

A VERSE-BY-VERSE STUDY OF PROVERBS

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# THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE

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“The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge”

PROVERBS 1:7

Thirty-One Chapters • Nine Hundred Fifteen Verses  
Complete, Verse by Verse



REV. GEORGE H. STODDARD

IN HIS HANDS MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

# THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE

*A Verse-by-Verse Study of the Book of Proverbs*

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Rev. George H. Stoddard  
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THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE: A Verse-by-Verse Study of the Book of Proverbs

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*To every reader who has ever asked God for wisdom instead of an  
easy answer — and meant it.*

## Publisher's Note

In His Hands Ministries International exists to put the whole counsel of God into the hands of ordinary readers — not summaries or paraphrases of Scripture, but Scripture itself, opened up verse by verse, in language a working believer can actually use on a Tuesday afternoon. *The Beginning of Knowledge* continues that work in the book of Proverbs, thirty-one chapters and nine hundred and fifteen verses of the most relentlessly practical wisdom literature ever written. It belongs on a nightstand, not a shelf. Read a chapter a day — there are enough for a full month — or slow down and sit with a single page. However you use it, our prayer is the same one Solomon opened this book with: that it would give prudence to the simple, and knowledge and discretion to the young man, and that even the wise would hear and increase in learning.

# Introduction: How to Read a Book of Proverbs

Proverbs is not a story, and it is not a law code, and it resists being read like either one. It almost never explains itself, rarely gives a reason attached to a command, and moves from topic to topic — money, then anger, then a lazy man's garden, then the king's throne — with no transition at all. Read it looking for a plot and it will frustrate you. Read it looking for a single argument built step by step and it will frustrate you worse. It was never built that way. It was built the way a life is actually lived: one decision at a time, most of them small, none of them announced in advance as the important one.

The book names its own authors, which is unusual for Old Testament wisdom literature and worth taking seriously. Solomon stands behind the great majority of it — the prologue of chapters 1 through 9, and the long couplet-form collection of 10:1 through 22:16, plus a second Solomonic collection in chapters 25 through 29 that the text says was copied out nearly two hundred and fifty years later by scribes serving King Hezekiah (25:1). First Kings 4:32 records that Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs in his lifetime; what survives here is a carefully curated fraction, not the whole output of a single afternoon. Two further, shorter sections close the book: the words of Agur in chapter 30, a sage otherwise unknown to Scripture whose humility about his own understanding stands deliberately opposite Solomon's proverbial confidence, and the words of King Lemuel in chapter 31, an oracle his mother taught him — the only chapter in the book credited, however indirectly, to a woman's voice, and it closes the whole collection with one.

The form itself carries meaning. Hebrew poetry does not rhyme sound; it rhymes thought, most often by placing two lines beside each other so the second restates the first (synonymous parallelism), reverses it (antithetic parallelism, the engine behind almost every 'the wise... but the fool' couplet in chapters 10 through 15), or completes it (synthetic parallelism). Chapter 30 adds a device almost unique to it in Scripture: the numerical proverb, 'three things... yea, four,' which trains the reader to notice a pattern across several examples rather than resting on one. Chapter 31's closing poem goes further still, structuring itself as an acrostic —

twenty-two lines, one beginning with each letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order — a literary signal, invisible in translation but real in the original, that this portrait of a life well lived is meant to feel complete, A to Z, nothing left out.

One verse functions as the key to all thirty-one chapters, and the book places it early enough that a reader cannot miss it: 'The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge' (1:7). Not the beginning of religious knowledge specifically, and not a stage a mature believer eventually graduates past — the beginning of knowledge itself, full stop, the foundation everything else in the book is built on. Proverbs will go on to say a great deal about money, work, anger, friendship, sex, speech, and government, and every single one of those subjects is treated, without exception, as downstream of this one posture toward God. Strip the fear of the LORD out of any proverb in this book and what remains is not wisdom — it is only technique, the kind of shrewdness that can just as easily serve cruelty as kindness. The book knows this, which is why it ends where it began: 'a woman that feareth Jehovah, she shall be praised' (31:30), the last substantial clause before the closing verse, closing a loop opened nine hundred and some verses earlier.

Between that opening and that closing, two figures recur throughout the book and are worth watching for by name: Wisdom, personified as a woman crying aloud in the street and at the city gates (1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-6), and her rival, sometimes called Folly and sometimes pictured as the seductive 'strange woman' of chapters 5 through 7, who offers the same kind of public invitation to a very different house. The two of them frame the entire prologue as a choice, not a curriculum — wisdom in this book is less something you learn than someone you either answer or ignore.

This guide moves through all thirty-one chapters and all nine hundred and fifteen verses in order, pairing the full ASV text of each verse with commentary aimed at application, not merely explanation, along with three reflection questions at the close of every chapter for personal study or group discussion. Read a chapter a day and the whole book, cover to cover, fits inside a month. Read it slower, and it will still be there — wisdom crying out at the gates has never once been in a hurry to stop.

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PART ONE

## The Prologue: Wisdom's Appeal

Chapters 1–9

# The Prologue: Wisdom's Appeal



## CHAPTER 1

### The Purpose of Wisdom and Wisdom's First Cry

*The book opens by naming its royal author and stating its mission in one breath: to turn the untaught into the discerning. Verse 7 is the hinge on which the entire book swings — knowledge does not begin with data but with reverence. The chapter closes with wisdom herself, personified as a woman, shouting her invitation in the public square, because true wisdom was never meant to be private or elite.*

<sup>1</sup> ‘The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:’ — Solomon is named as author and as king, which matters: this is not abstract philosophy but wisdom tested at the top of national life. Solomon himself had asked God for exactly this gift (1 Kings 3:9), so the book opens as the fruit of an answered prayer.

<sup>2</sup> ‘To know wisdom and instruction; to discern the words of understanding;’ — Two goals are set side by side — to ‘know’ wisdom (skill for living) and to ‘discern’ understanding (insight into why things work). Head knowledge and applied insight are treated as a single, inseparable pursuit from the very first verse.

- 3 *'To receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness and justice and equity;'* — Wise dealing here is defined in moral terms — righteousness, justice, equity — not merely cleverness or success. Biblical wisdom is never ethically neutral; a shrewd but unjust man is, by this book's definition, still a fool.
- 4 *'To give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion:'* — The target audience is named plainly: the simple (the untaught, easily led) and the young. Proverbs assumes its readers are not yet formed and offers prudence and discretion as things that can actually be given, not just admired from a distance.
- 5 *'That the wise man may hear, and increase in learning; and that the man of understanding may attain unto sound counsels:'* — Even the already-wise are invited to keep listening and 'increase in learning.' Maturity in this book is never a finish line — the moment a person thinks they have arrived is the moment they stop being wise.
- 6 *'To understand a proverb, and a figure, the words of the wise, and their dark sayings'* — The chapter names the literary tools ahead: proverb, figure, sayings, dark sayings (riddles). Readers are warned up front that some of this wisdom will need to be turned over and pondered, not just skimmed.
- 7 *'The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge; but the foolish despise wisdom and instruction'* — The thesis of the whole book: reverent awe of the LORD is the starting point, not the capstone, of real knowledge. Everything that follows — every proverb about money, anger, work, or sex — is an outworking of this one verse; strip it out and the rest becomes mere technique.
- 8 *'My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:'* — The appeal is deliberately domestic — father and mother together, not a distant academy. Wisdom in Proverbs is first transmitted at the kitchen table, long before it is tested in the street.
- 9 *'For they shall be a chaplet of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck'* — Parental instruction is pictured as jewelry — a garland, a chain of office. This flips the young person's instinct that rules are a cage; here they are ornaments that confer dignity, like something a king or priest would wear.
- 10 *'My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not'* — The first concrete temptation named in the whole book is peer pressure toward crime, and the counsel is blunt: refuse before you're even asked to explain why. Consent, not exposure, is the danger point.

11 *'If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood; let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause;'* — The enticers describe their plan almost gleefully — ambush, bloodshed, an innocent target. Scripture rarely lets sin speak this candidly; the ugliness is left exposed on purpose so the reader can't pretend it was ever glamorous.

12 *'Let us swallow them up alive as Sheol, and whole, as those that go down into the pit;'* — Sheol/the grave imagery ('swallow them up alive') shows the gang bragging about power over life and death itself. It is the oldest boast of organized violence — that it answers to no one.

13 *'We shall find all precious substance; we shall fill our houses with spoil;'* — the promised payoff is named specifically because greed needs a concrete lure. Every criminal enterprise sells itself on the loot, never on the cost.

14 *'Thou shalt cast thy lot among us; we will all have one purse;'* — The invitation to share a single purse offers belonging along with plunder — crime marketed as brotherhood. Many people are drawn into wrongdoing less by greed itself than by the promise of being on the inside of something.

15 *'My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path;'* — the counsel is geographic and physical: distance, not merely disagreement. Wisdom repeatedly prefers avoidance to willpower as the first line of defense.

16 *'For their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood'* — Feet that 'run to evil' and hands quick to bloodshed describe sin as a practiced reflex, not a rare lapse. Habitual violence has trained the whole body toward harm.

17 *'For in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird;'* — A bird that watches the net being spread and still flies in is a picture of self-inflicted blindness. The proverb's irony is that these men are less perceptive than birds — their own greed is the very net they can't see.

18 *'And these lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives'* — The twist lands hard: it is their own blood the ambush finally spills. Verses 11–14 promised power over others' lives; verse 18 reveals whose life was actually at risk the whole time.

19 *'So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; it taketh away the life of the owners thereof'* — The chapter's first summarizing proverb: this is the end of everyone 'greedy of gain,' not just this one gang. Personal testimony becomes universal principle — a pattern the book repeats constantly.

20 *'Wisdom crieth aloud in the street; she uttereth her voice in the broad places;'* — Wisdom is introduced as a woman crying aloud — not in a temple or school but in the street and the broad places. She is loud, public, and impossible to claim ignorance of.

21 *'She crieth in the chief place of concourse; at the entrance of the gates, in the city, she uttereth her words:'* — She speaks at the 'chief place of concourse' and at the city gates — the ancient equivalent of the courthouse steps and the town square, where legal and commercial life actually happened. Wisdom addresses real decisions, not hypotheticals.

22 *'How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and scoffers delight them in scoffing, and fools hate knowledge?'* — Three postures are named and rebuked together: the simple who love simplicity, the scoffer who enjoys mocking, and the fool who hates knowledge outright. Each is a different stage of the same refusal to grow up.

23 *'Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit upon you; i will make known my words unto you'* — 'Turn at my reproof' comes with a gracious promise — wisdom's spirit poured out, her words made known. Even after naming their folly bluntly, the offer on the table is still generous, not merely punitive.

24 *'Because I have called, and ye have refused; i have stretched out my hand, and no man hath regarded;'* — The pivot from invitation to warning begins here: wisdom called, and no one answered; she reached out her hand, and no one paid attention. Refusal, the text insists, is a choice made in real time, not an accident.

25 *'But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof:'* — rejecting wisdom is treated as an active dismissal of something offered in good faith, not a neutral non-event. Every proverb ignored is a small version of this scene.

26 *'I also will laugh in the day of your calamity; i will mock when your fear cometh;'* — Wisdom's laughter at coming calamity is startling, even unsettling — but it mirrors, almost exactly, the scoffer's own laughter at correction in verse 22. The text is showing a harvest, not inventing cruelty.

27 *'When your fear cometh as a storm, and your calamity cometh on as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come upon you'* — Calamity is compared to a storm and a whirlwind — sudden, overwhelming, impossible to argue with once it arrives. Warnings given calmly beforehand tend to land as emergencies later.

28 *'Then will they call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they shall not find me:'* — 'Then will they call... but I will not answer' is the most

sobering line in the chapter. It describes a door that does not stay open forever — not because wisdom is vindictive, but because a lifetime of refusal has consequences that outlast the moment of regret.

29 *‘For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of Jehovah,’* — The reason is given without softening: ‘they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of Jehovah.’ This ties the whole scene directly back to verse 7 — the crisis in view is simply what happens when the book’s opening thesis is rejected outright.

30 *‘They would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof’* — ‘Would none of my reproof’ repeats, almost word for word, the refusal already described — the text is not describing a single bad decision but an established pattern of life finally coming due.

31 *‘Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices’* — ‘Eat of the fruit of their own way’ states the whole chapter’s logic of consequence in one image: judgment here is less an external sentence than the harvest of seeds already planted by choice.

32 *‘For the backsliding of the simple shall slay them, and the careless ease of fools shall destroy them’* — not violence from outside, but the natural, lethal end of drifting. Comfortable indifference (‘the careless ease of fools’) is named as just as fatal as active rebellion.

33 *‘But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell securely, and shall be quiet without fear of evil’* — The chapter’s closing contrast is the offer standing behind every warning that came before it: whoever listens to wisdom dwells securely, quiet, undisturbed by fear of evil. The alternative to the crisis above was never complicated — only a matter of who answers the call.

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## Reflection

1. *Where in your life have you treated wisdom as optional information rather than a summons that expects an answer?*
2. *Verse 7 makes reverence for God the starting point of knowledge, not its reward. Does the way you pursue knowledge and skill actually begin there?*
3. *Who or what is currently inviting you toward the kind of ‘easy gain’ warned against in verses 10–19 — and what would it look like to refuse before being asked to explain why?*



## CHAPTER 2

# If You Seek Her — The Conditional Promise of Wisdom

*Chapter 2 is built as one long conditional sentence in the original: IF you pursue wisdom this intensely, THEN these specific results follow. The chapter names two dangers wisdom rescues a person from — violent men and the seductive 'strange woman' — before closing with a simple choice between two futures: staying in the land, or being cut off from it.*

1 *'My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and lay up my commandments with thee;'* — 'Receive my words' and 'lay up my commandments' begin the chapter's long IF-clause. Nothing is promised yet — verse 1 only asks for a posture of reception, the willingness to keep something rather than discard it.

2 *'So as to incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thy heart to understanding;'* — Incline the ear, apply the heart — two different organs, two different kinds of attention. Hearing wisdom and loving it are treated as separate steps; many people manage the first without ever reaching the second.

3 *'Yea, if thou cry after discernment, and lift up thy voice for understanding;'* — 'Cry after understanding... lift up thy voice' pictures prayer, not just study. Wisdom in this chapter is something asked of God as much as something read.

4 *'If thou seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures;'* — Seeking wisdom 'as silver' and searching for it 'as for hid treasures' sets the intensity level: not casual curiosity but the same effort a person spends chasing wealth. The verbs get stronger through verses 1–4 on purpose.

5 *'Then shalt thou understand the fear of Jehovah, and find the knowledge of God'* — The first THEN arrives: understanding 'the fear of Jehovah' and finding 'the

knowledge of God.’ The goal of all this searching was never information for its own sake — it was relationship with the God who is wisdom’s source.

6 *‘For Jehovah giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding;’* — the chapter interrupts its own instructions to remind the reader where wisdom actually originates. Effort in verses 1–4 does not manufacture wisdom; it positions a person to receive what only God supplies.

7 *‘He layeth up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to them that walk in integrity;’* — Sound wisdom is ‘laid up’ for the upright like a reserve fund, and God himself is called a shield for those who walk in integrity. Protection, not just insight, is wisdom’s practical dividend.

8 *‘That he may guard the paths of justice, and preserve the way of his saints’* — God ‘guardeth the paths of justice’ — the pursuit of wisdom is never a private self-improvement project in this book; it is bound up with how a person treats others justly.

9 *‘Then shalt thou understand righteousness and justice, and equity, yea, every good path’* — The second THEN: understanding righteousness, justice, equity — every good path. Ethics, not mere cleverness, is what wisdom actually produces when it takes root.

10 *‘For wisdom shall enter into thy heart, and knowledge shall be pleasant unto thy soul;’* — ‘Wisdom shall enter into thy heart’ marks the shift from external instruction to internal possession — no longer a rule kept from outside, but a conviction held from within.

11 *‘Discretion shall watch over thee; understanding shall keep thee;’* — Discretion and understanding are pictured as bodyguards — they will ‘watch over’ and ‘keep’ the person who has received them. Wisdom doesn’t just inform decisions; it actively guards the one who holds it.

