is it better to be rich, poor, or merely content in whatever state we find ourselves (Philippians 4:11-12)?*
- 8) *How may one make himself poor through generous and liberal giving, and yet enjoy great riches (11:25; 13:7)?*
- 9) *In what sense am I “lending to the Lord” (19:17) when I help the poor?*
- 10) *What is necessary on our part before God will ever hear our cries of need (21:23)?*
- 11) *What is usury (28:2)? Why is such a thing evil?*

INDUSTRY AND LAZINESS

“Go to the ant you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise.” (6:6)

INTRODUCTION—Nothing worthwhile was ever accomplished without hard work. On the other hand, laziness and sloth hinder and impoverish a man (10:4-5,16; 13:11; 18:9).

Of all the people in the Bible, the most ridiculous person described is the sluggard. God actually makes fun of him. *“Clearly the sages enjoyed poking fun and pouring ridicule on this lazy fellow. They have saved some of their best humor and liveliest imagery for him. As we read their proverbs we are meant to smile. We are also meant to recall when we got out of our beds this morning and how we spent our time today.”* (Kenneth Aitken, *Proverbs—The Daily Study Bible Series*, p.118).

I. MARKS OF A SLUGGARD

- A. Love of Sleep (26:14). Hinged to his bed, tossing back and forth, he sleepily thinks ‘just a few more minutes’ (6:9-10; 24:33). He cherishes sleep as an escape from responsibility. Rest benefits the hard worker, but it hinders the sluggard (20:13; 19:15).
- B. Inability to Start (10:4; 21:25-26; 6:9-10; 24:33). ‘Later’ and ‘tomorrow’ are the sluggard’s favorite times for accomplishing his tasks.
- C. Inability to Stick With a Task to its Conclusion (19:24; 26:15). He makes a promising start but doesn’t have the endurance and energy necessary for completion (12:27). He works hard to achieve something then lets it go to waste.
- D. Excuses. He will find 101 reasons not to do something—it is either too cold (20:4) or too dangerous (22:13; 26:13), or too something (cf. Ecclesiastes 11:4)! He is a master of excuses, no matter how wild or ridiculous!
- E. Talks About and Desires Success (13:4; 14:23; 21:25-26). He is as ambitious as anyone, but that appetite which drives the worker to **action** drives the sluggard to **frustration** (13:4; 16:26). He does not have, because He lacks diligence.
- F. Full of Advice (26:16). He thinks his days of observing other people work has made him wise and insightful.

II. CONSEQUENCES OF LAZINESS

- A. Self-Evident Ruin (24:30-34). It cannot be hidden.
- B. Suffers Poverty and Want (12:11; 19:15; 20:4; 24:34; 28:19; cf. 6:11). He obtains nothing for himself, God refuses to give him anything and forbids others from providing for him (2 Thessalonians 3:10).
- C. Loses His Independence (12:24).
- D. Perpetual Frustration of Getting Nowhere (15:19; 13:4; 14:23; 21:25-26). He is trapped in his own self-perpetuated cage.
- E. Irritant to His Employer (10:26; cf. 25:13). If you want a task performed well and quickly, don’t select a person with a lot of leisure time—always pick a busy person.

III. THE INDUSTRIOUS, HARD WORKER

- A. Self-Motivated and Disciplined (6:6-8; cf. Romans 12:11).

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- B. Knows the Necessity of Doing Work When it Needs to Be Done (10:4-5; 20:4; 28:19). Not when it is convenient. Neither does he put it off until it is too late to accomplish that work.
 - C. Receives Recognition (22:29).
 - D. Rewarded for His Industry (10:4; 13:4).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Is the sluggard one who lacks ability **or** does he lack zeal and energy?*
- 2) *How are the sluggard and the destroyer related (18:9)? What will be their common fate?*
- 3) *What is necessary before any person should be able to rest? What necessarily precedes rest?*
- 4) *Why is a sluggard unable to accomplish much?*
- 5) *Even though his excuses seem legitimate, why does the sluggard really make excuses?*
- 6) *May a lion sometimes be real and the excuse valid (26:13)? What should be done in such a case?*
- 7) *What is the only work a sluggard does on any project (26:16)?*
- 8) *Why does the slothful man lose his independence (12:24)?*
- 9) *Why does he never get anywhere?*
- 10) *How do you feel about a lazy employee (10:26)?*
- 11) *Why do busy people complete tasks better than people with more spare time?*
- 12) *What lesson is implied in the ant's having no chief or overseer (6:6-8)?*
- 13) *Why does no one ever praise the sluggard (22:29)?*

BUSINESS

"A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight." (11:1)

INTRODUCTION—According to an adage ‘Honesty in little things is not a little thing’... and then another states that ‘Honesty is exact to the penny.’ It is the ‘little things’ and the ‘pennies’ we easily overlook that God looks over (Luke 16:10). Honesty is the same in principle no matter how large or small.

Some say you cannot exist in the ‘dog-eat-dog’ business world without pulling some ‘shady deals.’ If that is true, it is better not to succeed (16:8). But it is not true anyway!

I. HONESTY IN BUSINESS

A. Where Dishonesty Gets You (11:3).

1. Temporary Gains (28:8; 21:6). God eventually takes them away and gives them to the righteous.
2. Bitter Gains (20:17). There is a price to that kind of success.
3. Bad Reputation (10:9). Reputations need little time to become bad, but years of proving to be made good again.
4. Troubles His Own House (15:27). His dishonesty comes home to haunt him. His family may become dishonest in their dealings with him or come to completely distrust him.