12 *‘To deliver thee from the way of evil, from the men that speak perverse things;’* — The first danger wisdom delivers from: men who speak ‘froward things’ — twisted, perverse speech used to manipulate. Wisdom trains the ear to recognize crooked talk before it does damage.

13 *‘Who forsake the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness;’* — These men have deliberately left ‘the paths of uprightness’ for ‘the ways of darkness’ — language

of departure, not ignorance. Proverbs treats this kind of evil as a road knowingly chosen, not stumbled onto.

14 *'Who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the perverseness of evil;'* — They 'rejoice to do evil' and delight in 'the frowardness of evil' — a chilling detail. This isn't reluctant wrongdoing; it is wrongdoing enjoyed for its own sake, which is precisely why avoidance matters more than argument.

15 *'Who are crooked in their ways, and wayward in their paths:'* — 'Crooked... wayward in their paths' closes the description with the same path imagery running through the whole chapter. A crooked way cannot be followed straight, no matter how skillfully a person tries to walk it.

16 *'To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the foreigner that flattereth with her words;'* — The second danger: 'the strange woman' who flatters with her words. She is called strange/foreign not necessarily by nationality but by being outside the bounds of covenant marriage — an illicit path dressed up as an inviting one.

17 *'That forsaketh the friend of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God:'* — She has 'forsaken the friend of her youth' and forgotten 'the covenant of her God' — her marriage vow is named explicitly as a covenant before God, not merely a social arrangement. Its violation is described as a spiritual breach first.

18 *'For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead;'* — the destination behind the flattery is named directly. Proverbs consistently strips seduction of its glamour by showing the reader the end of the road up front.

19 *'None that go unto her return again, neither do they attain unto the paths of life:'* — 'None that go unto her return again' warns that this path, left unchecked, tends to become one-way — not because forgiveness is impossible, but because the corrosive pull of persistent sin rarely reverses itself on its own.

20 *'That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous'* — the purpose of the whole chapter's warnings finally surfaces: not merely to avoid two dangers but to be free to walk somewhere good instead.

21 *'For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it'* — 'The upright shall dwell in the land' echoes the covenant language given to Israel about possessing the land through faithfulness. Wisdom here is tied to a very concrete, historical promise of stability and home.

22 *‘But the wicked shall be cut off from the land, and the treacherous shall be rooted out of it’* — The closing contrast is stark: the wicked ‘cut off,’ the treacherous ‘rooted out.’ Two paths, two harvests — the chapter that began with an intense pursuit of wisdom ends by showing exactly what was at stake in that pursuit all along.

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## Reflection

1. *Verses 1–4 use escalating verbs — receive, incline, cry out, search like silver. Which of these would most honestly describe your current pursuit of wisdom?*
2. *Wisdom is described here as something that actively guards the person who holds it (v.11). Can you name a time discretion or understanding protected you from a choice you now would have regretted?*
3. *The chapter names two specific dangers — violent men and seductive flattery. What is the modern equivalent of these voices in your own life, and what would it look like to recognize their ‘crooked path’ early?*



## CHAPTER 3

# Trust, Honor, and the Tree of Life

*This is the most quoted chapter in Proverbs, and for good reason — it moves from the most personal command in the book ('trust in Jehovah with all thy heart') to cosmic claims about wisdom founding the earth, and finally down to street-level ethics about neighbors and debts. Wisdom is shown here as equally at home in the heavens and in a disagreement over a loan.*

1 *'My son, forget not my law; but let thy heart keep my commandments:'* — 'Forget not my law' opens the chapter the same way chapter 1 and 2 began — memory and retention are treated as acts of the will, something a person can choose to do or neglect, not simply things that happen to them.

2 *'For length of days, and years of life, and peace, will they add to thee'* — Length of days and peace are named as the fruit of remembered instruction. Proverbs regularly ties wisdom to plain, practical longevity — not a mystical reward, but the ordinary outcome of a life lived without needless self-destruction.

3 *'Let not kindness and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the tablet of thy heart:'* — 'Mercy and truth' (steadfast love and faithfulness) are to be worn like jewelry and carved like an inscription — external ornament and internal permanence at once. Character here is meant to be both visible and unshakeable.

4 *'So shalt thou find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man'* — the chapter assumes these two are not usually in tension. A life built on steadfast love and faithfulness tends to earn respect on both fronts simultaneously.

5 *'Trust in Jehovah with all thy heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding:'* — The most famous verse in the book: trust Jehovah with the whole heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. This is not anti-intellectualism — chapters 1–2 command vigorous pursuit of understanding — but a warning against making your

own reasoning the final court of appeal.

6 *‘In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths’* — ‘In all thy ways acknowledge him’ broadens trust from crisis moments to daily ones; the promise that follows — ‘he will direct thy paths’ — is addressed to the person who has made this a constant practice, not an emergency prayer.

7 *‘Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear Jehovah, and depart from evil.’* — ‘Be not wise in thine own eyes’ restates verse 5 from the opposite angle. Self-assessed wisdom and the fear of the LORD are presented as rival sources of confidence — only one can sit on the throne.

8 *‘It will be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones’* — a striking physical image. Proverbs is unembarrassed about connecting spiritual posture to bodily wellbeing; the fear of the LORD is treated as good for the whole person, not just the soul.

9 *‘Honor Jehovah with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase.’* — giving God the first and best of income, not the leftover, is the concrete test of whether verse 5’s trust is real or theoretical.

10 *‘So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy vats shall overflow with new wine’* — The promised result — barns filled, vats overflowing — describes ordinary agrarian prosperity, not a guarantee of riches for every giver in every era. Read alongside the whole book, it is a general pattern of blessing on generosity, not a formula that overrides every other proverb about hardship and the righteous.

11 *‘My son, despise not the chastening of Jehovah; neither be weary of his reproof.’* — ‘Despise not the chastening of Jehovah’ pivots from prosperity to correction — the same chapter that promises full barns also insists that discipline from God is not a sign of his absence.

12 *‘For whom Jehovah loveth he reproveth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth’* — correction is reframed as evidence of love, not its opposite. Hebrews 12:6 later quotes this verse almost directly to make the same point.

13 *‘Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding’* — ‘Happy is the man that findeth wisdom’ opens a poem in praise of wisdom itself — not what wisdom gets you, but the sheer worth of the thing.

14 *‘For the gaining of it is better than the gaining of silver, and the profit thereof than fine gold’* — Wisdom’s ‘merchandise’ is better than silver, its gain better than fine gold

— the comparison is not incidental. Proverbs repeatedly measures wisdom against the two things its culture (and most cultures) prize most.

15 *'She is more precious than rubies: and none of the things thou canst desire are to be compared unto her'* — the superlative is total, not partial. This is the same phrase later applied to the worthy woman of chapter 31, linking the two figures deliberately.

16 *'Length of days is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor'* — wisdom is pictured holding gifts in both hands, offering the full range of what a life could want, though never as a mechanical guarantee divorced from the rest of Scripture's honesty about suffering.

17 *'Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace'* — a direct answer to anyone who assumes wisdom means a grim, restrictive existence. The claim is the opposite: folly is the harder road.

18 *'She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her'* — 'A tree of life to them that lay hold upon her' deliberately echoes Eden (Genesis 2–3), where access to the tree of life was lost. Wisdom is offered here as a real, present means of recovering something like what was forfeited at the fall.

19 *'Jehovah by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens'* — the poem suddenly widens from personal benefit to cosmology. Wisdom is not just useful for living well; it is the very quality God used to build the universe.

20 *'By his knowledge the depths were broken up, and the skies drop down the dew'* — 'By his knowledge the depths were broken up' recalls the flood narrative's language, and 'the skies drop down dew' points to ordinary rainfall. The same wisdom behind catastrophic and everyday events is the wisdom on offer to the reader.

21 *'My son, let them not depart from thine eyes; keep sound wisdom and discretion.'* — 'Keep sound wisdom and discretion' pulls the poem back down from the cosmic to the personal — the God who built the heavens by wisdom now invites an individual to 'let them not depart from thine eyes.'

22 *'So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck'* — the neck imagery returns from verse 3, tying the chapter's opening command back to its closing promise.

23 *'Then shalt thou walk in thy way securely, and thy foot shall not stumble'* — the practical payoff of the whole chapter distilled into one line: wisdom does not remove the road, it steadies the walk.

24 *'When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet'* — an unexpectedly tender promise. Untroubled sleep is treated as real, tangible evidence of a life rightly ordered.

25 *'Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh:'* — the promise is not that calamity never comes near the wise, but that it need not master them the way it masters those who built their security elsewhere.

26 *'For Jehovah will be thy confidence, and will keep thy foot from being taken'* — the Hebrew word for confidence here can also mean the object one trusts in, closing the loop back to verse 5's opening command to trust.

27 *'Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thy hand to do it'* — The poem ends and street-level ethics begin: 'withhold not good... when it is in the power of thy hand to do it.' Trusting God in the abstract (v.5) is now tested in the very concrete question of what you owe someone standing in front of you.

28 *'Say not unto thy neighbor, Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee'* — a rebuke of needless delay. If you already have the means to help, postponing it for no reason is treated as its own small injustice.

29 *'Devise not evil against thy neighbor, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee'* — trust between neighbors is named as something that can be quietly betrayed even without an overt act of harm.

30 *'Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm'* — a warning against manufactured conflict. Not every disagreement needs to become a fight; some need to simply not happen.

31 *'Envy thou not the man of violence, and choose none of his ways'* — a direct echo of chapter 1's opening warning, showing the temptation to admire ill-gotten power is not a one-time issue but a recurring pull worth naming twice.

32 *'For the perverse is an abomination to Jehovah; but his friendship is with the upright'* — in a book largely about consequences and practical results, this verse states plainly that God has a relational stake in a person's character.

33 *'The curse of Jehovah is in the house of the wicked; but he blesseth the habitation of the righteous'* — blessing and curse are pictured resting on a household, not just an individual, echoing Deuteronomy's covenant language.

34 *'Surely he scoffeth at the scoffers; but he giveth grace unto the lowly'* — quoted directly in James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5 as a summary of how God relates to pride and humility. Few verses in Proverbs echo more directly into the New Testament.

35 *'The wise shall inherit glory; but shame shall be the promotion of fools'* — the chapter's closing line is deliberately ironic: fools do get 'promoted,' just to something no one would actually want.

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## Reflection

1. *Verses 5–6 separate trusting God from leaning on your own understanding. Where in your life are you currently doing the second while calling it the first?*
2. *The chapter moves from cosmic wisdom (vv.19–20) straight into neighbor ethics — lending, delay, envy, unnecessary conflict (vv.27–32). Which of those street-level tests currently exposes the gap between your stated trust in God and your actual behavior?*
3. *Verse 34 is quoted twice in the New Testament. Where has pride recently made you resistant to correction, and what would humility change about how you receive it?*



## CHAPTER 4

# Get Wisdom — Guarding the Heart Above All Else

*The father now tells his own story — he was once the son being taught, which is why he can teach with such conviction. The chapter's center is a single command that outweighs every other pursuit named in the book: get wisdom, whatever else it costs. It ends with the most quoted verse on the inner life in all of Proverbs: guard your heart, because everything else flows from it.*

- 1 *'Hear, my sons, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding:'* — 'Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father' opens with plural children — this is addressed to more than one listener, a household lesson rather than a private aside.
- 2 *'For I give you good doctrine; forsake ye not my law'* — the father stakes his own credibility on the quality of what he's about to say, inviting scrutiny rather than blind acceptance.
- 3 *'For I was a son unto my father, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother'* — an unusually personal, autobiographical note. The teacher was once exactly where the listener is now, which is the whole reason his counsel carries weight.
- 4 *'And he taught me, and said unto me: let thy heart retain my words; keep my commandments, and live;'* — the chain of instruction is made explicit: father to father to son, each generation passing on what it received rather than starting from nothing.
- 5 *'Get wisdom, get understanding; forget not, neither decline from the words of my mouth;'* — the double command, repeated with urgency, is the first appearance of a phrase that will anchor the whole chapter. 'Forget it not' treats losing wisdom as a real danger, not just failing to acquire it.

6 *'Forsake her not, and she will preserve thee; love her, and she will keep thee'* — wisdom is described in relational terms, almost like a marriage: loyalty given is loyalty returned.

7 *'Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; yea, with all thy getting get understanding'* — The chapter's thesis, stated as plainly as anywhere in the book: wisdom is the principal thing — get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding. Every other acquisition in life is ranked beneath this one.

8 *'Exalt her, and she will promote thee; she will bring thee to honor, when thou dost embrace her'* — the promotion offered here has nothing to do with position or title; it is the honor that comes from a life well ordered.

9 *'She will give to thy head a chaplet of grace; a crown of beauty will she deliver to thee'* — 'A chaplet of grace... a crown of beauty' deliberately echoes 1:9, where parental instruction was pictured the same way. The imagery has now shifted from what parents give to what wisdom herself gives when embraced.

10 *'Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many'* — 'The years of thy life shall be many' restates the book's recurring, unglamorous promise — wisdom tends to add ordinary years by removing the self-destruction that shortens them.

11 *'I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; i have led thee in paths of uprightness'* — the father claims not just to have given information but to have walked the road with his son personally.

12 *'When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and if thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble'* — wisdom doesn't promise an easy road, only an unhindered one; the difference matters.

13 *'Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life'* — the intensity of grip commanded here matches the stakes named: this isn't advice to consider, it's identified with life itself.

14 *'Enter not into the path of the wicked, and walk not in the way of evil men'* — 'Enter not into the path of the wicked' begins a section built entirely on avoidance rather than confrontation — the counsel is not how to defeat evil influence but how to never enter its path to begin with.

15 *'Avoid it, pass not by it; turn from it, and pass on'* — Four verbs in quick succession — avoid, pass not by, turn from, pass on — pile up almost comically to make one

point: don't negotiate with proximity to this path, just leave the area.

16 *'For they sleep not, except they do evil; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall'* — wickedness described as a compulsion so entrenched it disrupts even rest. This is not casual wrongdoing but an appetite that has taken over.

17 *'For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence'* — harm has become their sustenance, not merely their occasional behavior. The metaphor of eating and drinking suggests habit turned into identity.

18 *'But the path of the righteous is as the dawning light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day'* — one of the book's most hopeful images: the righteous life is not static but a gradual dawn, growing brighter with time rather than dimming.

19 *'The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble'* — the tragedy of that path is not just danger but blindness; they can't even see clearly enough to know what's hurting them.

20 *'My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings'* — 'Attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings' signals a new section, returning to the father's direct appeal after the two-paths interlude.

21 *'Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thy heart'* — sight and heart named together, anticipating verse 23's climax. Wisdom must be kept in view and kept internally, not one without the other.

22 *'For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh'* — another instance of Proverbs refusing to separate the spiritual from the physical; wisdom is described as good for the whole body, not an abstraction.

23 *'Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life'* — The chapter's most famous line: 'Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.' Everything else in this book — words, actions, relationships, work — is treated as downstream of what is guarded or neglected here, at the source.

24 *'Put away from thee a wayward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee'* — the first practical application of guarding the heart: it starts with speech, since the mouth reveals what the heart has been storing.

25 *'Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee'* — focused, undistracted attention as a discipline, not a personality trait. Wandering eyes and

wandering hearts are treated as connected.

26 *'Make level the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established'* — deliberate reflection before action, the opposite of impulsiveness; stability comes from forethought, not luck.

27 *'Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil'* — the chapter's closing command pictures a straight road with real ditches on both sides. Balance is not found in moderation between good and evil, but in staying entirely off the second.

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## Reflection

1. Verse 23 calls the heart the source of 'the issues of life.' What is currently flowing out of your life — in words, habits, or decisions — that reveals what you've actually been storing in your heart?

2. The father in this chapter teaches from his own remembered experience as a son (vv. 3–4). What wisdom have you received that you are responsible for passing on, and to whom?

3. Verses 14–17 counsel avoidance rather than willpower when it comes to the path of the wicked. Is there a path in your life right now you're trying to resist by strength rather than simply leaving?