B. Honesty on Both Sides of the Counter.

1. Seller (16:11; 11:1; 20:10,23). Just, accurate scales and measurements have been assigned by God. He expects merchants to be fair, not like the dishonest ones with one set of measures falling below the standard for selling, and the other measuring in excess of the standard for buying. He also condemns holding back goods to push up the price (11:26).
2. Buyer (20:14). Likewise the buyer is not to use his own fraudulent schemes for an advantage.

II. GIFTS AND BRIBES

A. Bribery Condemned (15:27; 17:23). These are the kind of bribes given or received by one who is out to take advantage of another and make a profit at the cost of justice and fairness (cf. 29:4).

B. Gifts Advantageous (17:8). Proverbs does not make a blanket statement condemning buying favors with gifts. Likely it is the motive and whether there is openness or secrecy about the gift, which determines which side of the line it is on.

1. Wins Friends and Influences People (19:6).
2. Paves Way to Social Advancement (18:16).
3. Helps Get a Man Out of a Jam (21:14).

III. MOVING UP IN THE BUSINESS WORLD

A. Gifts (18:16; 17:8). You have to ‘give’ a little to ‘get’ a little (cf. 19:6).

B. Integrity (10:9; cf. 11:3; 12:22). It may be a slower way to the top, but it is far more secure. Honest men are always recognized.

C. Competency (22:29). The quality of your work and efforts goes before you.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Why is the principle of honesty not changed whether dealing with small or large amounts?*
- 2) *Can one exist in the business world if he stands for principles of right?*
- 3) *Dishonesty nets a profit, but what else does it bring (28:8; 20:17; 10:9; 15:27)?*
- 4) *Does God expect more honesty from the manufacturer or retailer than He does from the consumer?*
- 5) *Is it wrong to make a **sizable** profit in your work?*
- 6) *The wise man appears somewhat ambiguous concerning his instructions on gifts and bribes. Can you explain his position on the subject?*
- 7) *What will help you move up in the business world?*
- 8) *What good things will a man be recognized for in his business?*
- 9) *What partner do we **all** need in business?*
- 10) *Which three individuals are involved in the middle of every business transaction?*

A GOOD NAME

“A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver or gold.” (22:1)

INTRODUCTION—Would you rather have someone tell your children, after you are gone, that you were a rich man or that you were a good, honest, and noble man (19:1)? A man’s integrity can gain him honor, glory, and dignity that money cannot buy (22:1). *“It is the foundation of society, the basis of justice, and the guarantee of treaties among men and nations.”* (J.A. McNutt, *Pearls From Proverbs*, Vol. II, p.27).

I. A GOOD NAME

- A. Importance (12:3). It establishes him.
- B. Originates from Others, Not Self (27:2,21). Man’s reputation comes from others recognizing his integrity, not from him announcing it! The value of gold and silver is tested by refining—the value of a man’s character is tested by his reputation.
- C. Honor (3:3-4). Along with a good reputation is the honor associated with it.
 - 1. From God (11:20).
 - 2. From Men (12:8; 10:7; 11:16). The world has nothing to say but praise for honorable men. But dishonorable conduct always brings reproach (18:3).

II. HOW TO ACHIEVE A GOOD REPUTATION

- A. Integrity (10:9; 11:3; 20:7). Integrity is ‘adherence to a code of values.’ It is a man’s noblest possession. It is not an action in particular, but a **motivation** to action. Integrity speaks of a man’s relationship with himself.
 - 1. A man who walks in integrity will not stumble, because he has something to guide his steps properly. The dishonorable man is a blight on his family—they must also live under his bad reputation.
- B. Honesty (12:20; 13:5; 17:20; 20:17). Integrity calls for honesty. Deceit is in the heart of the unrighteous (26:24-26). Honesty sets a man apart and gives him a good name. Surely ‘Honesty **is** the best policy’!
- C. Diligently Seek God (11:27; 21:21). Then when you make a mistake, others will know where your heart is.
- D. Righteous Deeds (20:11). What we **do** tells people what we **are** (cf. Matthew 12:33-35).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Why is a good name better than riches (22:1)?*
- 2) *As a Christian, is it important for you to have a good name?*
- 3) *Who honors such people?*
- 4) *What is integrity? Why is it important?*

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- 5) *How does a just man bestow blessing upon his children (20:7)?*
 - 6) *What does honesty tell people about you?*
 - 7) *Does a man with a good reputation ever make mistakes? What do people know about him though?*
 - 8) *Why are our actions a good indication of our integrity or lack of it (cf. Matthew 12:33-35)?*
 - 9) *What is the final goal of a life of integrity (4:18)?*
 - 10) *Do you have a good reputation?*

FRIENDSHIPS

"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." (17:17)

INTRODUCTION—"A friend is a gift we give ourselves" (Robert Louis Stevenson). Friends are valuable and precious, one of the greatest blessings a man has. Even family relationships, if not founded on deep caring and sharing (rather than just the accident of birth), cannot have the depth of quality that a real friendship has (18:24; 27:10c).

Superficial friends are easily gained and lost, but true friends are for a lifetime. Neither time nor miles can separate them (cf. 1 Samuel 18:1-4; 20:41-42).

I. REAL FRIENDSHIPS

- A. Not Superficial (19:4,6-7; 14:20). These are 'fair-weather' friends and are only loyal so long as we are able to hold them by that which attracts them to us (money, common interests, or other things **they** benefit from). A true friend is not a friend for what he can **get** out of it, but what he can **give** into it.
- B. Reciprocal (18:24). Friendships cannot be one-sided.
- C. Proven in Adversity (17:17; 18:24). He comes through for you, not because you beg him to, but because you need him to (27:10b—which may be advising us not to think we deserve help in times of adversity, with a 'you owe me' attitude. A real friend will come through not because it is demanded of him, but because he loves).
- D. Refine us (27:5-6,17). Real friends care enough to correct us, and help us grow rather than remain silent about our faults. Don't respond '*I thought you were my friend*' when receiving constructive criticism—that is exactly the reason why a real friend gives it.
 - 1. We Must Appreciate It (28:23). A man's character does not develop in a cocoon, but through constant interaction with others (27:17).
- E. Forgive and Forget (17:9).
- F. Are Worth Keeping (27:10). No matter what the cost.