## CHAPTER 5

# Drink From Your Own Well

*The father's warnings now turn specifically to sexual temptation, and the chapter is structured as a contrast: the honeyed but deadly path of the 'strange woman' versus the deliberately celebrated joy of faithfulness to 'the wife of thy youth.' Proverbs never treats fidelity as mere restraint — here it is framed as the better pleasure, not just the safer one.*

- 1 *'My son, attend unto my wisdom; incline thine ear to my understanding;'* — 'Attend unto my wisdom... bow thine ear to my understanding' opens the chapter with the same posture of attentive listening used throughout the book — this subject, more than most, requires the reader to actually be listening before the warning lands.
- 2 *'That thou mayest preserve discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge'* — discretion is introduced as the specific virtue needed here; this chapter is less about raw willpower than about perceiving danger early enough to act on it.
- 3 *'For the lips of a strange woman drop honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil.'* — the danger is named as attractive on purpose. Proverbs refuses to pretend temptation is obviously repulsive; if it were, no warning would be needed.
- 4 *'But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword'* — the pivot from honey to bitterness in a single verse is the chapter's central rhetorical move: sweetness at the entrance, a blade at the end.
- 5 *'Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on Sheol;'* — the destination is stated flatly, without euphemism. This is the same blunt strategy chapter 1 used with the violent gang: name the actual ending before the appeal can take hold.
- 6 *'So that she findeth not the level path of life: her ways are unstable, and she knoweth it not'* — a haunting detail: she herself may be unaware how far off course she has drifted,

which is exactly the danger warned against for the reader as well.

7 *'Now therefore, my sons, hearken unto me, and depart not from the words of my mouth'* — the appeal restarts with fresh urgency, signaling that what follows is the practical instruction, not just the diagnosis.

8 *'Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house;'* — as in chapter 4, the counsel is physical distance, not proximity managed by self-control. Wisdom consistently prefers not being tested at all.

9 *'Lest thou give thine honor unto others, and thy years unto the cruel;'* — the cost is named in terms of reputation and time, not only guilt; consequences here ripple outward into a person's whole future.

10 *'Lest strangers be filled with thy strength, and thy labors be in the house of an alien,'* — a warning that a lifetime's work can end up funding someone else's household entirely, a picture of ruin that is financial as much as moral.

11 *'And thou mourn at thy latter end, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed,'* — the warning reaches forward to old age, insisting that some choices made young are still being paid for decades later.

12 *'And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof;'* — The imagined future regret speaks in the first person: 'How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof.' Proverbs frequently uses this device — letting the fool's own future voice make the case against the fool's present choice.

13 *'Neither have I obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me!'* — the regret is specifically about having been teachable and refusing it, tying this warning back to the whole book's opening emphasis on receiving instruction.

14 *'I was well-nigh in all evil in the midst of the assembly and congregation'* — the shame is public, not merely private; sin of this kind rarely stays contained to the individual who commits it.

15 *'Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well'* — the metaphor shifts abruptly to the positive alternative: marital faithfulness pictured as drawing satisfaction from a source that is rightfully, exclusively one's own.

16 *'Should thy springs be dispersed abroad, and streams of water in the streets?'* — read with verse 17, this pictures the fruit of a faithful marriage (children, legacy) benefiting the wider community, not the danger of infidelity as some translations imply.

17 *'Let them be for thyself alone, and not for strangers with thee'* — 'Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee' — exclusivity is stated as the point, not a limitation on it: what is shared within marriage is not meant to be divided outside it.

18 *'Let thy fountain be blessed; and rejoice in the wife of thy youth'* — marriage is called a blessing to be actively enjoyed, not merely a boundary to be kept. The command is to rejoice, not simply to refrain.

19 *'As a loving hind and a pleasant doe, let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love'* — one of the most openly romantic verses in the Old Testament. Proverbs' answer to the pull of illicit passion is not less passion but rightly placed passion, sustained deliberately over a lifetime.

20 *'For why shouldest thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a foreigner?'* — the question is almost incredulous: why trade something already described as satisfying for something already shown to be lethal?

21 *'For the ways of man are before the eyes of Jehovah; and he maketh level all his paths'* — the chapter's turn toward its conclusion begins with a reminder that nothing described so far, in either direction, has been unseen.

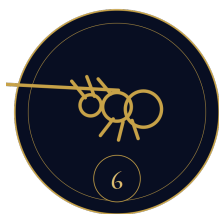
22 *'His own iniquities shall take the wicked, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sin'* — sin is pictured as self-binding; the trap is not sprung by an outside enemy but constructed, cord by cord, by the very choices being warned against.

23 *'He shall die for lack of instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray'* — the chapter's final verdict lands on a cause, not just an outcome: not merely folly, but instruction refused — tying the whole chapter back to its opening call to listen.

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## Reflection

- 1. The chapter contrasts the honeyed entrance of temptation with its bitter end (vv.3–4). What 'sweet' invitation in your life needs to be evaluated by its actual destination rather than its immediate appeal?*
- 2. Verses 18–19 command active rejoicing in a faithful relationship, not merely avoiding unfaithfulness. What would it look like to pursue delight in your existing commitments rather than treating fidelity as only restraint?*
- 3. Verse 22 pictures sin as self-binding cords rather than an external trap. Is there a pattern in your life you once chose freely that has since begun to feel like it's choosing you?*



## CHAPTER 6

# The Ant, the Sluggard, and Seven Things God Hates

*Chapter 6 breaks from sustained discourse into four distinct short warnings: reckless co-signing of debt, laziness (illustrated by the ant), a numbered list of what God hates, and a return to the danger of adultery. The variety is deliberate — wisdom has to address financial recklessness and sexual sin with the same seriousness, because both destroy a life the same way.*

- 1 *'If thou art become surety for thy neighbor, if thou hast stricken thy hands for a stranger'* — surety meant guaranteeing someone else's debt with your own assets. The warning targets a specific, common financial trap of the ancient economy, not generosity itself.
- 2 *'Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth'* — the danger isn't a contract signed in ink but a verbal promise given too quickly; Proverbs treats spoken commitments as fully binding.
- 3 *'Do this now... deliver thyself... humble thyself, and urge thy neighbor'* — the counsel is strikingly undignified: go back and beg to be released, because pride is a poor trade for financial ruin.
- 4 *'Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids'* — the urgency demanded matches the size of the exposure; this is treated as an emergency, not a matter to get to eventually.
- 5 *'Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler'* — the imagery of frantic escape underlines just how seriously Proverbs takes the danger of taking on someone else's debt.

6 *'Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise'* — the address shifts to a new topic and a new target: not the reckless guarantor but the lazy man, told to learn from an insect smaller and less impressive than himself.

7 *'Which having no chief, overseer, or ruler'* — the ant's discipline is not imposed from outside by a supervisor; it is self-generated, which is precisely the point being made to the sluggard.

8 *'Provideth her bread in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest'* — the ant works ahead of need, not in response to crisis; foresight, not just effort, is the virtue being praised.

9 *'How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?'* — the tone turns from illustration to direct, almost exasperated address, the closest Proverbs gets to shaking someone awake.

10 *'Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep'* — the sluggard's own rationalizing voice is quoted, always asking for just a little more; laziness rarely announces itself as a decision, only as a series of small delays.

11 *'So shall thy poverty come as a robber, and thy want as an armed man'* — the consequence is described as violent and sudden, even though its cause (repeated small delays) was gradual and quiet.

12 *'A worthless person, a man of iniquity, is he that walketh with a wicked mouth'* — a third figure now enters: the deliberately deceptive troublemaker, distinct from both the reckless guarantor and the sluggard.

13 *'Winketh with his eyes, speaketh with his feet, teacheth with his fingers'* — a picture of coded, deniable communication; this person schemes in a way designed to leave no one able to prove exactly what was said.

14 *'Frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth evil continually; he soweth discord'* — the sequence — hidden signals, then a corrupt heart, then active discord — shows manipulation escalating from something small into open damage.

15 *'Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; on a sudden shall he be broken, and that without remedy'* — as with the sluggard's poverty in verse 11, the reckoning is abrupt even though the pattern behind it was long in the making.

16 *‘There are six things which Jehovah hateth; yea, seven which are an abomination unto him’* — the numerical formula (six... seven) is a common Hebrew poetic device signaling a complete, emphatic list — not merely six examples, but the full picture.

17 *‘Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood’* — the list begins with pride before it ever reaches violence; arrogance is treated as morally serious in its own right, not just a precursor to worse things.

18 *‘A heart that deviseth wicked purposes, feet that are swift in running to mischief’* — the heart’s plotting and the feet’s eagerness are named together, showing intention and action as equally condemned.

19 *‘A false witness that uttereth lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren’* — the list closes exactly where verse 14 left off, on discord-sowing — God’s hatred of division within a community bookends the whole passage.

20 *‘My son, keep the commandment of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother’* — the chapter pivots back to parental instruction, setting up the final warning against adultery with the same domestic framing used in chapter 1.

21 *‘Bind them continually upon thy heart; tie them about thy neck’* — the same jewelry-and-permanence imagery from earlier chapters returns just before the most serious warning in the chapter.

22 *‘When thou walkest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall watch over thee’* — parental instruction, once internalized, is pictured as active at every hour — not a rule consulted occasionally but a constant companion.

23 *‘The commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life’* — correction is reframed one more time, now as illumination rather than restriction — light that lets a person see the danger ahead.

24 *‘To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the foreigner’s tongue’* — the purpose of all this instruction is now stated directly: protection from exactly the danger chapter 5 already described in detail.

25 *‘Lust not after her beauty in thy heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids’* — the warning targets the internal moment of lingering desire, before any external act, since that is where the whole chain of temptation actually begins.

26 *'For on account of a harlot a man is reduced to a piece of bread; and the adulteress hunteth for the precious life'* — a stark cost comparison: one path costs money, the other costs life itself — the second danger is treated as categorically worse.

27 *'Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?'* — the first of two vivid rhetorical questions; the answer is obviously no, and that obviousness is the entire argument.

28 *'Can one walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be scorched?'* — the second question intensifies the first; Proverbs is arguing that adultery's consequences aren't a possible risk but a physical certainty, like fire burning skin.

29 *'So he that goeth in to his neighbor's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be unpunished'* — the metaphor is applied directly, without softening: this is treated as a law of consequence as fixed as fire itself.

30 *'Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy himself when he is hungry'* — an unexpected comparison: even theft driven by real need gets a measure of social sympathy that adultery, driven by desire rather than necessity, will not receive.

31 *'If he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house'* — even the sympathetically-viewed thief still pays a steep, tangible price; the point sets up an even steeper one to follow.

32 *'He that committeth adultery with a woman is void of understanding; he doeth it who would destroy his own soul'* — the verdict is blunt: this isn't merely risky behavior but self-destruction, chosen by someone lacking the very understanding this whole book exists to give.

33 *'Wounds and dishonor shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away'* — unlike the thief's sevenfold restitution, which can be paid off, this reproach is described as lasting — a stain rather than a settled debt.

34 *'Jealousy is the rage of a man; and he will not spare in the day of vengeance'* — the chapter names a very human, predictable consequence: a wronged husband's anger, not merely an abstract moral principle.

35 *'He will not regard any ransom; neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts'* — the chapter's closing line insists this is a debt no payment can settle, in sharp contrast to the sevenfold restitution that could satisfy the case of theft just a few verses earlier.

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## Reflection

- 1. The ant is praised for working ahead of need without external supervision (vv.6–8). Where in your life are you waiting for a deadline or someone else's pressure to do what wisdom alone should already be prompting?*
- 2. Verses 16–19 list what God hates, opening with pride before violence. Which item on that list is most easily overlooked in your own self-assessment because it seems 'smaller' than the others?*
- 3. Verses 27–29 argue that some consequences are as certain as fire burning skin. Is there an area of your life where you're currently treating a near-certain consequence as merely a possible risk?*



## CHAPTER 7

# The Young Man at Her Corner — A Cautionary Story

*Where earlier chapters warned about the adulteress in principle, chapter 7 tells her story as a single unfolding scene, watched from a window. It is the most narrative passage in the book so far — a small, complete short story meant to make the earlier warnings impossible to forget, because now the reader has watched exactly how it happens.*

1 *‘My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee’* — the familiar opening returns one more time, signaling that what follows deserves the same careful retention as everything before it.

2 *‘Keep my commandments and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye’* — the eye’s pupil, the most protected and sensitive part of the body, becomes the image for how carefully this instruction should be guarded.

3 *‘Bind them upon thy fingers; write them upon the tablet of thy heart’* — hands and heart together, echoing the same pairing used throughout the book: instruction meant to shape both what a person does and what a person feels.

4 *‘Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman’* — a striking reframe: wisdom is to be treated with the same off-limits familiarity as a close family member, precisely because a very different kind of woman is about to appear.

5 *‘That they may keep thee from the strange woman... that flattereth with her words’* — the purpose clause makes the connection explicit before the story even begins: everything in verses 1–4 exists to inoculate against what’s coming.

6 *‘For at the window of my house I looked forth through my lattice’* — the teacher becomes an eyewitness narrator; what follows is framed not as hypothetical but as

something actually observed.

7 *'And I beheld among the simple ones... a young man void of understanding'* — the target is identified precisely: not a hardened sinner, just an untaught young man, exactly the audience this whole book has been trying to reach.

8 *'Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house'* — the danger is already underway before any dialogue starts; proximity itself is the first mistake, echoing chapter 5's warning to stay far from her door.

9 *'In the twilight, in the evening of the day, in the middle of the night and in the darkness'* — the piling up of time markers emphasizes concealment; this scene requires darkness to happen, a detail worth noticing about sin in general.

10 *'And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of a harlot, and wily of heart'* — her appearance and her intentions are named together; nothing about this meeting is accidental on her side.

11 *'She is clamorous and wilful; her feet abide not in her house'* — restlessness is named as part of her character, a life that resists the stability wisdom has praised throughout the book.

12 *'Now she is in the streets, now in the broad places, and lieth in wait at every corner'* — deliberately echoing wisdom's own public cry in 1:20–21; the passage sets up an unmistakable contrast between two women calling out in the same public spaces.

13 *'So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face she said unto him'* — the pace quickens; from this point the young man is reacting, not initiating — a warning about how quickly control can shift once proximity has already been allowed.

14 *'Sacrifices of peace-offerings are with me; this day have I paid my vows'* — her opening line uses religious language, meat from a fellowship offering she's obligated to share; she disguises seduction in the vocabulary of piety and hospitality.

15 *'Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee'* — flattery aimed directly at his ego — he is made to feel specifically, deliberately sought after, not randomly encountered.

16 *'I have decked my bed with coverings, with striped cloths of the yarn of Egypt'* — the appeal turns sensory and material; imported luxury is used to signal both pleasure and status.

17 *'I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon'* — the sensory buildup continues; every detail is engineered to overwhelm caution with immediate appeal.

18 *'Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning; let us solace ourselves with loves'* — the invitation is finally explicit, arriving only after several verses of careful setup — seduction rarely opens with its real request.

19 *'For the man is not at home; he is gone a long journey'* — the practical reassurance follows the emotional appeal: she preempts the obvious objection before he can raise it himself.

20 *'He hath taken a bag of money with him; he will come home at the full moon'* — a specific, calculated timeline, meant to remove any sense of urgency or risk from his mind.

21 *'With her much fair speech she causeth him to yield; with the flattering of her lips she forceth him along'* — the narrator steps back in to name what just happened: not seduction by force, but by persuasion skillfully applied to an untrained will.

22 *'He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as one in fetters to the correction of a fool'* — the animal imagery is deliberately undignified; he moves toward his own ruin with no more awareness than livestock being led away.

23 *'Till an arrow strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life'* — the fatal outcome is stated as already certain, even mid-scene; the narrator lets the reader see what the young man cannot.

24 *'Now therefore, my sons, hearken unto me, and attend to the words of my mouth'* — the story ends and direct address resumes; the narrative was never told for its own sake but to make this appeal unforgettable.

25 *'Let not thy heart decline to her ways; go not astray in her paths'* — the warning is aimed at the heart first, the same organ chapter 4 commanded the reader to guard 'with all diligence.'

26 *'For she hath cast down many wounded; yea, all her slain are a mighty host'* — the young man just described is revealed to be one of many, not a unique case; the story is representative, not exceptional.

27 *'Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death'* — the chapter's closing line matches chapter 5's warning almost exactly, confirming that everything

just witnessed was, from the very first step at her corner, already a road toward death.

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## Reflection

- 1. The young man's first mistake was proximity — walking near her corner — long before any words were exchanged (v.8). What 'corner' are you currently walking near that wisdom would tell you to avoid entirely rather than trust yourself around?*
- 2. Her opening line used religious language to disguise her intent (v.14). Where have you seen — or been tempted to use — spiritual or virtuous-sounding language to make a compromised choice feel acceptable?*
- 3. Verse 26 reveals the young man was not unique; 'her slain are a mighty host.' Does treating temptation as a common, well-worn trap rather than a private struggle change how seriously you take the warning signs in your own life?*



## CHAPTER 8

# Wisdom's Grand Speech — Present Before the World Began

*Wisdom takes center stage for her longest, most exalted speech in the book. She claims to have been present at creation itself, 'daily his delight' before the mountains were formed. Many readers through church history have heard echoes of Christ in this passage — the New Testament applies wisdom language to Jesus directly (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30; Colossians 1:15–17) — though the chapter's immediate sense is the personified wisdom of God, offered now to ordinary people at the city gate.*

- 1 *'Doth not wisdom cry, and understanding put forth her voice?'* — the rhetorical question assumes the answer is obvious; wisdom's call, like folly's in the previous chapter, is public and constant, not hidden.
- 2 *'On the top of high places by the way, where the paths meet, she standeth'* — wisdom positions herself at the literal crossroads, the exact spot where a traveler must choose a direction.
- 3 *'Beside the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors, she crieth aloud'* — gates and doorways were the ancient sites of commerce, justice, and civic life; wisdom is not confined to sacred space but shouts at the center of ordinary business.
- 4 *'Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men'* — the address is deliberately universal, not restricted to a class, a nation, or the already-wise.
- 5 *'O ye simple, understand prudence; and, ye fools, be of an understanding heart'* — wisdom addresses her hardest audience directly — not to shame them but because they are exactly who the invitation is for.

6 *'Hear, for I will speak excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things'* — wisdom vouches for her own integrity before she begins, the same move the human father made back in 4:2.

7 *'My mouth shall utter truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips'* — truthfulness is described as wisdom's very nature, not merely her policy; she is incapable of the crooked speech warned against throughout the book.

8 *'All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing crooked or perverse in them'* — the same path language used for human choices (chapters 2 and 4) is now applied to wisdom's own speech.

9 *'They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge'* — wisdom's words aren't cryptic to everyone; clarity is available, but only to those who have already begun the pursuit described in chapter 2.

10 *'Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold'* — the value comparison from 3:14 returns, now spoken by wisdom herself rather than about her.

11 *'Wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared unto her'* — nearly identical to 3:15, the repetition across chapters reinforces this as one of the book's central, non-negotiable claims.

12 *'I wisdom have made prudence my dwelling, and find out knowledge and discretion'* — wisdom describes her own household, so to speak; prudence is not a visitor to her but a permanent resident.

13 *'The fear of Jehovah is to hate evil; pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the perverse mouth, do I hate'* — the chapter's clearest definition yet of what reverence for God actually requires: not vague piety, but the specific hatred of pride and crooked speech.

14 *'Counsel is mine, and sound knowledge: I am understanding; I have strength'* — wisdom claims not just insight but power — the ability to act effectively, not merely to know correctly.

15 *'By me kings reign, and princes decree justice'* — political authority itself is said to depend on wisdom; a ruler's legitimacy is measured by access to her, not merely by title.

16 *'By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth'* — the claim widens from kings to every level of governance; no human authority operates outside wisdom's reach, in principle.

17 *'I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me'* — wisdom's affection is not passive; it is reciprocal and responsive, extended specifically to those who seek her while there is still time.

18 *'Riches and honor are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness'* — wisdom, not wealth pursued directly, is named as the actual source of lasting riches — a deliberate reordering of what most people chase first.

19 *'My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver'* — the metaphor shifts from possession to yield; wisdom is described as something that keeps producing, not a one-time payout.

20 *'I walk in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice'* — wisdom does not merely point toward the right path; she is described as already walking it herself.

21 *'That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance, and that I may fill their treasuries'* — the language of inheritance ties wisdom's gifts to something passed down and kept, not merely acquired and spent.

22 *'Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old'* — the chapter's tone shifts dramatically into cosmic time; wisdom claims an origin point before creation itself began.

23 *'I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth was'* — the claim of priority is repeated and intensified; wisdom is older than the created order in its entirety.

24 *'When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water'* — the negative construction (before X existed) becomes the poem's structuring device across several verses, each naming something ancient and then placing wisdom before it.

25 *'Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth'* — mountains, the ancient world's picture of permanence, are shown to be younger than wisdom herself.

26 *‘While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the beginning of the dust of the world’* — the list reaches its earliest possible point — before even the raw material of the earth existed.

27 *‘When he established the heavens, I was there; when he set a circle upon the face of the deep’* — wisdom moves from claiming priority to claiming presence — not just older than creation, but there, participating, as it happened.

28 *‘When he made firm the skies above, when the fountains of the deep became strong’* — the account continues to track the days of Genesis 1 loosely, wisdom present through each stage.

29 *‘When he gave to the sea its bound, that the waters should not transgress his commandment’* — even the sea's obedience to a fixed boundary is described as something wisdom witnessed — order itself established in her presence.

30 *‘Then I was by him, as a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him’* — the most personal and, to many later Christian readers, most striking line in the chapter: wisdom pictured not as a tool used but as a beloved companion in the work of creation, echoed in the New Testament's description of Christ as the one ‘through whom’ all things were made (Colossians 1:16, John 1:3).

31 *‘Rejoicing in his habitable earth; and my delight was with the sons of men’* — the poem's climax turns outward: wisdom's joy in creation includes, specifically, delight in humanity — the same people about to be addressed directly again.

32 *‘Now therefore, my sons, hearken unto me; for blessed are they that keep my ways’* — after the cosmic vision, wisdom returns to plain, direct address — the towering claims of verses 22–31 are not meant to remain abstract.

33 *‘Hear instruction, and be wise; and refuse it not’* — the same call issued throughout the book, now carrying the full weight of everything just claimed about wisdom's origin and role.

34 *‘Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors’* — the picture is of eager, habitual persistence — not a single visit but a daily practice of showing up.

35 *‘For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favor of Jehovah’* — wisdom's gift is named as nothing less than life itself, and access to God's favor — the highest stakes the chapter has offered.

36 *'But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me love death'* — the chapter's closing line restates chapter 1's ending contrast in the starkest possible terms: there is no neutral position toward wisdom, only life sought or death loved.

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## Reflection

1. *Wisdom is described standing at crossroads and city gates — the ordinary places of daily decision (vv.2–3). Where are your own 'crossroads' this week, and are you actually listening there?*
2. *Verses 22–31 picture wisdom rejoicing in creation and 'delighting in the sons of men.' Does your pursuit of wisdom feel like duty, delight, or both — and what would change if you approached it the way this passage describes wisdom approaching you?*
3. *Verse 17 promises that those who seek wisdom early will find her. Is there a decision or habit you've been delaying wisdom on, telling yourself there will be time to seek it later?*



## CHAPTER 9

# Two Houses, Two Invitations

*The nine-chapter introduction to Proverbs closes with a final, deliberate contrast: Wisdom has built a grand house and calls out an invitation to a feast, and so, in almost identical language, has Folly. Sandwiched between them is a short section on how the wise and the scoffer each respond to correction — which is really the whole point of the contrast that frames it.*

- 1 *'Wisdom hath builded her house; she hath hewn out her seven pillars'* — seven, a number of completeness in Hebrew idiom, suggests a house fully and substantially built, not a hasty or flimsy structure.
- 2 *'She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table'* — the preparation is lavish and complete before a single guest arrives; the invitation that follows costs the host everything and the guest nothing.
- 3 *'She hath sent forth her maidens; she crieth upon the highest places of the city'* — as in chapter 8, wisdom's call is amplified and public, sent out actively rather than waiting to be discovered.
- 4 *'Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that is void of understanding, she saith to him'* — the invitation is aimed, again, at the very people least equipped to deserve it — the untaught and the foolish, not the already-wise.
- 5 *'Come, eat ye of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled'* — the invitation is not to information but to nourishment; wisdom is pictured as something a person consumes and is changed by, not merely studies.
- 6 *'Leave off, ye simple ones, and live; and walk in the way of understanding'* — the cost of accepting is named plainly: leaving something behind. Growth here requires abandoning the 'simple' identity, not merely adding wisdom on top of it.

7 *'He that correcteth a scoffer getteth to himself reviling; he that reproveth a wicked man getteth himself a blot'* — an unusually candid, practical warning: correcting some people will cost you personally, and the book does not pretend otherwise.

8 *'Reprove not a scoffer, lest he hate thee; reprove a wise man, and he will love thee'* — the same act, correction, produces opposite reactions depending entirely on the character of the one receiving it — a diagnostic tool as much as a warning.

9 *'Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning'* — the wise are shown to be defined not by having arrived, but by their continued teachability — the same posture urged back in 1:5.

10 *'The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding'* — a near-repetition of 1:7, marking the close of the book's long introduction by returning to where it began.

11 *'For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased'* — wisdom speaks again in the first person, restating the book's recurring, concrete promise of a longer, less self-destructive life.

12 *'If thou art wise, thou art wise for thyself; and if thou scoffest, thou alone shalt bear it'* — responsibility is placed squarely on the individual; wisdom benefits the one who holds it, and folly's cost cannot be outsourced to someone else.

13 *'The foolish woman is clamorous; she is simple, and knoweth nothing'* — Folly is now introduced as a rival figure to Wisdom, deliberately mirroring her in structure but marked from the outset by noise and ignorance rather than substance.

14 *'And she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city'* — Folly borrows Wisdom's own strategic real estate (compare 8:2–3; 9:3), setting up shop wherever Wisdom is already calling.

15 *'To call to them that pass by, who go right on their ways'* — her targets are people already walking a straight path elsewhere; Folly's invitation is fundamentally a distraction, not a destination someone was already headed toward.

16 *'Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that is void of understanding, she saith to him'* — the line is copied almost word for word from verse 4; Folly offers an imitation invitation to the exact same vulnerable audience Wisdom was calling.

17 *'Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant'* — Folly's entire pitch, in contrast to Wisdom's lavish, openly prepared feast, is that secrecy and transgression themselves are the appeal — nothing here is actually being offered, only a thrill.

18 *'But he knoweth not that the dead are there; that her guests are in the depths of Sheol'* — the book's introduction ends exactly where it began in 1:32–33: a guest who does not see what the host already knows, walking toward death mistaking it for a feast.

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## Reflection

1. Both Wisdom and Folly call out from the same high places in the city, offering rival invitations (vv.3, 14). What are the competing 'invitations' calling to you right now, and which one actually cost something to prepare on your behalf?

2. Verses 7–9 note that correction lands differently depending on the character of the one receiving it. When you're corrected, do you tend to respond like the scoffer in verse 8 or the wise man?

3. Folly's appeal in verse 17 is that secrecy itself is 'sweet.' Is there anything in your life you're drawn to mainly because it's hidden, rather than because it's actually good?



PART TWO

## The Proverbs of Solomon Begin

Chapters 10–22:16

# The Proverbs of Solomon Begin



### CHAPTER 10

## The Proverbs of Solomon Begin — Wise Son, Foolish Son

*Here the book shifts genre. After nine chapters of sustained discourse, Proverbs 10 opens the long central collection of short, independent two-line sayings that runs through chapter 29. Most work by antithetic parallelism — the second line contrasts with the first — setting the wise against the foolish, the righteous against the wicked, verse after verse, so the reader is trained to see the pattern everywhere in ordinary life.*

<sup>1</sup> ‘A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother’ — the first proverb of the collection returns to the family, exactly where the book began, showing character as something with direct emotional weight on the people who raised you.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Treasures of wickedness profit nothing; but righteousness delivereth from death’ — the comparison isn’t wealth versus poverty but ill-gotten gain versus integrity, and only one of the two is credited with actually saving a life.

3 *'Jehovah will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish; but he thrusteth away the desire of the wicked'* — provision and denial are both attributed directly to God's active involvement, not left to chance.

4 *'He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand; but the hand of the diligent maketh rich'* — the first of many proverbs in this section linking diligence to prosperity, a plain, repeated observation rather than an absolute guarantee.

5 *'He that gathereth in summer is a wise son; but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame'* — timing matters as much as effort; the same work done at the wrong season is treated as a failure of wisdom, not just of labor.

6 *'Blessings are upon the head of the righteous; but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked'* — what rests visibly on a person — blessing or violence — is shown as the natural residue of their whole way of life.

7 *'The memory of the righteous is blessed; but the name of the wicked shall rot'* — reputation outlives the person; Proverbs takes seriously that how you are remembered is itself a consequence worth caring about now.

8 *'The wise in heart will receive commandments; but a prating fool shall fall'* — receptiveness to instruction and compulsive talking are set against each other as opposite postures toward correction.

9 *'He that walketh uprightly walketh surely; but he that perverteth his ways shall be known'* — integrity is pictured as stability underfoot, while crookedness is destined to be exposed, whether quickly or eventually.

10 *'He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow; but a prating fool shall fall'* — the silent, manipulative signal (compare 6:13) and the compulsively talkative fool are both shown to cause harm, just through opposite excesses of speech and silence.

11 *'The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life; but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked'* — the tongue is pictured as a source, either life-giving or violent, that reveals what's actually flowing from within.

12 *'Hatred stirreth up strifes; but love covereth all transgressions'* — quoted almost directly in 1 Peter 4:8; the same offense can either be fanned into ongoing conflict or absorbed and let go, depending entirely on which posture meets it.

13 *'In the lips of him that hath discernment wisdom is found; but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding'* — discernment is rewarded with respected speech, while its absence, the proverb bluntly notes, tends to invite correction by force.

14 *'Wise men lay up knowledge; but the mouth of the foolish is a present destruction'* — the wise stockpile something useful for later, while the fool's mouth causes immediate damage in the present moment.

15 *'The rich man's wealth is his strong city; the destruction of the poor is their poverty'* — a plain, sociological observation about vulnerability, not a moral endorsement; later proverbs in the book will complicate any simple equation of wealth with righteousness.

16 *'The labor of the righteous tendeth to life; the increase of the wicked, to sin'* — the same word, 'increase' or 'produce,' describes both, but its direction — toward life or toward more sin — depends on the character behind it.

17 *'He is in the way of life that heedeth correction; but he that forsaketh reproof erreth'* — correction accepted is pictured as a path, not a punishment; refusing it is what actually causes a person to go astray.

18 *'He that hideth hatred is of lying lips; and he that uttereth a slander is a fool'* — concealed hostility and open slander are named as two versions of the same dishonesty, one hidden and one spoken.

19 *'In the multitude of words there wanteth not transgression; but he that refraineth his lips doeth wisely'* — talking more increases the statistical odds of saying something wrong; restraint is treated as a wisdom skill in its own right.

20 *'The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver; the heart of the wicked is little worth'* — the value comparison shifts here from speech to the heart behind it, showing the two are ultimately judged by the same standard.

21 *'The lips of the righteous feed many; but fools die for lack of understanding'* — righteous speech is pictured as nourishing to a whole community, while the fool's own deficiency proves fatal to himself alone.

22 *'The blessing of Jehovah, it maketh rich; and he addeth no sorrow therewith'* — a deliberate contrast with verse 4's diligence — some prosperity is simply gift, not wage, and comes without the anxious strings human effort often attaches.

23 *'It is as sport to a fool to do wickedness; and so is wisdom to a man of understanding'* — each finds their natural pleasure in a different place; wickedness and wisdom are both described as something a person can come to actually enjoy.

24 *'The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him; but the desire of the righteous shall be granted'* — what each secretly dreads or hopes for is shown moving toward fulfillment, in opposite directions.

25 *'When the whirlwind passeth, the wicked is no more; but the righteous is an everlasting foundation'* — sudden catastrophe reveals which of the two was actually built to last.

26 *'As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him'* — two sharply unpleasant sensory images capture exactly how frustrating it is to depend on someone unreliable.

27 *'The fear of Jehovah prolongeth days; but the years of the wicked shall be shortened'* — the book's recurring promise of longevity is restated, tied once more to reverence for God rather than mere caution.

28 *'The hope of the righteous shall be gladness; but the expectation of the wicked shall perish'* — what a person looks forward to is only as reliable as the foundation it's built on.

29 *'The way of Jehovah is a stronghold to the upright; but it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity'* — the very same reality — God's ordered way of the world — functions as shelter for one group and ruin for the other.