II. NURTURING FRIENDSHIPS

- A. Know When a Joke is Not a Joke (26:18-19). Tackiness and thoughtlessness can be painful to another, and '*I was only joking*' is a lame excuse for such conduct.
- B. Don't Make a Pest of Yourself (25:17).
- C. Don't Be Inconsiderate (27:14). You are not doing your friend a favor when it inconveniences him!
- D. Don't Tell Tales (17:9; 16:28). Friendship thrives on forgiveness, understanding, and love, bearing no grudges and telling no tales (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Friends know how to keep quiet.
- E. Don't Betray Confidences (25:8-10). The man who tries to score over his neighbor and undermine his neighbor's good name, will himself end up with a reputation of being disloyal and untrustworthy (25:19).

III. THE POWER OF A FRIEND'S INFLUENCE

- A. Friends Influence us More than Anyone Else (12:26; 13:20). They will make us better or worse people.

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1. They Influence us for Evil (1:10-19; 22:24-25; 23:20; 24:1; 28:7; 29:24).
 2. They Influence us for Good (27:17).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *How would you describe a real friend?*
- 2) *How would you describe a 'fair-weather' friend?*
- 3) *What is the key to the difference?*
- 4) *Are you a real friend to anyone?*
- 5) *Which is better—having many friends or a few real friends? Why?*
- 6) *Is a person's best friend necessarily determined by whom he/she spends the most time with?*
- 7) *Do real friends always agree on everything (cf. 27:17)?*
- 8) *Why do friends conceal each other's mistakes (17:9)?*
- 9) *Why would you refrain from gossiping about a friend and his shortcomings (17:9; 16:28)?*
- 10) *Why is the influence of evil companions emphasized more than the influence of good ones (12:26)?*

GENEROSITY AND GREED

“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so.” (3:27)

INTRODUCTION—Generosity is not tied to a person’s net worth, nor to the face value of his gift. It is not just the rich who can be generous and benevolent. Likewise the wealthy are not the only ones who can hoard what they have. These qualities are in no way tied to what a person **has** but what he **is** (22:9)! *“It is not what you would do with a million, if a million should ere be your lot. But what you are doing at present, with the dollar and a quarter you got.”* (Author unknown).

I. GREED

A. Characteristics of Greed.

1. Insatiable Desires (27:20). Like Sheol, the monster that can never swallow enough humans to satisfy its appetite, the “*eyes of man*” are never satisfied (cf. Ecclesiastes 1:8; 5:10). That which he wants, but cannot have, makes him miserable and he despises it (21:25-26).
2. Miserly (23:6-8). His generosity is a front (23:7). His heart is not in his gift to you, but in the cost to himself. If one’s generosity is selfish, it is a sham. Generosity does not keep records of good done.
3. Self-Defeating (11:16-17,24; 15:27). In it’s attempt to fill itself by gaining and returning things, it empties itself of the inward qualities which truly satisfy (13:7). Any evil done to fill oneself with the spoils of others is self-destructive (1:10-19; esp. v.19).

II. GENEROSITY

- A. Caring for the Needy (14:21,31; 28:27; 11:24-26). The great benefit of possessions is not in **having** them but in **using** them! Where we have opportunity we have responsibility (3:27).
- B. Don’t Put Off Helping the Needy (3:28). By doing so you may make his need greater.
- C. Honoring the Lord (14:31; cf. 3:9-10). God is honored by our consideration and generosity for the poor. He also takes it as a personal insult when we do nothing (22:22-23).
- D. Blessings of Liberality (28:27). Among those blessings is the satisfaction he receives from giving (11:17) and because of his liberality he receives the generosity of others (11:24-25).
- E. God’s Response to our Generosity (22:9). He becomes indebted to us for being the channel of His blessings to the poor (19:17). He also responds to our lack of generosity by turning the same ‘deaf ear’ to us that we turned to the poor (21:13).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Why isn’t generosity based on the amount of the gift? What is it based on?*
- 2) *Why is the greedy man never filled (27:20)?*
- 3) *How will a miser treat you? If he does happen to do anything for you, what is his mind likely on (23:6-8)?*

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- 4) *Even though a paradox—why is it true that one can make himself rich yet have nothing, and one can make himself poor even with great riches (13:7; 11:24)?*
 - 5) *What is the extent of our responsibility to help the needy (3:27)?*
 - 6) *Why can't the needy wait until tomorrow for your help (3:28)?*
 - 7) *In what sense do we “honor the Lord” when showing mercy to the needy (14:31)?*
 - 8) *Jesus said “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). What greater blessings does the giver experience than the recipient?*
 - 9) *Why does God indebt Himself to us for helping the poor (19:17)?*
 - 10) *To what extent must our generosity and benevolence go (25:21-22)?*

HOME LIFE

"In the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but in the revenue of the wicked is trouble." (15:6)

INTRODUCTION—When God designed the home, He had man's best interests in mind (18:22; 19:14; Genesis 2:18). It was not designed to be a battleground, but rather a haven. Although Proverbs does not provide pat answers for all the problems the home faces, it does point us in the right direction. Its instructions are worthy and valid for having successful families. It impresses us with the personal responsibility of **every** family member for the benefit of the whole (11:29).