30 *'The righteous shall never be removed; but the wicked shall not dwell in the land'* — stability of home and place, a deeply covenantal image throughout the Old Testament, is tied directly to character.

31 *'The mouth of the righteous bringeth forth wisdom; but the perverse tongue shall be cut off'* — productive, wise speech versus speech that is eventually silenced — what a mouth habitually produces determines its own future.

32 *'The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable; but the mouth of the wicked knoweth what is perverse'* — the chapter closes on the same theme it has circled back to repeatedly: speech as the clearest evidence of the character underneath it.

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## Reflection

- 1. This chapter returns to speech and the tongue more than any other single topic (vv.11, 13–14, 18–21, 31–32). What would an honest audit of your last week's conversations reveal about which 'fountain' your words are flowing from?*
- 2. Verse 12 says love covers offenses while hatred stirs up strife — the same wrong met two different ways. Is there a current grievance you're stirring rather than covering?*
- 3. Verses 4 and 22 both mention wealth, but from different angles — diligence and blessing. How do you currently hold effort and gift together, rather than crediting one and ignoring the other?*



## CHAPTER 11

# Just Weights and the Welfare of the City

*This chapter moves fluidly between the marketplace, the household, and the city gate — honest scales, generous giving, and the ripple effects of one person's righteousness or wickedness on an entire community. Proverbs never treats integrity as a purely private virtue; over and over this chapter shows character spilling outward into public consequence.*

1 *'A false balance is an abomination to Jehovah; but a just weight is his delight'* — rigged scales open the chapter as the paradigm case of small, easily-hidden dishonesty that God treats as no small matter at all.

2 *'When pride cometh, then cometh shame; but with the lowly is wisdom'* — pride and shame are linked as cause and near-certain effect, while humility is named as wisdom's natural home.

3 *'The integrity of the upright shall guide them; but the perverseness of the treacherous shall destroy them'* — character is pictured as a built-in navigation system — one that either leads safely or actively steers toward ruin.

4 *'Riches profit not in the day of wrath; but righteousness delivereth from death'* — the proverb doesn't condemn wealth itself but exposes its limits; some crises simply cannot be bought out of.

5 *'The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way; but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness'* — both outcomes are self-generated; neither character produces a result imposed entirely from outside.

6 *'The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them; but the treacherous shall be taken in their own naughtiness'* — the imagery of being caught in one's own trap recurs (compare 1:17–18), reinforcing that wickedness tends to ensnare its own author.

7 *'When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish; and the hope of unjust men perisheth'* — whatever hope was built on wrongdoing has no foundation able to outlast the person who held it.

8 *'The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead'* — a proverb of general pattern, not a mechanical formula for every case, observing how trouble often finds its way to those who court it.

9 *'With his mouth the godless man destroyeth his neighbor; but through knowledge shall the righteous be delivered'* — words are shown as a weapon capable of real damage, countered specifically by knowledge rather than by mere caution.

10 *'When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth; and when the wicked perish, there is shouting'* — the chapter's first explicit statement that individual character has civic consequences — a whole city feels the difference.

11 *'By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted; but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked'* — the claim intensifies: a city's rise or fall is tied to the character, and specifically the speech, of its citizens.

12 *'He that despiseth his neighbor is void of wisdom; but a man of understanding holdeth his peace'* — contempt is named plainly as a lack of wisdom, while silence, again, is commended as its own skill.

13 *'He that goeth about as a tale-bearer revealeth secrets; but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth a matter'* — trustworthiness is defined here specifically as the ability to keep something confidential, not merely to avoid outright lying.

14 *'Where no wise guidance is, the people falleth; but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety'* — wisdom is pictured as something communities need structurally, not just individuals privately; isolated decision-making is treated as a real risk.

15 *'He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it; but he that hateth suretyship is secure'* — the warning from chapter 6 is condensed into a single line, generalized now into a broader principle about entangling financial guarantees.

16 *'A gracious woman obtaineth honor; and violent men obtain riches'* — the proverb contrasts two very different routes to two very different kinds of gain, quietly favoring the one that lasts.

17 *'The merciful man doeth good to his own soul; but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh'* — kindness and cruelty are shown circling back on the one who practices them, not only affecting their intended target.

18 *'The wicked earneth deceitful wages; but he that soweth righteousness hath a sure reward'* — the agricultural image of sowing (echoed again in v.30) suggests one kind of gain is unstable and untrustworthy, the other reliably harvestable.

19 *'He that is stedfast in righteousness shall attain unto life; and he that pursueth evil doeth it to his own death'* — pursuit, not just possession, is the operative word — the direction someone is actively running matters as much as where they currently stand.

20 *'They that are perverse in heart are an abomination to Jehovah; but such as are perfect in their way are his delight'* — the chapter returns to the same strong language used of the false balance in verse 1, this time applied to the heart itself.

21 *'Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished; but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered'* — collective wrongdoing (hand joined to hand, perhaps a picture of a pact or conspiracy) offers no more protection than acting alone.

22 *'As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman that is without discretion'* — a memorably jarring image: outward beauty paired with poor judgment is not a compliment undercut slightly, but a genuine mismatch, like fine jewelry on an animal that cannot appreciate or use it.

23 *'The desire of the righteous is only good; but the expectation of the wicked is wrath'* — what each is fundamentally oriented toward, at the level of desire itself, is already revealing where they are headed.

24 *'There is that scattereth, and increaseth yet more; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth only to want'* — a genuinely counterintuitive proverb: generosity is linked to increase, and stinginess to loss, defying the instinctive logic of hoarding.

25 *'The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself'* — the principle from verse 24 is restated with a vivid image — what you pour out on others has a way of returning to refresh you.

26 *'He that withholdeth grain, the people shall curse him; but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it'* — a pointed word against hoarding during scarcity for profit, naming the public's response — curse or blessing — as the fitting verdict on the

practice.

27 *'He that diligently seeketh good seeketh favor; but he that searcheth after mischief, it shall come unto him'* — what a person actively searches for tends to be exactly what they find, for better or worse.

28 *'He that trusteth in his riches shall fall; but the righteous shall flourish as the green leaf'* — the object of trust, not the amount of wealth itself, is what determines whether a person falls or flourishes.

29 *'He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind; and the foolish shall be servant to the wise of heart'* — domestic mismanagement is pictured as inheriting nothing but emptiness — wind, something ungraspable and worthless.

30 *'The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that is wise winneth souls'* — the tree of life image returns from 3:18, now applied to the effect a righteous life has on others, not just on the person living it.

31 *'Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: how much more the wicked and the sinner!'* — quoted loosely in 1 Peter 4:18; the chapter's closing 'how much more' argument reasons from the lesser to the greater case, insisting that if even the righteous experience consequence in this life, the wicked certainly will not escape it.

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## Reflection

1. Verses 24–25 make the counterintuitive claim that generosity leads to increase and withholding leads to want. Where in your own life have you experienced — or resisted — this pattern?

2. This chapter repeatedly ties individual character to a whole city's wellbeing (vv.10–11). What is one sphere — a family, a team, a community — where your integrity or lack of it is having more public impact than you usually credit it with?

3. Verse 13 defines trustworthiness partly as the ability to keep a confidence. Is there information entrusted to you right now that you're at risk of treating too casually?



## CHAPTER 12

# Truthful Lips, Diligent Hands

*Chapter 12 keeps circling back to two tests of character: what comes out of a person's mouth, and what their hands actually produce. Between these two threads runs a quieter theme — the righteous person's care extends even to their animals and their reputation, while the wicked cut corners everywhere, including in the smallest, least-watched places.*

1 *'Whoso loveth correction loveth knowledge; but he that hateth reproof is brutish'* — the chapter opens by making receptiveness to correction the very definition of loving knowledge, not merely a step toward it.

2 *'A good man shall obtain favor of Jehovah; but a man of wicked devices will be condemn'* — divine favor and condemnation are tied directly to character and intention ('devices'), not to outward performance alone.

3 *'A man shall not be established by wickedness; but the root of the righteous shall not be moved'* — the agricultural image of a root recurs throughout Proverbs, always suggesting that righteousness provides a stability wickedness structurally cannot.

4 *'A worthy woman is the crown of her husband; but she that doeth shamefully is as rottenness in his bones'* — the same word for 'worthy' used here anticipates the extended poem in 31:10; a spouse's character is described as reaching into the very bones of the other.

5 *'The thoughts of the righteous are just; but the counsels of the wicked are deceit'* — the contrast begins at the level of internal thought, before any word or action, showing intention itself as morally significant.

6 *'The words of the wicked are of laying wait for blood; but the mouth of the upright shall deliver them'* — speech is again shown as either predatory or rescuing, with no

real neutral middle ground.

7 *'The wicked are overthrown, and are not; but the house of the righteous shall stand'* — durability across time, not immediate success, is the true test being applied here.

8 *'A man shall be commended according to his wisdom; but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised'* — genuine respect, the proverb notes, tracks wisdom far more reliably than it tracks status or charm.

9 *'Better is he that is lightly esteemed, and hath a servant, than he that honoreth himself, and lacketh bread'* — substance without status beats status without substance; the proverb quietly deflates the pursuit of appearances over reality.

10 *'A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast; but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel'* — kindness to animals becomes a small but telling window into character; even where cruelty could go unnoticed, it doesn't stay hidden from what it reveals.

11 *'He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread; but he that followeth after vain persons is void of understanding'* — steady, unglamorous labor is set against the temptation to chase get-rich schemes or empty company instead.

12 *'The wicked desireth the net of evil men; but the root of the righteous yieldeth fruit'* — the wicked crave what predators use to capture others, while the righteous simply produce something of lasting value on their own.

13 *'In the transgression of the lips is a snare to the evil man; but the righteous shall come out of trouble'* — careless or wicked speech is shown trapping its own speaker, while integrity provides a way through difficulty rather than into it.

14 *'A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth; and the doings of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him'* — words and works are named together as the two things that most directly return to their source.

15 *'The way of a fool is right in his own eyes; but he that is wise hearkeneth unto counsel'* — the fool's defining trait isn't stupidity but self-certainty; wisdom's defining trait is the humility to actually listen to others.

16 *'A fool's vexation is presently known; but a prudent man concealeth shame'* — self-control over visible reaction, not the absence of feeling, is what separates the two — the prudent still feel it, they just don't broadcast it.

17 *'He that uttereth truth sheweth forth righteousness; but a false witness, deceit'* — truthfulness in testimony is treated as a direct expression of righteousness itself, not a separate, lesser virtue.

18 *'There is that speaketh rashly like the piercing of a sword; but the tongue of the wise is health'* — the same organ, the tongue, is capable of wounding like a blade or healing like medicine, depending entirely on how it's used.

19 *'The lip of truth shall be established for ever; but a lying tongue is but for a moment'* — truth is described as having durability built in, while lies carry a kind of built-in expiration date.

20 *'Deceit is in the heart of them that devise evil; but to the counsellors of peace is joy'* — peacemaking is credited with a genuine internal reward — joy — while scheming is shown corroding the schemer's own heart.

21 *'There shall no mischief happen to the righteous; but the wicked shall be filled with evil'* — a general proverb of pattern and trajectory rather than an ironclad promise against all hardship, consistent with the book's broader realism elsewhere about suffering.

22 *'Lying lips are an abomination to Jehovah; but they that deal truly are his delight'* — the strong language used earlier for dishonest scales (11:1) is applied here to dishonest speech — both are treated with equal seriousness.

23 *'A prudent man concealeth knowledge; but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness'* — restraint in what you display, not just in what you say, marks the difference between prudence and folly.

24 *'The hand of the diligent shall bear rule; but the slothful shall be put under taskwork'* — diligence and laziness are tied to two very different long-term positions — leading, or being managed by someone else.

25 *'Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop; but a good word maketh it glad'* — an unusually tender proverb, acknowledging the real weight anxiety carries and the real power a single kind word has to lift it.

26 *'The righteous is a guide to his neighbor; but the way of the wicked causeth them to err'* — influence runs in both directions; a person's character shapes not only their own path but the paths of people watching them.

27 *'The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting; but the precious substance of men is to the diligent'* — laziness is shown failing even to finish what it started; diligence, by contrast, is credited with turning effort into something genuinely valuable.

28 *'In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death'* — the chapter's closing line restates the book's central either/or in its simplest form: one road leads to life, and it is the only one that does.

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## Reflection

1. Verse 15 says a fool's defining trait is self-certainty, not ignorance. When was the last time you actively sought counsel on a decision you were already confident about?

2. Verse 10 measures character by how someone treats an animal — something with no power to repay or expose them. Where in your life are you kindest or cruelest when no one of consequence is watching?

3. This chapter twice contrasts a wounding tongue with a healing one (vv.18, 25). Think back over your last few conversations — which did your words more closely resemble?



## CHAPTER 13

# Guarding the Mouth, Guarding the Life

*This chapter pairs everyday self-control — what you say, how you handle money, how you receive correction — with the longer view of legacy: what gets passed down to children and grandchildren. It ends with one of the book's most debated verses on discipline, framed deliberately as an act of love rather than mere control.*

1 *'A wise son heareth his father's instruction; but a scoffer beareth not rebuke'* — the book's opening theme returns as the chapter's first line: receptiveness to correction remains the clearest early marker of wisdom or its absence.

2 *'A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth; but the soul of the treacherous shall eat violence'* — speech is pictured as food a person eventually has to consume themselves — whatever kind they habitually produce.

3 *'He that guardeth his mouth keepeth his life; but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction'* — restraint in speech is elevated to a matter of self-preservation, not merely etiquette.

4 *'The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat'* — desire alone accomplishes nothing; only desire joined to effort produces anything worth having.

5 *'A righteous man hateth lying; but a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame'* — hatred of lying is treated as an active, felt conviction in the righteous, not merely an absence of the habit.

6 *'Righteousness guardeth him that is upright in the way; but wickedness overthroweth the sinner'* — character is again pictured as protection or as the very cause of one's own downfall.

7 *'There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing; and that maketh himself poor, yet hath great wealth'* — outward appearance and inward reality are shown to sometimes run in opposite directions entirely; the proverb warns against judging by display.

8 *'The ransom of a man's life is his riches; but the poor heareth no threatening'* — wealth can become a liability as easily as an asset, attracting exactly the kind of threats poverty is spared.

9 *'The light of the righteous rejoiceth; but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out'* — light imagery, used throughout the book (compare 4:18–19), here contrasts ongoing joy with an ending that is abrupt and final.

10 *'By pride cometh only contention; but with the well-advised is wisdom'* — pride is named as producing nothing but conflict, while wisdom is specifically linked to being willing to be advised by others.

11 *'Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished; but he that gathereth by labor shall have increase'* — the manner of gaining wealth, not merely the amount, determines whether it lasts.

12 *'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life'* — an unusually psychological proverb, naming the real toll of prolonged waiting alongside the real vitality that fulfilled longing brings.

13 *'Whoso despiseth the word bringeth destruction on himself; but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded'* — the consequence for disregarding instruction is described as self-inflicted, not externally imposed.

14 *'The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death'* — wisdom's teaching is pictured, as in 10:11, as a source that actively sustains rather than a rule that merely restricts.

15 *'Good understanding giveth favor; but the way of the transgressor is hard'* — the transgressor's road is described plainly as harder, not easier — a quiet correction of the assumption that wrongdoing is the path of least resistance.

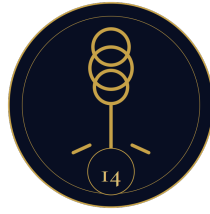
16 *'Every prudent man worketh with knowledge; but a fool flaunteth his folly'* — the prudent apply what they know quietly and functionally, while the fool puts ignorance on public display, seemingly without realizing it.