I. PURPOSE OF A HOME

- A. Contribute to the Happiness of Each Member (5:18; 10:1; 15:20; 17:6; 23:15-16; 29:3; 31:28). Families are God's way of blessing all of us (cf. Psalm 127:3-5; 128:3-4). The righteous family member brings happiness to all the rest.
- B. Training Ground for Children (22:6; 23:14; 1:8-9). In the home, children get the direction and guidance necessary to grow and develop. They also receive instruction that will prepare them and stick with them into adulthood (4:1-13; 6:20-23).

II. MAKINGS OF A HOME

- A. Complementing One Another. Each family is comprised of different members with various roles and responsibilities. Each has his own place and effect on all the other members of the home. Their lives are all interrelated and influence one another.
 - 1. Husband and Father (20:7; 17:6; 15:27). His wise and righteous life benefits his family.
 - 2. Wife and Mother (14:1; 12:4; 31:10-31). She may have the most pivotal, important position in the home, with the success or failure of that home dependent upon her.
 - 3. Children (10:1; 15:20). They are either a blessing or a curse. Some of the proverbs are addressed to the children to convince them that their lives can bring either joy or sorrow to their parents.
 - a. Good Children (23:15-16,24-25; 29:3,17). They are a delight to their parents—children of whom they can be proud.
 - b. Bad Children (17:21,25; 19:27). Even a parent's love for these children cannot make the pain and the shame go away—it only intensifies them!
 - 4. Aged (17:6). Here we see the solidity and harmony of family life spanning three generations. Instead of 'generation gaps,' each generation finds enrichment in and derives honor from the other. Grandchildren are the blessing of the elderly. Older family members have much to contribute to their family (20:29; 16:31).

III. WORTH OF A GOOD HOME

- A. It May be Man's Most Precious Possession (24:3-4; 15:6).
- B. Unity is the Most Important Thing a Family Can Have (15:17; 17:1). It is far more valuable than the greatest wealth and pleasures.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

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- 1) *Did God bless us with the roles and responsibilities of the home or curse us?*
 - 2) *Can any family member live without having an effect on the others?*
 - 3) *Why was the home and family relationship established?*
 - 4) *What do children learn in the formative years while at home (4:1-13; 6:20-23)?*
 - 5) *Where does a child learn how to discipline himself and respect authority?*
 - 6) *Should children be made to attend worship services and Bible study?*
 - 7) *Why may the wife/mother be the most pivotal person in the family (14:1)?*
 - 8) *Why does one's love for his children intensify the pain when that child goes astray?*
 - 9) *What place do the elderly have in the family (cf. 20:29; 16:31)?*
 - 10) *How important is a good home?*

HUSBANDS AND WIVES

"He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord." (18:22)

INTRODUCTION—Godly homes don't just happen. They are the fruit of much toil and labor. They are built by the strong hands of both men and women who follow after the wisdom of God (24:3-4; cf. Psalm 127:1). Such homes are a blessing and are reinforced by God.

The most intimate human relationship in the home—or the world—is with one's spouse. The stability of that relationship is more important than anything they possess (15:17; 17:1). Its success is based on the partnership between the two (cf. Luke 11:17).

I. HUSBANDS

- A. Good Husbands are Rare (20:6). As many negative things as are said about women in Proverbs, the men may think they are naturally superior as husbands. Not hardly!
- B. His Greatest Treasure (18:22; 19:14). She is his blessing from a gracious God. She enhances his position, brings out the best in him, and brings him honor and dignity (31:10-12,23).
- C. Troublesome Husbands (11:29; 27:8). Such irresponsibility in the family breeds separation and emptiness for him.
- D. Faithfulness (5:18). The warnings against sexual sins are addressed almost entirely to the men in Proverbs. Why?
 - 1. Beware of the Harlot (5:1-6; 7:24-27). Like a leech she will suck all his livelihood and vitality from him, leaving him empty (5:9-11). Then too, he must face the punishment for his sin (5:14,21-23).
 - 2. Share Love with Your Wife (5:15-20). That is the only sure way of happiness and fulfillment.

II. WIVES

- A. Power to Stabilize or Destroy Home (14:1). A wife will manage and establish a home or bring it crumbling down. The home teeters on her character—she will either balance and support it through her wisdom or bring it crashing down through irresponsibility and folly (cf. 1 Timothy 5:14).
- B. Makes or Breaks her Husband (12:4). She will either bring out the best in him and assure him of honor and dignity (31:23) or through her shameful behavior bring disgrace to him and continually gnaw away at him and waste him like a consuming bone disease (cf. 11:22).
- C. Contentious (19:13; 27:15-16). A wife always at conflict with her husband, nagging and restless is a torturous irritation—like constantly dripping water. She cannot be quieted and it is useless to even try.
 - 1. A man's only relief from her is separation—whether sleeping on the couch, in another room, or as far away as he can get (21:9,19; 25:24).
- D. The Worthy Woman (31:10-31). She is rare and priceless, a blessing to her family and deserving of their praise (31:28-31).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Is a successful home a partnership or dictatorship?*

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- 2) *What is more valuable than a peaceable home (15:17; 17:1)?*
 - 3) *Are good husbands about as rare as good wives (20:6; 31:10)?*
 - 4) *How is a man's wife his greatest treasure?*
 - 5) *Why do you suppose the instructions about sexual sins are addressed solely to the men?*
 - 6) *How beautiful can love be between a husband and wife (5:15-20)?*
 - 7) *What power does a wife hold in the home (14:1)?*
 - 8) *Why does a wife have such a tremendous positive or negative effect on her husband?*
 - 9) *What is the effect of a continual dripping of water (19:13)? What is the similar problem with a continuous dripping on a rainy day and a contentious woman (27:15)? Will there be peace in such a home?*
 - 10) *Is the description of the worthy woman (31:10-31) just a man's conception of his dream girl or a real and obtainable description of a godly woman?*

THE WORTHY WOMAN

“Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.” (31:10)

INTRODUCTION—The Bible does not suppress women, but rather elevates and honors them. When God looked at the man He had created, He saw incompleteness, instability, and weakness (Genesis 2:18). He saved the best for last and created woman as man’s help—not just to cook, clean, and provide sex for him. As she demonstrates the special, God-given graces of womanhood, she enhances the family’s life along with the rest of society and is worthy of the highest honor (11:16; 14:1).

Proverbs includes an acrostic poem that extols the virtues of the godly woman and emphasizes her value to mankind (31:10-31). Lest anyone think this is just some man’s unreasonable expectation of a ‘perfect woman,’ notice that these are the words of a woman (31:1)!

I. HER VALUE (31:10-12)

- A. Priceless (31:10). She is his crowning jewel, a treasure given to a man by God (12:4; 19:14).
- B. Reason for Her Worth (31:11-12). Her husband has confidence, knowing she will **always** do what is best for him and the entire family. She is one of the keys to his success.

II. HER LIFE (31:13-24)

- A. Hard Worker (31:13-15). She **looks** for tasks that need to be done and is willing to do them rather than complain or leave them undone (31:13). She goes to whatever lengths she must to acquire the things needed for her family (31:14). Her greatest satisfaction comes from providing for her family all hours of the day or night (31:15).
- B. Wise and Industrious (31:16-19). She is a good business manager and can make wise decisions on her own (31:16,18a). She also prepares herself for the rigorous work of providing food and clothing for her family, and seems to never tire (31:17-19).
- C. Kindness and Generosity (31:20). She still has time for others! She is truly a giving person.
- D. Benefit to Family (31:21-24). What would they do without her? She provides for every need of her family (31:21), is an asset to her husband’s standing in the community (31:23) and even brings in extra income needed for the family (31:24).
 - 1. Notice that among all these provisions, she also does something for ‘herself’ (31:22). She is **not** a slave—but her voluntary hard work buys her the right to some ‘time to herself.’ She deserves it!

III. HER CHARACTER (31:25-27)

- A. Strength and Honor (31:25). She is adorned with the fine trappings of the **inward** woman (cf. 1 Peter 3:3-5; 1 Timothy 2:9-10).
- B. Wisdom (31:26). She knows when to speak, what to say, and how to say it. Unlike the fool, she has something to say worth listening to (cf. 18:2,13; 14:33; 10:8).
- C. Busy (31:27). She has no time to be idle (cf. 1 Timothy 5:11-15).

IV. RESULTS OF SUCH A LIFE (31:28-29)

- A. Praise from Family (31:28). Her value to the family does not go unnoticed or unappreciated. Her praise comes from the mouths that are most important to her.

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- B. She Excels all Others (31:29). She stands head and shoulders above the most noted women of this world. None is even in her league!

V. HER SECRET (31:30-31)

- A. Her Secret (31:30-31). We might credit her success to many things—her charm (but that is deceitful), her beauty (but that is vain and fleeting). Her secret is her fear of the Lord. Does that surprise you? Isn't that where the wise life begins (cf. 1:7; 9:10)?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Why do so many people have a negative view of what the Bible says about women?*
- 2) *Does the Bible elevate or denigrate women? How high or how low does it place them?*
- 3) *Describe a “worthy woman.”*
- 4) *Why do people argue that such a woman as is depicted in Proverbs 31:10-31 is unrealistic?*
- 5) *Why is she so valuable? Why is she so rare?*
- 6) *How does she find time for the rigorous activity as a mother, wife, and home manager?*
- 7) *Why does she take time to do some things for herself (31:22)?*
- 8) *Why is her husband known in the gates (31:23)? How can a wife encourage and inspire her husband?*
- 9) *How does she approach the work of providing for her family? Who works harder than she?*
- 10) *What is the true value of a woman? What is the key to her success?*
- 11) *What is necessary for **you** to complete your development and become a “worthy woman”?*

PARENTS AND CHILDREN

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” (22:6)

INTRODUCTION—Parenting may be the most difficult, yet rewarding job in the world—because being a child is the most important time in anyone’s life. The person that child will become is shaped and formed **most** by the parent’s influence during the adolescent years.

Parents must provide the necessary instruction, training, guidance, and example which are fundamental for the child’s development. Therefore, children must honor their parents and be willing to receive instruction and correction (1:8-9; 4:1-4).

I. PARENTS

A. Task of Child Training (22:6).

1. Difficult (22:15). Children are immature. Their silly whims and childish thoughts must be removed and replaced as they grow, making them **thinking** people rather than just **reacting** people.
2. Important (19:18). If not trained and directed properly in the formative years, it may be too late to change him later. The folly of youth seems to be not giving a matter **enough** thought whereas the hardened folly of an adult is in refusing to give a matter **any** thought!
3. Serious (29:15,17; 19:18). Leaving a child to grow himself without guidance, either through neglect or choice, will be destructive for the child and his parents.
4. Key to the Task (3:11-12). Discipline is first and foremost a matter of **instruction** for the child and then afterward **punishment** for his wrong doings. Parental discipline is advised and recommended for both ends of a child!
 - a. Rod (29:15; 23:13-14; 13:24). The plain truth is that without the unpleasant discipline parents must administer, the child is likely to follow the path of folly to his own destruction (cf. 22:15; 19:18).
 - b. Reproof (29:15; 6:20-21,23). The wise child is able to accept reproof (a fatherly lecture or ‘sermon’) and such sets him straight (15:5,32), but the foolish needs to have those lessons driven home by the force of the rod.

These proverbs address the importance of parents disciplining their children and not exclusively **how** this should be done. Such judgment is left for the wise parent to use with each individual child.