- 17 *'A wicked messenger falleth into evil; but a faithful ambassador is health'* — reliability in carrying communication between others is treated as a moral matter with real consequences for everyone involved, not just a professional skill.
- 18 *'Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction; but he that regardeth reproof shall be honored'* — the chapter's opening theme of receiving correction returns, now tied explicitly to social outcome — honor or shame.
- 19 *'The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul; but it is an abomination to fools to depart from evil'* — the fool's aversion isn't to sweetness itself but specifically to leaving evil behind — the one thing that would actually let their other desires be fulfilled well.
- 20 *'Walk with wise men, and thou shalt be wise; but the companion of fools shall smart for it'* — character is shown as contagious; who a person spends time with is treated as a real, causal influence, not incidental company.
- 21 *'Evil pursueth sinners; but the righteous shall be rewarded with good'* — consequence is pictured almost as a hunter, actively tracking down the sinner rather than waiting passively to be encountered.
- 22 *'A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children; and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the righteous'* — the proverb takes a generational view; what is built faithfully outlasts the builder, and what is built wrongly often ends up benefiting someone else entirely.
- 23 *'Much food is in the tillage of the poor; but there is that is destroyed by reason of injustice'* — the poor's own honest labor can yield real abundance, but injustice — someone else's, imposed on them — can just as easily wipe it out.
- 24 *'He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes'* — a hard saying to modern ears, but its logic mirrors 3:11–12: withholding needed correction is framed here not as kindness but as a failure to love, while discipline given early and consistently ('betimes') is named as love's actual expression.
- 25 *'The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul; but the belly of the wicked shall want'* — the chapter closes on contentment itself as a marker of character — one soul genuinely satisfied, the other perpetually, restlessly wanting.

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## Reflection

- 1. Verse 20 says companionship shapes character, for better or worse. Who are you currently walking closely with, and what is that relationship actually forming in you?*
- 2. Verse 12 names the real ache of 'hope deferred.' Is there a longstanding hope you're currently carrying, and how are you tending your heart while you wait rather than letting it grow sick?*
- 3. Verse 11 distinguishes wealth gained by 'vanity' (get-rich-quick schemes, shortcuts) from wealth gathered by steady labor. Which of these two patterns better describes how you currently pursue your goals?*



## CHAPTER 14

# She Builds Her House — Wisdom in the Everyday

*Chapter 14 ranges widely — from a single opening image of a woman building or destroying her own household, through anger, poverty, national righteousness, and the fear of the LORD as a recurring fountain of life. It is one of the longer chapters in the central collection, and one of the most socially aware, repeatedly noticing how the poor and the wronged are actually treated.*

1 *‘Every wise woman buildeth her house; but the foolish plucketh it down with her own hands’* — the chapter opens with a striking image of agency: the same household can be built up or torn down by the very hands meant to tend it.

2 *‘He that walketh in his uprightness feareth Jehovah; but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him’* — daily conduct, not just belief, is treated as the real evidence of whether a person actually reveres God.

3 *‘In the mouth of the foolish is a rod for his pride; but the lips of the wise shall preserve them’* — the fool’s own boastful speech becomes the very instrument of his correction, while the wise are kept safe by the restraint of theirs.

4 *‘Where no oxen are, the crib is clean; but much increase is by the strength of the ox’* — a plain, almost homely proverb: avoiding mess by avoiding productive work isn’t actually a gain — real increase requires the inconvenience that comes with it.

5 *‘A faithful witness will not lie; but a false witness uttereth lies’* — stated almost as a tautology, but the point is serious: truthfulness is meant to be so basic to character that it requires no further qualification.

6 *‘A scoffer seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not; but knowledge is easy unto him that hath understanding’* — the scoffer’s own posture, not a lack of access, is what blocks the

search; wisdom resists a mocking approach even while it opens easily to a humble one.

7 *'Go into the presence of a foolish man, and thou shalt not perceive in him the lips of knowledge'* — a blunt piece of practical advice: don't expect insight from a source that has already shown it has none to offer.

8 *'The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way; but the folly of fools is deceit'* — self-awareness is named as the prudent person's specific skill, while the fool's specialty runs in the opposite direction, toward self-deception.

9 *'Fools make a mock at sin; but among the upright there is favor'* — treating wrongdoing as a joke is set directly against the goodwill that surrounds those who take it seriously.

10 *'The heart knoweth its own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy'* — an honest acknowledgment that some inner experience — both pain and joy — is simply not fully shareable, no matter how close the relationship.

11 *'The house of the wicked shall be overthrown; but the tent of the upright shall flourish'* — notably, the wicked get the more permanent-sounding structure (a house) and the upright a mere tent, yet it is the tent that is said to flourish — durability depends on character, not architecture.

12 *'There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death'* — repeated again in 16:25, this may be the single most important warning in the whole book about the limits of self-assessment; feeling right is not the same as being right.

13 *'Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of mirth is heaviness'* — an unusually clear-eyed observation that outward emotion doesn't always match inward reality, and that some laughter is covering something else entirely.

14 *'The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways; and a good man shall be satisfied from himself'* — both receive the natural fruit of their own inner life — one a hollow return, the other a genuine, self-sustaining satisfaction.

15 *'The simple believeth every word; but the prudent man looketh well to his going'* — credulity and careful attention are set against each other; wisdom includes healthy discernment about what and whom to believe.

16 *'A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil; but the fool beareth himself insolently, and is confident'* — the fool's misplaced confidence is treated as more dangerous than the wise man's caution; appropriate fear is reframed as a form of wisdom, not weakness.

17 *'He that is soon angry will deal foolishly; and a man of wicked devices is hated'* — quick temper and calculated scheming are named as two different roads to the same destination — folly and enmity, respectively.

18 *'The simple inherit folly; but the prudent are crowned with knowledge'* — inheritance language suggests these outcomes aren't random but the natural, expected result of a settled way of life.

19 *'The evil bow before the good; and the wicked, at the gates of the righteous'* — a promise of eventual vindication; whatever the present arrangement looks like, the proverb anticipates a reversal in which character ultimately determines standing.

20 *'The poor is hated even of his own neighbor; but the rich hath many friends'* — stated without approval, as a clear-eyed observation of how people actually behave, not as an endorsement of how they should.

21 *'He that despiseth his neighbor sinneth; but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he'* — the very unfairness just described in verse 20 is immediately named as sin when it involves contempt, and mercy toward the poor is called blessing rather than mere kindness.

22 *'Do they not err that devise evil? but mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good'* — mercy and truth are treated as things a person can actively plan and pursue, just as deliberately as evil can be devised.

23 *'In all labor there is profit; but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury'* — a plain warning against substituting talk for actual work; ideas and intentions alone produce nothing without labor behind them.

24 *'The crown of the wise is their riches; but the folly of fools is only folly'* — whatever the wise gain becomes an ornament that enhances them further, while whatever the foolish produce only compounds their foolishness.

25 *'A true witness delivereth souls; but a deceitful witness uttereth lies'* — truthful testimony is credited with the power to actually save someone, raising the stakes of honesty in legal or public matters well beyond mere personal integrity.

26 *'In the fear of Jehovah is strong confidence; and his children shall have a place of refuge'* — reverence for God is described as producing a stability that extends protectively to the next generation as well.

27 *'The fear of Jehovah is a fountain of life, that one may depart from the snares of death'* — nearly identical to 13:14, the repetition underscores how central this single idea is to the entire book's understanding of what actually keeps a person safe.

28 *'In the multitude of people is the king's glory; but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince'* — a rare political proverb: a ruler's real strength lies in a thriving, growing population, not merely in personal power or wealth.

29 *'He that is slow to anger is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly'* — patience is directly equated with understanding itself, not merely listed as a separate virtue alongside it.

30 *'A sound heart is the life of the flesh; but envy is the rottenness of the bones'* — emotional and physical health are again tied together; envy specifically is singled out as corrosive at the deepest, most literal level.

31 *'He that oppreseth the poor reproacheth his Maker; but he that hath mercy on the needy honoreth him'* — how the poor are treated is framed as a direct statement about God himself, since he is named as their Maker as much as anyone else's.

32 *'The wicked is thrust down in his evil-doing; but the righteous hath a refuge in his death'* — the chapter briefly looks beyond ordinary life circumstances to the very moment of death itself, finding the same contrast holding even there.

33 *'Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding; but that which is in the inward part of fools is made known'* — wisdom is content to remain quietly settled, while folly, by contrast, seems compelled to eventually reveal itself.

34 *'Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people'* — the individual-focused proverbs of this chapter zoom out to the national level — the same moral logic that governs a person's life is applied to an entire people.

35 *'The king's favor is toward a servant that dealeth wisely; but his wrath will be against him that causeth shame'* — the chapter closes back at the royal court, where wisdom and folly are shown to have direct, tangible consequences on standing and favor.

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## Reflection

- 1. Verse 12 warns that a way can 'seem right' and still end in death. Where might you currently be trusting your own sense of rightness more than you're testing it against outside counsel or Scripture?*
- 2. Verses 20–21 and 31 return repeatedly to how the poor are treated. Who in your own circles is easiest to overlook, and what would mercy toward them concretely look like this week?*
- 3. Verse 29 equates patience with understanding. Think of your most recent flash of anger — what would slowing down by even a few seconds have changed about what you said or did?*



## CHAPTER 15

# A Soft Answer, a Merry Heart

*Chapter 15 opens with one of the most practical single lines in the whole book — how you respond to conflict changes its outcome — and keeps returning to the connection between inner disposition and outer circumstance: a cheerful heart, a peaceful home, a mind at rest before God. It closes on the theme that will recur throughout the book's second half: humility as the doorway to honor.*

- 1 *'A soft answer turneth away wrath; but a grievous word stirreth up anger'* — one of the most immediately usable proverbs in the whole book: the same conflict can escalate or de-escalate depending entirely on the tone chosen in response.
- 2 *'The tongue of the wise uttereth knowledge aright; but the mouth of fools poureth out folly'* — 'pour out' suggests something uncontrolled and excessive, in contrast to knowledge offered with precision and care.
- 3 *'The eyes of Jehovah are in every place, beholding the evil and the good'* — a sobering reminder placed early in the chapter: nothing described in the proverbs that follow happens outside of God's awareness, whether hidden from people or not.
- 4 *'A gentle tongue is a tree of life; but perverseness therein is a breaking of the spirit'* — speech is credited again with the power to either nourish (tree of life) or genuinely wound ('breaking of the spirit') — not a minor thing in either direction.
- 5 *'A fool despiseth his father's instruction; but he that regardeth reproof getteth prudence'* — the book's opening theme surfaces again: response to parental correction remains a defining marker of character.
- 6 *'In the house of the righteous is much treasure; but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble'* — wealth itself isn't the variable; what surrounds and accompanies it — peace or trouble — depends on how it was gained and held.

7 *'The lips of the wise disperse knowledge; but the heart of the foolish doeth not so'* — the wise actively spread what they know for others' benefit; the foolish heart, by contrast, has nothing of that kind to give.

8 *'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to Jehovah; but the prayer of the upright is his delight'* — religious ritual performed without integrity is rejected outright; God is shown caring about the worshiper's character, not merely the correctness of the offering.

9 *'The way of the wicked is an abomination to Jehovah; but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness'* — the same principle from verse 8 widens from worship to a whole way of life; pursuit, again, matters as much as arrival.

10 *'There is grievous correction for him that forsaketh the way; and he that hateth reproof shall die'* — a blunt warning that refusing correction isn't a neutral choice but one with escalating, ultimately fatal consequences.

11 *'Sheol and Abaddon are before Jehovah: how much more then the hearts of the children of men!'* — if even the realm of the dead lies open to God's sight, the proverb reasons, human hearts — far closer and far more knowable — certainly do too.

12 *'A scoffer loveth not to be reproved; he will not go unto the wise'* — the scoffer's avoidance is active, not accidental; he deliberately stays away from exactly the people who could help him most.

13 *'A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance; but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken'* — the face is treated as an honest, hard-to-fake readout of what's actually happening inside.

14 *'The understanding heart seeketh knowledge; but the mouth of fools feedeth on folly'* — both are described as consuming something — one actively seeking nourishment, the other content to graze on emptiness.

15 *'All the days of the afflicted are evil; but he that is of a cheerful heart hath a continual feast'* — circumstance and disposition are shown diverging; the same objective hardship can be endured very differently depending on the heart brought to it.

16 *'Better is little, with the fear of Jehovah, than great treasure and trouble therewith'* — the first of several 'better than' proverbs in this chapter, deliberately ranking a right relationship with God above material abundance troubled by anxiety or wrongdoing.

17 *'Better is a dinner of herbs, where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith'* — the comparison sharpens: a humble meal in a loving home outweighs luxury in a hostile one, a proverb often quoted precisely because it's so easy to verify from experience.

18 *'A wrathful man stirreth up strife; but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife'* — the same scenario as verse 1, restated: the presence or absence of anger in one person can determine whether conflict grows or settles.

19 *'The way of the sluggard is as a hedge of thorns; but the path of the upright is made a highway'* — laziness is pictured making life itself harder and more obstructed, while diligence and integrity smooth the road ahead.

20 *'A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish man despiseth his mother'* — nearly identical to 10:1, the repetition of this family theme throughout the book reflects how central it is to the whole project of passing wisdom on.

21 *'Folly is joy to him that is void of wisdom; but a man of understanding walketh uprightly'* — folly isn't merely tolerated by the foolish but actively enjoyed, which is part of why it's so hard to correct by argument alone.

22 *'Where there is no counsel, purposes are disappointed; but in the multitude of counsellors they are established'* — nearly identical to 11:14, reinforcing that plans made in isolation are structurally more fragile than plans tested against outside wisdom.

23 *'A man hath joy in the answer of his mouth; and a word in season, how good is it!'* — there is a genuine, felt satisfaction in saying the right thing at the right moment — timing is treated as part of what makes speech valuable.

24 *'To the wise the way of life leadeth upward, that he may depart from Sheol beneath'* — the up/down imagery pictures wisdom as an ascending path, deliberately moving away from, rather than toward, the realm of the dead.

25 *'Jehovah will root up the house of the proud; but he will establish the border of the widow'* — God's involvement is shown taking sides concretely, tearing down entrenched arrogance while securing the most vulnerable household in that society.

26 *'Thoughts of wickedness are an abomination to Jehovah; but pleasant words are pure'* — the contrast returns to the level of thought itself, matching verse 5's earlier attention to what happens before any word is spoken.

27 *'He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth bribes shall live'* — dishonest gain is shown having a cost that reaches the whole household, not just the individual who pursued it.

28 *'The heart of the righteous studieth to answer; but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things'* — deliberation before speaking, versus impulsive outburst, separates the two — the same distinction drawn back in verse 2.

29 *'Jehovah is far from the wicked; but he heareth the prayer of the righteous'* — nearness to God is described in relational, not merely locational, terms — determined by character, and evidenced by whether prayer is heard.

30 *'The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart; and good tidings make the bones fat'* — good news is credited with a genuinely physical effect, continuing the book's consistent refusal to separate emotional and bodily wellbeing.

31 *'The ear that hearkeneth to the reproof of life abideth among the wise'* — willingness to hear correction is described here as an entry ticket into the company of the wise, not merely a private virtue.

32 *'He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul; but he that hearkeneth to reproof getteth understanding'* — refusing correction is reframed as an act of self-contempt — harming the very self it seems to be protecting.

33 *'The fear of Jehovah is the instruction of wisdom; and before honor goeth humility'* — the chapter's closing line ties its whole argument together: reverence for God teaches wisdom, and humility — not self-promotion — is what actually precedes lasting honor.

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## Reflection

1. Verse 1 says a soft answer turns away wrath. Recall your last real argument — was your opening response soft or grievous, and what might have changed if it had been the other?
2. Verse 15 contrasts objective hardship with a 'continual feast' of a cheerful heart. Is your current mood more shaped by your circumstances or by the disposition you're bringing to them?
3. Verse 33 says humility comes before honor. Where are you currently seeking recognition in a way that skips the humility this verse says has to come first?



## CHAPTER 16

# The Heart Plans, the LORD Directs

*Chapter 16 is the theological center of gravity for the whole middle section of Proverbs — verse after verse insists that human planning operates inside God's ultimate sovereignty, whether over a person's daily steps, a king's throne, or something as small as the roll of dice. It ends with two of the book's most memorized lines: pride goes before destruction, and a slow temper outranks military conquest.*

- 1 *'The plans of the heart belong to man; but the answer of the tongue is from Jehovah'* — a striking division of labor: humans do the planning, but even the words that finally come out are shown to be, in the end, under God's governance.
- 2 *'All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but Jehovah weigheth the spirits'* — self-assessment is exposed as unreliable by nature; only an outside, perfectly accurate judge — God himself — can weigh motive rather than mere appearance.
- 3 *'Commit thy works unto Jehovah, and thy purposes shall be established'* — stability for a plan is tied not to how well it's calculated but to whether it has been entrusted to God at all.
- 4 *Jehovah hath made everything for its own end; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil'* — a difficult verse best read as affirming that nothing, not even the existence of evildoers, ultimately escapes purpose within God's sovereign plan — not that God authors their wickedness, but that even it will not go unaddressed.
- 5 *'Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to Jehovah: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished'* — nearly identical to 11:21, reinforcing that collective arrogance offers no more shelter from consequence than individual arrogance does.

6 *'By mercy and truth iniquity is purged; and by the fear of Jehovah men depart from evil'* — two different but complementary mechanisms are named: relational faithfulness dealing with guilt already incurred, and reverence for God preventing evil before it happens.

7 *'When a man's ways please Jehovah, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him'* — a promise that goes beyond mere personal integrity, suggesting God's favor can reach into and reshape even hostile relationships.

8 *'Better is a little, with righteousness, than great revenues with injustice'* — another 'better than' proverb (compare 15:16–17), insisting that the manner of gain matters more than its size.

9 *'A man's heart deviseth his way; but Jehovah directeth his steps'* — closely paired with verse 1 and verse 3, restating the chapter's central conviction from yet another angle: planning is real and human, but final direction belongs to God.

10 *'A divine sentence is in the lips of the king; his mouth shall not transgress in judgment'* — describes the ideal function of kingship — speech carrying real authority — more than a guarantee that every king actually lives up to it.

11 *'A just balance and scales are Jehovah's; all the weights of the bag are his work'* — honest commerce, down to the literal weights used in a market stall, is claimed as belonging to God — there is no corner of ordinary business exempt from his concern.

12 *'It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness; for the throne is established by righteousness'* — political legitimacy itself, not just personal virtue, is tied directly to righteous rule.

13 *'Righteous lips are the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right'* — truthful counsel, even when unwelcome in the moment, is what a wise ruler is said to actually treasure most.

14 *'The wrath of a king is as messengers of death; but a wise man will pacify it'* — proximity to great power is shown as genuinely dangerous, and wisdom — the ability to defuse anger — as a real, practical survival skill.

15 *'In the light of the king's countenance is life; and his favor is as a cloud of the latter rain'* — the same royal power capable of verse 14's danger is shown equally capable of being a source of blessing — as welcome and needed as the rain that ripened a harvest.

16 *'How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! yea, to get understanding is rather to be chosen than silver'* — the value comparison from chapters 3 and 8 is restated once more, showing how central this single ranking is to everything the book teaches.

17 *'The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul'* — righteousness is pictured as an actual road under construction, built specifically by the habit of turning away from evil.

18 *'Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall'* — perhaps the single most quoted verse in all of Proverbs; the sequence — pride first, ruin after — is offered as a near-mechanical law of moral cause and effect.

19 *'Better it is to be of a lowly spirit with the poor, than to divide the spoil with the proud'* — the proverb ranks humble poverty above the material gains of pride, following immediately after verse 18 to complete its warning with a positive alternative.

20 *'He that giveth heed unto the word shall find good; and whoso trusteth in Jehovah, happy is he'* — attentiveness to instruction and trust in God are named together as parallel routes to the same blessing.

21 *'The wise in heart shall be called prudent; and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning'* — pleasant, well-chosen speech isn't just agreeable; the proverb credits it with actually making others more receptive to learning.

22 *'Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that bath it; but the instruction of fools is their folly'* — what the wise draw life from, the fool merely repeats and compounds — the same word, 'instruction,' meaning something entirely different depending on who holds it.

23 *'The heart of the wise instructeth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips'* — wise speech is shown originating from within, from a heart already shaped by wisdom, not from clever technique layered on top.

24 *'Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones'* — kind speech is credited, once again, with genuine physical and emotional nourishment, not merely social pleasantness.

25 *'There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death'* — repeated word for word from 14:12; its return here, in a chapter so focused on God's governance of human plans, sharpens the warning: self-trust without reference to God is precisely the danger this whole chapter has been building toward.

26 *'The appetite of the laboring man laboreth for him; for his mouth urgeth him thereto'* — hunger itself is described as a built-in, God-given motivator for honest work — need driving diligence rather than laziness.

27 *'A worthless man deviseth mischief; and in his lips there is as a scorching fire'* — destructive speech is compared to fire, an image the book will return to again — something that spreads and consumes well beyond its original spark.

28 *'A froward man scattereth strife; and a whisperer separateth chief friends'* — gossip is shown having the specific power to destroy even the closest relationships, not merely minor acquaintances.

29 *'A man of violence enticeth his neighbor, and leadeth him in a way that is not good'* — corruption is described as relational and contagious, actively drawing others along rather than remaining contained to one person.

30 *'He that shutteth his eyes, it is to devise perverse things: he that compresseth his lips bringeth evil to pass'* — small, easily missed physical gestures are shown as the visible tells of premeditated wrongdoing already underway internally.

31 *'The hoary head is a crown of glory; it shall be found in the way of righteousness'* — old age itself is honored, but specifically when it has been reached by a righteous path — longevity, again, tied to character rather than treated as automatic.

32 *'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city'* — self-mastery is ranked above military conquest, redefining greatness in entirely internal terms.

33 *'The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of Jehovah'* — the chapter's closing line applies its entire argument to even the most apparently random event — chance itself, the proverb insists, is not outside God's governance.

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## Reflection

- 1. Verses 1, 3, and 9 each restate the same conviction: you plan, God directs. Is there a current plan you're holding tightly that you haven't actually 'committed' to God, in the sense verse 3 describes?*
- 2. Verse 18's warning about pride is among the most familiar in Scripture, which can make it easy to nod past. Where has pride most recently shown up in your own thinking, even in a small or subtle form?*
- 3. Verse 32 ranks self-control above conquering a city. What would 'ruling your own spirit' look like this week in the specific situation that most often provokes you?*



## CHAPTER 17

# A Friend Loves at All Times

*Chapter 17 covers a wide range — sibling and household conflict, the danger of gossip, medicine for the soul, bribery, and one of the most treasured lines in the book on friendship. Its unifying thread is relational: nearly every proverb here is about how people treat each other, especially under pressure or provocation.*

1 *‘Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than a house full of feasting with strife’* — peace is again ranked above abundance (compare 15:16–17); the proverb assumes most people would trade comfort for calm if they honestly weighed the cost of constant conflict.

2 *‘A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren’* — competence and character are shown outranking mere birth status; earned trust can override inherited privilege.

3 *‘The refining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but Jehovah trieth the hearts’* — metal is purified by fire; the proverb claims hearts undergo the same kind of testing, examined by God for what is genuine underneath the surface.

4 *‘An evil-doer giveth heed to wicked lips; and a liar giveth ear to a mischievous tongue’* — what a person is willing to listen to reveals as much about their character as what they say themselves.

5 *‘Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker; and he that is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished’* — nearly identical in logic to 14:31; contempt for the vulnerable, or pleasure at someone else’s disaster, is treated as an offense against God directly, not merely against the person harmed.

6 *‘Children’s children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers’* — honor is pictured flowing in both directions across generations — grandchildren honoring the elderly, parents honoring their children by the legacy

passed down.

7 *‘Excellent speech becometh not a fool: much less do lying lips a prince’* — eloquence from someone foolish rings false, but dishonesty from someone in power is worse still — the higher the position, the greater the damage speech can do.

8 *‘A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth’* — a clear-eyed, almost cynical observation about how bribery actually functions in practice, describing the phenomenon rather than endorsing it (the book condemns bribes explicitly elsewhere, e.g., 17:23).

9 *‘He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that harpeth on a matter separateth chief friends’* — letting an offense go, rather than repeatedly bringing it up, is named as the very thing that preserves close relationships.

10 *‘A rebuke entereth deeper into one that hath understanding than a hundred stripes into a fool’* — receptiveness determines effectiveness; a single word reaches the teachable person further than repeated punishment reaches the one who refuses to listen.

11 *‘An evil man seeketh only rebellion; therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him’* — rebellion is shown inviting its own harsh response, consequence matched in kind to the character that provoked it.

12 *‘Let a bear robbed of her cubs meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly’* — a vivid, almost humorous comparison: a fool in the middle of his foolishness is judged more dangerous to encounter than one of the fiercest animals imaginable.

13 *‘Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house’* — repaying kindness with harm is treated as inviting a lasting curse on one’s own household, not just a single bad outcome.

14 *‘The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before there is quarrelling’* — conflict is compared to a breached dam — easy to stop at the very first crack, nearly impossible once it’s flowing.

15 *‘He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to Jehovah’* — corrupting judgment in either direction — excusing guilt or condemning innocence — is treated as equally offensive to God.

16 *'Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom, seeing he hath no understanding?'* — a pointed question: wisdom can't simply be purchased by someone unwilling to actually change; means without desire accomplishes nothing.

17 *'A friend loveth at all times; and a brother is born for adversity'* — one of the most beloved verses on friendship in Scripture, distinguishing between love that is constant regardless of circumstance and the specific loyalty tested and proven in hardship.

18 *'A man void of understanding striketh hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his neighbor'* — the warning against reckless financial guarantees (compare 6:1–5; 11:15) returns once more, treated as a recurring, common trap worth repeating.

19 *'He loveth transgression that loveth strife; and he that raiseth high his gate seeketh destruction'* — both a taste for conflict and ostentatious pride (a needlessly grand gate) are named as forms of the same underlying self-destructive impulse.

20 *'He that hath a wayward heart findeth no good; and he that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief'* — heart and tongue are again paired; neither internal corruption nor its outward expression in speech goes unpunished.

21 *'He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow; and the father of a fool hath no joy'* — an honest, unsentimental acknowledgment of the real grief a parent can carry over a child's persistent folly — the book doesn't pretend such pain isn't real.

22 *'A merry heart is a good medicine; but a broken spirit drieth up the bones'* — emotional state is described in explicitly medicinal terms — joy functioning almost like treatment, despair like an illness working its way through the body.

23 *'A wicked man taketh a bribe out of the bosom, to pervert the ways of justice'* — unlike verse 8's neutral observation, this verse names the act directly: taking a bribe to twist judgment is corruption, full stop.

24 *'Wisdom is before the face of him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth'* — the wise keep their attention on what's actually in front of them, while the fool's focus scatters toward whatever is distant, distracting, or irrelevant.

25 *'A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him'* — nearly identical in sentiment to verse 21 and 10:1, the repetition throughout the book reflects how seriously Proverbs treats a child's character as a shared family burden or joy.

26 *'Also to punish the righteous is not good, nor to smite the noble for their uprightness'* — justice misapplied against integrity itself is named as a distinct category of wrong, worth condemning on its own.

27 *'He that spareth his words bath knowledge; and he that is of a cool spirit is a man of understanding'* — restraint in both speech and temper is credited as visible evidence of genuine understanding, not merely a personality trait.

28 *'Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise; and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding'* — the chapter's closing line is almost wry: silence alone, without any actual wisdom behind it, can still buy the appearance of it — a warning as much as a compliment.

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## Reflection

1. Verse 9 says covering an offense (rather than repeating it) is what preserves close friendships. Is there a past grievance you keep bringing back up with someone — and what would it cost you to actually let it rest?

2. Verse 17 distinguishes a friend who loves 'at all times' from a brother 'born for adversity.' Who in your life has proven to be the second kind, and have you thanked them for it?

3. Verse 28 notes that even a fool looks wise while silent. Before your next difficult conversation, what would it look like to let restraint do more of the work than your words?



## CHAPTER 18

# Death and Life in the Power of the Tongue

*Chapter 18 returns intensely to the theme of speech — gossip, contention, careless answers, the tongue's power over life and death itself — while also naming isolation as its own danger and community as its remedy. It closes with the well-known observation that some friendships run deeper than blood relation.*

- 1 *'He that separateth himself seeketh his own desire, and rageth against all sound wisdom'* — self-isolation is treated not as neutral independence but as a hostile posture toward wisdom itself, which by design requires community and counsel to function.
- 2 *'A fool hath no delight in understanding, but only that his heart may reveal itself'* — the fool doesn't want to learn; he wants to talk, and the proverb names that self-display as the actual goal, however it's disguised.
- 3 *'When the wicked cometh, contempt cometh also, and with ignominy cometh reproach'* — wickedness is shown arriving with a whole retinue of consequences that follow automatically, not as separate, avoidable add-ons.
- 4 *'The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters; the wellspring of wisdom is as a flowing brook'* — depth and flow are both pictured positively here — substantial speech from a genuine source, in contrast to the shallow noise described elsewhere in the chapter.
- 5 *'To respect the person of the wicked is not good, nor to turn aside the righteous in judgment'* — impartiality in judgment is named directly; favoritism toward the powerful or against the innocent corrupts justice at its root.
- 6 *'A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for stripes'* — the fool's own words are shown inviting the very punishment or conflict that follows, cause and effect collapsed into a single image.

7 *'A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul'* — restated for emphasis: the fool doesn't merely risk harm through careless speech, his own mouth is identified as the direct mechanism of his ruin.

8 *'The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts'* — gossip's appeal is compared to a delicious snack — easy to consume, satisfying in the moment, and absorbed far deeper than intended.

9 *'He also that is slack in his work is brother to him that is a destroyer'* — a striking equivalence: laziness is placed in the same moral family as active destruction, not treated as merely a lesser, harmless failing.

10 *'The name of Jehovah is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe'* — one of the most comforting images in the whole book — refuge that is immediate, accessible, and effective specifically for those who run toward it.

11 *'The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as a high wall in his own imagination'* — a deliberate contrast with verse 10: wealth offers only an imagined security, while God's name offers something proven and real.

12 *'Before destruction the heart of man is haughty; but before honor goeth humility'* — nearly identical to 16:18, the repeated pairing across the book cements pride and humility as the two hinge points on which a person's whole trajectory turns.

13 *'He that giveth answer before he heareth, it is folly and shame unto him'* — a plain, common-sense rebuke of interrupting or assuming before actually listening — named outright as both foolish and shameful.

14 *'The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a broken spirit who can bear?'* — inner resilience is shown capable of carrying real physical or external hardship, but when that inner resilience itself breaks, the proverb admits there's little left to carry the weight.

15 *'The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge'* — both organs, heart and ear, are pictured actively pursuing understanding — wisdom is never passive reception alone.

16 *'A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men'* — a practical, almost sociological observation about how generosity or skillful giving can open doors, offered descriptively rather than as unconditional endorsement.

17 *‘He that pleadeth his cause first seemeth just; but his neighbor cometh and searcheth him out’* — a caution against forming judgment from only one side of a story; the first, most confident account isn’t automatically the true one.

18 *‘The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty’* — casting lots is offered as a practical way to resolve disputes between parties too evenly matched, or too proud, to settle things any other way.

19 *‘A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city; and such contentions are like the bars of a castle’* — broken trust between close relations is named as uniquely difficult to repair, harder even than breaching a fortified wall.

20 *‘A man’s belly shall be filled with the fruit of his mouth; with the increase of his lips shall he be satisfied’* — speech is again pictured as something a person eventually has to consume themselves, echoing 13:2 and 18:21 together.

21 *‘Death and life are in the power of the tongue; and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof’* — the chapter’s central claim, stated in its strongest form yet: the tongue is not merely influential but genuinely lethal or life-giving, and its user will personally bear the outcome.

22 *‘Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of Jehovah’* — marriage is described as both a personal good and evidence of God’s favor, a positive note amid a chapter otherwise largely focused on conflict and speech.

23 *‘The poor useth entreaties; but the rich answereth roughly’* — another clear-eyed social observation, noting the disparity in how differently positioned people are able to speak to others, without endorsing the rich man’s harshness.

24 *‘He that maketh many friends doeth it to his own destruction; but there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother’* — the chapter closes by distinguishing quantity from quality: a wide but shallow social circle is contrasted with the rare, deep loyalty of a true friend.