II. CHILDREN

A. Showing Honor to Parents. How can the conduct of wise children honor and delight their parents (20:11; 23:25). The following points are taken from *Proverbs*, by Kenneth Aitken, pp.149-152.

1. Listen to Them (13:1; 15:5; 23:22). Some children are fools, refusing to listen to their parent’s instruction. Others are so brash and cocky that they cannot be taught. Still others are so contemptuous, the rolled back eyes tell it all (30:17).
2. Don’t Speak Ill of Them (30:11; 20:20). Picking fault and criticizing them reveals our dishonor and disrespect for them.
3. Don’t Mistreat Them (19:26; 28:24). Children who would harm their parents in any way are inexcusable.

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4. Pull Your Weight (10:5). A lazy child is a curse to his parents. Parents are not running a hotel, they are running a home!
 5. Watch the Company You Keep (29:3; 28:7). Their influence on you may bring a father shame.
- B. Effect of a Child's Life on Parents (10:1,5; 15:20; 17:21,25; 19:13; 23:15-16,24). Children can be a man's greatest source of pride and joy or the most grievous burden he has to bear!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Should the spiritual training and guidance of the child be judged less important than his material needs?*
- 2) *What are some things included in the idea of "training" a child?*
- 3) *Why is training a child difficult?*
- 4) *Why is training a child such a serious matter?*
- 5) *What are two useful tools for training children (29:15)?*
- 6) *Is the rod of correction likely to warp a child's personality? What are some useful tools for disciplining children?*
- 7) *Parental discipline must be meted out as God administers discipline to us. How could a father provoke his child to wrath by his use of discipline (Ephesians 6:4)?*
- 8) *How long must a child honor and respect his parents?*
- 9) *Is any child 'too big' to listen to his parents?*
- 10) *Tell how children can be a blessing and source of joy. Tell how they can be a source of sorrow.*

THE NATION

"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." (14:34)

INTRODUCTION—A nation's greatness cannot accurately be measured by its wealth, commerce, or size. Its strength and might has no lasting value if it is not characterized by righteousness in its leaders and citizens (14:34). Governments are assigned to men by God and leaders are raised by Him to carry out His will among nations (24:21; 21:1; cf. Romans 13:1-7). Dishonor and disobedience rendered to the king is likewise shown to God.

I. KINGS AND RULERS

- A. Throne Must be Established on Principles of Righteousness (16:12; 20:28; 29:4). The only real security for a ruler and his nation is to build and guard it with righteousness, justice and truth. Even though the people think he speaks "as God" he is not free to pervert justice (16:10).
 - 1. Must be Just and Fair (20:8; 8:12,15). In order to do that he keeps abreast of what is going on among his people and how faithfully his ministers are fulfilling their duties (25:2).
 - a. Insures Punishment of Wrong-Doers (20:8,26).
 - b. Protects Rights of Needy and Poor (29:14; 31:1,8-9; cf. 28:15-16).
 - 2. Advisors Should be Men of Honor (25:4-5).
 - 3. Refuses Bribes (29:4; 17:23). Bribes pervert justice.
- B. Responsibilities of His Position.
 - 1. Avoid Excess and Overindulgence (31:2-6). One distracts his attention and drains his energy while the other confuses his mind and confounds proper judgment.
 - 2. Compassion for His People (28:16; 31:8-9). A throne built upon the gratitude and loyalty of the people will defy rumblings and revolutions (29:2,14).
 - 3. His Influence on His People (29:12; cf. 17:7). As goes the ruler, so goes his people.

II. SUBJECTS AND CITIZENS

- A. Keep the Law (29:18; 14:34). The attitude that if you do not like a law or think it is unjust, therefore you are justified in breaking it, is nothing less than anarchy and rebellion.
- B. Fear the King (24:21-22). Both he and God deserve our highest respect and honor. We must avoid association with revolutionaries in religion or politics—dissidents and oppositionists who fail to recognize and regard the authority of the Lord or the king.
 - 1. Support Righteous Rulers (14:28). The strength and permanence of any ruler is dependent on the loyalty of his subjects.
 - 2. Gaining the King's Favor (16:15; 14:35; 19:12). Faithfulness to the king insures his favor.
 - 3. Provoking the King's Wrath (20:2; 19:12; 14:35). With the authority a king possesses, provoking his wrath is suicidal. Wisdom advises that we appease it (16:14).
- C. The King's Attendants (14:35). Those in the king's service must be sure to win his favor and avoid arousing his anger (16:15; 19:12).

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1. Must Merit the King's Approval to Receive Promotion and Praise (14:35; 22:29).
 2. Counsel He Gives Must be Tactful (25:15). He is in no position to scold the king.
 3. Counsel He Gives Must be Truthful Too (16:13; 22:11). The king doesn't need a 'yes' man.
 4. Knows His Place (25:6-7).
 5. Control His Passions and Appetites (23:1-3). A man excessive and unrestrained at the king's table, is likely to be excessive with the authority given him by the king.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Are these proverbs applicable to all nations or just those ruled as a monarchy?*
- 2) *How is a nation's greatness measured?*
- 3) *Why must a ruler's throne be established on principles of righteousness and justice (cf. Psalm 97:1-2; 89:14)?*
- 4) *Why must he avoid overindulgence (31:2-6)?*
- 5) *What will compassion on his subjects insure for the king (29:2,14)?*
- 6) *Whether or not laws make sense or seem fair to us, why should we obey the laws of the nation?*
- 7) *Why are we to avoid those who rebel against the authority of our rulers (24:21-22)? Who is really in charge anyway?*
- 8) *Is revolt and uprising the solution to getting out from under a bad ruler? What are some possible channels and lawful solutions?*
- 9) *Why is it important to remain in the king's favor?*
- 10) *List some ways to win the king's favor and offset his anger.*

NUMERICAL RIDDLES

“...to understand a proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles.” (1:6)

INTRODUCTION—Some of the most puzzling, yet profound riddles in Proverbs are found in the riddles of Agur (30:11-31). Each grouping of four observations, or proverbs, have something in common and it is that **common thread** which is the emphasis of each group.

These observations from nature and people shed light on human behavior, conveying moral truths that the reader must meditate on and extract after much thought. They are brainteasers that do not press their lessons strongly on a person, but after putting forth the effort to understand them, they are deeply etched in the mind.

I. FOUR CLASSES OF EVIL DOERS (30:11-14)

A. There is a Generation... Likely every generation has its share of ingrates, self-righteous sinners, proud and arrogant men, and those whose covetousness knows no bounds and shows no mercy (cf. 30:17).

II. FOUR THINGS NEVER SATISFIED (30:15-16)

- A. The Leech (30:15). Its blood-sucking appetite is never satisfied. If that's not enough, its offspring has the same insatiable appetite. Thus, not only is it never **satisfied**, but that desire is **intensified**!
- B. Four Things Never Say 'It is Enough'" (30:16). The grave never fills, the barren womb never stops crying out for children, the dry parched earth drinks in the water and thirsts for more, and the fire needs constant fuel to burn. Even so a man's lusts and desires are never filled. Human greed and covetousness can never be filled, it must learn contentment with what it has (cf. 27:20).

III. FOUR THINGS THAT ARE INCOMPREHENSIBLE (30:18-19)

- A. Things too Wonderful for Us. How can an eagle hang in mid-air hundreds of feet above the ground? How can a smooth-bellied serpent, without legs, climb to the top of a smooth rock and cling there? How can a heavy ship, weighted down with cargo, float on top of the water when much smaller objects sink? What is that mysterious magnetic power which attracts certain men and women to one another instead of someone else?
1. These are beyond man's comprehension. Likewise, man does not understand God's power and will—but he can stand in awe, then trust and believe in the ways of God (30:4-5).

IV. FOUR THINGS THAT ARE UNBEARABLE (30:21-23)

- A. People Not Suited for Their Promotion in Life. These people are nauseating to the world. They all have something in common—they have each been raised to a higher position and have 'let it go to their head,' becoming arrogant and feeling superior.
1. A mistreated servant will be an oppressive ruler. The fool who receives an abundance will be too self-centered to share and use it. The hateful spinster will bring her bitterness and discontentment to the marriage and become doubly odious. Likewise, the maid who becomes the woman of the house will be intolerable.

V. FOUR SMALL BUT WISE THINGS (30:24-28)

- A. We Minimize the Worth of Small Things. These small creatures exhibit wisdom effectively, highlighting the fact that wisdom, not strength, is the key to success.

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1. Ants (30:25). They redeem the time and make provisions for the future without being prodded (cf. 6:6). They make the best use of their abilities.
 2. Rock Badgers (30:26). These are rodents about the size of small rabbits. They realize their feebleness and frailty, therefore, do not trust in their strength, but flee to the rocks for safety from danger. They already know what we should know (cf. Psalm 46:1; 61:1-4).
 3. Locusts (30:27). Though each is small and insignificant, they show what a life of discipline, direction, order, cooperation, and unity can do (cf. Joel 1:4; 2:3-10).
 4. Spider [Lizard] (30:28). He is adept at 'getting places' through his ingenuity, determination, and persistence. He can even find his way into the most royal of places.

VI. FOUR STATELY THINGS (30:29-31)

- A. Some Things are Regal and Stately and Others are Not. Some interpret these passages as referring to arrogance or domination. That may be the meaning, or it may depict certain things as being grand and beautiful (30:29-31) in contrast with others who would do better if they stopped boasting (30:32).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *Why are these riddles so difficult to understand?*
- 2) *What is the point made with the illustration of the leech's daughters (30:15)?*
- 3) *How are each of the four things mentioned never satisfied (30:15-16)?*
- 4) *What is the point about some things in nature being beyond our comprehension (30:18-19)?*
- 5) *Explain how those mentioned in 30:21-23 become unbearable.*
- 6) *Which is more important—wisdom or strength? How does the wise man emphasize that?*
- 7) *What is the lesson taught by each of the small animals mentioned?*
- 8) *Some things may be grand and beautiful, but should we boast of ourselves as such (30:29-32)?*

THE WORDS OF THE WISE

"Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge." (22:17)

INTRODUCTION—Now that we have heard the words of the wise on so many different subjects, the challenge is for us to listen and heed their instruction. What will we do with what we have learned? Our response will expose our wisdom... or our folly!

Proverbs began with a section of lengthy discourses (chapters 1-9) devoted to wisdom itself. Then interspersed throughout the book are reminders and admonitions for us to heed the words of the wise, rather than just intellectually agreeing with them. Various themes are recurrent in these exhortations to heed the wise (The following are suggested by Kenneth T. Aitken in his commentary on *Proverbs*).

I. A LISTENING EAR

- A. God Made Ears and Eyes to be Used (20:12; 15:31; 24:32).
- B. Attune Our Ears to Instruction (18:15; 23:12). There is an active effort involved in learning from these words. There is great benefit in the attainment of this wisdom (19:8,20).
- C. Danger of Turning a Deaf Ear (15:10,32; 19:27; 29:1). The consequences of not listening are severe.

II. THE VALUE OF WISDOM

- A. Worth the Cost (23:23). Some things come at great price and many must be had at any price.
- B. An Appealing Commodity. Whereas some important things are necessary but unpleasant, wisdom is both precious (16:16) and sweet (24:13-14).
- C. Practical and Useful (24:3-4).

III. THE TWO WAYS

- A. Life Restricted to Two Paths (10:17; cf. 4:10-19; Matthew 7:13-14). The wise men challenge us with the two ways of life... not quite as much freedom as we thought! Everyone thinks he is going his own way, being himself... but God says he is traveling one of two paths.
- B. Each Path Radically Changes our Lives (13:13-14; 15:24; 19:16; 21:16).
- C. Each Path Has its Own Destination and Consequences (11:8,19; 13:6; 14:11; 28:18).

IV. THE FEAR OF THE LORD

- A. The Best Way to Learn Wisdom (15:33). Without that fear, honor, and respect for God, we will learn nothing from what His wisdom teaches.
- B. Bears Fruit in our Lives (14:2; 16:6). It's not done in secret, neither is it done without some attendant response in our lives.
- C. The Best Security in Life (10:27; 14:27). In a world of uncertainty, we need something to stabilize our lives and be a foundation for living.
 - 1. Brings Happiness (16:20; 28:14).
 - 2. Brings Contentment (19:23).

3. Brings Security (14:26; 29:25).

4. Brings Hope (23:17-18).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *What is different about the words of the wise in Proverbs and the words of advice from people today?*
- 2) *What is the difference between hearing the words of the wise and listening to them?*
- 3) *As many mistakes as we make, why do we still refuse to listen to the instruction of the wise?*
- 4) *We claim to be independent thinkers, architects of our own destiny, and independent enough to travel our own different paths. What does the Proverbs say about the number of paths we can travel? Is it accurate to say we are headed down one of two different paths? Why?*
- 5) *How does the fear of the Lord give us such a good foundation for life?*
- 6) *If we travel the right path, does that mean we will never have problems, never have bad things happen, and never die? How can the Scriptures be accurate to claim blessings for righteous living and consequences for unrighteous living?*
- 7) *What practical benefit do you see to living by these principles?*
- 8) *What use do you plan to make of all that we have learned in this study of the Proverbs?*

A GREATER THAN SOLOMON IS HERE

“The queen of the South will rise up in judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.” (Matthew 12:42)

INTRODUCTION—As great and wise as Solomon was, he was just a shadow of what the Christ would be. All through his reign, Solomon awed and impressed people with profound wisdom about all things. All through His ministry, Jesus dumbfounded people with words of spiritual wisdom that were beyond most of His listeners. Solomon spoke practical living for life... Jesus spoke words that give life (John 6:68; 8:32).

I. COMPARING THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON WITH THE WISDOM OF JESUS

- A. Wisdom of Solomon. Solomon was unique among men (1 Kings 3:12). His wisdom was received from God in humility (1 Kings 3:7-9). His wisdom was well known among men of all nations (1 Kings 4:29,32; 10:1-10).
- B. Wisdom of Jesus. Jesus was unique among men (John 7:46; Matthew 7:29). His wisdom was received from God in humility (Matthew 13:54; John 8:28; Luke 4:16-22). His wisdom is well known among men of all nations.

II. HOW DOES SOLOMON COMPARE WITH JESUS?

- A. Life. Knowledge and wisdom are supposed to influence our lives.
 - 1. Solomon did not Live What He Knew and Taught (1 Kings 11:1-13; Ecclesiastes 2:10-11,17; cf. 12:13-14).
 - 2. Jesus Was a Sinless Example of What He Knew and Taught (John 8:46; 1 Peter 2:21-22).
- B. Teaching. Solomon’s wisdom tended to be more worldly—while Jesus’ was more spiritual.
 - 1. Solomon’s wisdom dealt with the successful life in this world. Jesus’ wisdom transcended this world and sought to make us more like God (Matthew 5:48).
 - 2. Solomon stressed practical living. Jesus called for radical living (Matthew 5-7). Solomon’s words benefited physical life (4:10-13). Jesus’ words led to eternal life (John 6:68).
 - 3. Solomon taught effectively with proverbs that relate general wisdom learned by observation (1:1-4). Jesus taught effectively with parables which are spiritual lessons and applications from everyday occurrences (Matthew 13:10-17).
 - 4. Solomon’s philosophy of life was pessimistic because he lost sight of God (Ecclesiastes 1:1-3,14). Jesus’ philosophy of life was based on optimism and God’s goodness (John 10:10).
- C. Accomplishments. Both left their marks on the world.
 - 1. Solomon built the temple that his father was not permitted to build (1 Kings 5:2-5; 6:11-13).
 - 2. Jesus built the temple that his Father wanted to dwell in since before time began (John 4:21-24; 1 Corinthians 3:9-11,16-17; Ephesians 2:19-22).
- D. Son Of David. Both sons were promised to David by God.
 - 1. Solomon was the son who built the temple and ruled on the throne (2 Samuel 7:11-16).

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2. Jesus was the son who would fulfill all the promises made to David (2 Samuel 7:11-16; Psalm 89:35-37; Luke 1:32). As great as Solomon was, he was always just a shadow of what Christ would be.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS—

- 1) *How does the queen of the South arise to condemn those of Jesus' generation?*
- 2) *What prompted the queen of the South to come and visit Solomon? Was she invited? Does the Lord invite us to come learn of Him (Matthew 11:28-30)? Why will she condemn those who refuse the Lord?*
- 3) *How much effort did the queen make to hear Solomon's wisdom? How much effort do we make to learn of Christ's wisdom?*
- 4) *Considering Solomon's attitude at the beginning (1 Kings 3:3-15), how were he and Jesus alike?*
- 5) *In what ways does the wisdom of Solomon help us live? In what ways does the wisdom of Christ help us live?*
- 6) *How can one know what is right, yet do things that are so wrong?*
- 7) *Explain why Solomon's and Jesus' philosophy of life are so different?*
- 8) *Would the wisdom of the Bible have been complete if the Proverbs were the last word God had to say about the wisdom for living?*