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## Reflection

- 1. Verse 21 says death and life are in the power of the tongue. Reviewing your speech over the past few days, has it more often given life or taken something from someone?*
- 2. Verse 13 rebukes answering before truly listening. In your next disagreement, could you commit to restating the other person's point before responding to it?*
- 3. Verse 10 pictures God's name as a tower the righteous run into, while verse 11 pictures wealth as only an imagined wall. Which of these two are you actually relying on when trouble comes?*



## CHAPTER 19

# Many Plans, One Counsel That Stands

*Chapter 19 continues weaving family life, poverty and wealth, and self-control together, before landing on one of the book's clearest statements of divine sovereignty: a person may hold many plans, but it is the LORD's counsel that stands. Discipline of children, patience with the poor, and control of anger all reappear as tests of whether that counsel has actually shaped daily life.*

1 *'Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool'* — the chapter opens exactly where several others have (compare 16:8, 19), ranking honest poverty above deceitful speech regardless of that speech's apparent cleverness.

2 *'Also, that the soul be without knowledge is not good; and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth'* — both ignorance and impulsiveness are named as dangerous; wisdom requires both informed understanding and unhurried action.

3 *'The foolishness of man subverteth his way; and his heart fretteth against Jehovah'* — a sharp psychological observation: people often bring ruin on themselves through their own folly, then resent God for the consequences of their own choices.

4 *'Wealth addeth many friends; but the poor is separated from his friend'* — a blunt, unflattering description of how social relationships often actually work, offered without approval, setting up verse 7's even sharper version of the same point.

5 *'A false witness shall not be unpunished; and he that uttereth lies shall not escape'* — the book returns repeatedly to false testimony (compare 6:19; 12:17; 14:5, 25) as a sin taken with particular seriousness, since it corrupts the very possibility of justice.

6 *'Many will entreat the favor of the liberal man; and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts'* — generosity is shown attracting attention and goodwill, a realistic

observation that sets up the harder truth in the following verse about what happens to those with nothing to give.

7 *'All the brethren of the poor do hate him: how much more do his friends go far from him! He pursueth them with words, but they are gone'* — an unusually stark and honest verse; even family can abandon someone in poverty, and the closing image of pursuing with words that go unanswered captures real, felt isolation.

8 *'He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul: he that keepeth understanding shall find good'* — pursuing wisdom is reframed as an act of self-love in the healthiest sense — caring well for your own life rather than neglecting it.

9 *'A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that uttereth lies shall perish'* — nearly identical to verse 5, the repetition within a single chapter underscores how seriously this particular sin is treated.

10 *'Delicate living is not seemly for a fool; much less for a servant to have rule over princes'* — both scenarios describe a mismatch between position and character — comfort or authority landing on someone unprepared to steward it well.

11 *'The discretion of a man maketh him slow to anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression'* — restraint under provocation is named as glory, not weakness — a direct challenge to the instinct that anger expressed is strength.

12 *'The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion; but his favor is as dew upon the grass'* — concentrated power, whether from a king or any authority figure, is described as capable of both terror and refreshment, worth respecting either way.

13 *'A foolish son is the calamity of his father; and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping'* — two different, ongoing household hardships are named side by side, both wearing down a household not through a single blow but through relentless repetition.

14 *'House and riches are an inheritance from fathers; but a prudent wife is from Jehovah'* — material inheritance is contrasted with something that cannot simply be passed down by human means — a wise spouse is credited directly to God's gift.

15 *'Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and the idle soul shall suffer hunger'* — laziness is pictured almost as a spreading numbness, one form of inactivity (sleep) leading directly to real deprivation (hunger).

16 *'He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; but he that is careless of his ways shall die'* — obedience is framed once more as self-preservation, not mere duty imposed from outside.

17 *'He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto Jehovah, and his good deed will he pay him again'* — a striking image: kindness to the poor is treated as a loan extended directly to God himself, who personally guarantees the repayment.

18 *'Chasten thy son, seeing there is hope; and set not thy heart on his destruction'* — discipline is framed here explicitly as an act of hope, not despair — correction given precisely because the outcome isn't yet decided.

19 *'A man of great wrath shall bear the penalty; for if thou deliver him, thou must do it again'* — a warning against repeatedly rescuing someone from the consequences of their own uncontrolled temper, since doing so only guarantees the cycle continues.

20 *'Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end'* — wisdom is framed with a long horizon in view; the payoff of listening now is measured not immediately but across an entire lifetime.

21 *'There are many devices in a man's heart; but the counsel of Jehovah, that shall stand'* — the chapter's theological center: however many plans a person makes, only God's purpose is guaranteed to endure.

22 *'That which maketh a man to be desired is his kindness; and a poor man is better than a liar'* — kindness, more than wealth or cleverness, is named as what actually makes someone worth being around — and integrity in poverty outranks prosperity built on lies.

23 *'The fear of Jehovah tendeth to life; and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil'* — reverence for God is tied once more to both longevity and a settled contentment, immune to the restless anxiety that plagues other pursuits.

24 *'The sluggard burieth his hand in the dish, and will not so much as bring it again to his mouth'* — a vivid, almost comic image of laziness taken to its most absurd extreme — too idle even to finish feeding himself.

25 *'Smite a scoffer, and the simple will beware; and reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge'* — different people require different means of correction; visible consequence teaches the impressionable onlooker even when it fails to change the scoffer himself.

26 *'He that doeth violence to his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame and bringeth reproach'* — a strong condemnation of a child's abuse or neglect of aging parents, naming it plainly as shameful.

27 *'Cease, my son, to hear instruction, only to err from the words of knowledge'* — read as an ironic warning (echoing the book's rhetorical style): stopping instruction now only guarantees future error — the opposite of what the fool imagines he's gaining by tuning out.

28 *'A worthless witness mocketh at justice; and the mouth of the wicked swalloweth iniquity'* — corrupt testimony is described as consuming wrongdoing the way food is consumed — casually, appetite-driven, without any resistance.

29 *'Judgments are prepared for scoffers, and stripes for the back of fools'* — the chapter's closing line insists that consequence for these patterns isn't improvised after the fact but already, in a sense, waiting and ready.

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## Reflection

1. Verse 21 contrasts many human plans with the one counsel of the LORD that stands. What plan are you currently most attached to, and have you actually held it open-handedly before God?

2. Verse 17 calls kindness to the poor a loan made directly to God. Does your generosity change when you think of it this way rather than as simply giving something away?

3. Verse 11 calls patience under provocation a person's 'glory.' What situation currently tests your patience most, and what would choosing restraint there actually cost you?



## CHAPTER 20

# The Spirit of Man Is the Lamp of the LORD

*Chapter 20 mixes practical warnings — against strong drink, dishonest scales, hasty vows — with striking claims about how thoroughly God sees a person's inner life. It closes with the recurring insistence that even painful correction has a cleansing purpose, difficult as that is to hear.*

- 1 *'Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; and whosoever erreth thereby is not wise' —* alcohol is personified as actively deceptive, not neutral; being led astray by it is named plainly as a failure of wisdom, not merely bad luck.
- 2 *'The terror of a king is as the roaring of a lion: he that provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own life' —* nearly identical in force to 19:12; provoking great power unnecessarily is treated as genuinely self-endangering, not simply unwise.
- 3 *'It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife; but every fool will be quarrelling' —* avoiding unnecessary conflict is reframed as honorable rather than passive; picking fights is named, bluntly, as a fool's habit.
- 4 *'The sluggard will not plow by reason of the winter; therefore he shall beg in harvest, and have nothing' —* laziness dressed up as reasonable caution (waiting out the cold) is shown producing an entirely foreseeable, avoidable poverty later.
- 5 *'Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out' —* wisdom includes the skill of drawing out what's genuinely in someone else's heart, not just speaking one's own mind.
- 6 *'Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness; but a faithful man who can find?' —* self-praise is shown as common and cheap, while actual, tested faithfulness is named as rare and valuable precisely because it's harder to fake.

7 *'A just man that walketh in his integrity, blessed are his children after him'* — the benefits of integrity are shown extending beyond the individual, blessing an entire family line that follows.

8 *'A king that sitteth on the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes'* — a ruler's discerning presence alone is credited with a kind of preventive power, deterring wrongdoing simply by paying close attention.

9 *'Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?'* — a rare, humbling admission within the book itself: no one, not even the wise, can honestly claim total moral purity on their own.

10 *'Diverse weights, and diverse measures, both of them alike are an abomination to Jehovah'* — the warning against rigged scales (compare 11:1) returns, naming dishonest measurement in commerce as offensive to God regardless of which direction it cheats.

11 *'Even a child maketh himself known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right'* — character is shown revealing itself early, even in childhood, through action rather than words or intention.

12 *'The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, Jehovah hath made even both of them'* — the very organs of perception are credited to God's design, a reminder that the capacity to understand wisdom at all is itself a gift.

13 *'Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread'* — laziness and diligence are again tied to their natural material outcomes, stated with characteristic bluntness.

14 *'It is bad, it is bad, saith the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth'* — a sharp little character study of manipulative bargaining — feigned dissatisfaction used deliberately to secure a better deal, then bragged about afterward.

15 *'There is gold, and abundance of rubies; but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel'* — the value comparison recurs once more (compare 3:15; 8:11), knowledgeable speech ranked above even the most treasured material wealth.

16 *'Take his garment that is surety for a stranger; and hold him in pledge that is surety for a foreign woman'* — practical, almost legal advice: if someone has been reckless enough to co-sign a stranger's debt, take the collateral seriously, since the warning against such suretyship (chapter 6) so often goes unheeded.

17 *'Bread of falsehood is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel'* — Gain obtained by deceit — tastes good only briefly before turning to something painful and inedible.

18 *'Every purpose is established by counsel; and by wise guidance make thou war'* — the value of outside counsel (compare 11:14; 15:22) is applied here even to the highest-stakes decision imaginable — going to war.

19 *'He that goeth about as a tale-bearer revealeth secrets; therefore meddle not with him that openeth wide his lips'* — practical relational advice: don't just avoid gossiping yourself, avoid close association with habitual gossips, since your own confidences aren't safe with them either.

20 *'Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in the blackest darkness'* — dishonoring parents is treated with unusual severity, the extinguished lamp signaling a complete, total loss of the guidance and blessing this book associates with light throughout.

21 *'An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed'* — wealth acquired too quickly, without the patience and integrity the book consistently commends, is warned against even when the gain itself seems real.

22 *'Say not thou, I will recompense evil: wait for Jehovah, and he will save thee'* — a direct command against personal vengeance, redirecting the desire for justice toward patient trust in God's timing instead.

23 *'Diverse weights are an abomination to Jehovah; and a false balance is not good'* — the warning against dishonest measures (compare v.10; 11:1) appears a third time across the book, reflecting how seriously ordinary commercial honesty is treated.

24 *'A man's goings are of Jehovah; how then can man understand his way?'* — human self-understanding is shown as inherently limited; full clarity about one's own path depends on more than introspection alone.

25 *'It is a snare to a man rashly to say, It is holy, and after vows to make inquiry'* — a warning against hasty religious commitments made before thinking them through; a vow spoken impulsively can become a genuine trap.

26 *'A wise king winnoweth the wicked, and bringeth the threshing wheel over them'* — the agricultural image of separating grain from chaff is applied to just governance — a wise ruler actively sorts out corruption rather than tolerating it.

27 *‘The spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah, searching all his innermost parts’* — one of the most striking verses in the chapter: human conscience itself is described as something God uses to illuminate a person’s own hidden depths.

28 *‘Mercy and truth preserve the king; and his throne is upholden by mercy’* — lasting political stability, the proverb claims, rests not on force but on the ruler’s own character — the same mercy and truth commended to individuals throughout the book.

29 *‘The glory of young men is their strength; and the beauty of old men is the gray head’* — each stage of life is credited with its own fitting form of honor, neither one treated as superior to the other.

30 *‘Stripes that wound cleanse away evil; and strokes reach the innermost parts’* — the chapter’s closing line is hard but consistent with the book’s broader view of discipline (compare 3:11–12; 13:24): painful correction, though unwelcome, can reach and cleanse what gentler methods cannot.

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## Reflection

1. Verse 9 admits that no one can honestly claim a fully clean heart. Does your own self-assessment tend toward this kind of honesty, or toward the self-praise warned about in verse 6?
2. Verse 22 forbids taking personal revenge and commands waiting on the LORD instead. Is there a wrong done to you that you’re currently tempted to repay yourself rather than release?
3. Verse 27 describes conscience as a lamp God uses to search your innermost parts. What has your own conscience been quietly flagging lately that you’ve been slow to address?



## CHAPTER 21

# No Wisdom Against the LORD

*Chapter 21 opens by placing even a king's heart under God's direct control and closes by insisting no human wisdom, understanding, or counsel can succeed against him. In between, familiar themes return — justice over ritual, diligence over haste, domestic peace, and the danger of a hardened, self-justifying heart.*

- 1 *'The king's heart is in the hand of Jehovah as the watercourses: he turneth it whithersoever he will'* — even the most powerful human will in the land is pictured as pliable in God's hand, like irrigation water directed at the farmer's discretion.
- 2 *'Every way of a man is right in his own eyes; but Jehovah weigheth the hearts'* — nearly identical to 16:2, restating the book's consistent warning that self-assessment is not a reliable final judge.
- 3 *'To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to Jehovah than sacrifice'* — echoing 15:8, ethical action toward others is ranked above religious ritual whenever the two come into conflict.
- 4 *'A high look, and a proud heart, even the lamp of the wicked, is sin'* — pride is named as sin not only in its outward display but at its very source, described almost as the wicked person's defining, constant illumination.
- 5 *'The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but every one that is hasty hasteth only to want'* — careful, unhurried planning is contrasted with impulsive haste, the two producing opposite material outcomes.
- 6 *'The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vapor driven to and fro; they that seek them seek death'* — wealth gained by deceit is described as insubstantial as vapor, and the pursuit itself, starkly, as a pursuit of death.

- 7 *'The violence of the wicked shall sweep them away, because they refuse to do justice'* — the very violence the wicked employ against others is shown circling back to destroy them, rooted specifically in their refusal to act justly.
- 8 *'The way of him that is laden with guilt is exceeding crooked; but as for the pure, his work is right'* — guilt itself is pictured distorting a person's whole path, while purity of conscience keeps the way straight.
- 9 *'It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a contentious woman in a wide house'* — the first of several proverbs in this chapter and the next on domestic conflict, ranking modest peace above spacious but constant strife.
- 10 *'The soul of the wicked desireth evil; his neighbor findeth no favor in his eyes'* — wickedness is described as an actual appetite, oriented instinctively toward harm rather than toward the goodwill a neighbor might reasonably expect.
- 11 *'When the scoffer is punished, the simple is made wise; and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge'* — nearly identical in structure to 19:25, showing again how different people learn through different means — consequence for one, direct teaching for another.
- 12 *'The righteous man considereth the house of the wicked, how the wicked are overthrown to their ruin'* — the righteous are shown paying attention to the outcomes of wickedness, not out of cruelty but as a sober, instructive observation.
- 13 *'Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard'* — refusing to hear the poor is met, in kind, with being refused a hearing later — the same principle of reciprocal consequence found throughout the book.
- 14 *'A gift in secret pacifieth anger, and a present in the bosom, strong wrath'* — a practical, almost tactical observation about how a well-placed gift can defuse conflict, offered descriptively rather than as unconditional counsel to bribe.
- 15 *'It is joy to the righteous to do justice; but it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity'* — the very same act, justice being done, produces opposite emotional and practical effects depending on which side of it a person stands.
- 16 *'The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall rest in the congregation of the dead'* — straying from wisdom is pictured, starkly, as a path that terminates among the dead — a resting place chosen by the direction walked, not a sudden accident.

17 *'He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man; he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich'* — a direct warning against a life organized around consumption and indulgence, which the proverb ties plainly to eventual poverty.

18 *'The wicked is a ransom for the righteous; and the treacherous cometh in the stead of the upright'* — nearly identical to 11:8, restating the general pattern that trouble intended for the righteous often ends up finding the wicked instead.

19 *'It is better to dwell in a desert land, than with a contentious and fretful woman'* — a companion proverb to verse 9, intensifying the comparison from a mere corner of a roof to an entire wilderness — peace, even in scarcity, outweighs constant conflict.

20 *'There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man swalloweth it up'* — the same resources, once gained, are either preserved through wisdom or squandered through folly — the outcome depends on stewardship, not merely acquisition.

21 *'He that followeth after righteousness and kindness findeth life, righteousness, and honor'* — pursuit, once more, is credited as the operative word; these goods are found by those actively chasing them, not by those merely hoping to receive them.

22 *'A wise man scaleth the city of the mighty, and bringeth down the strength of the confidence thereof'* — wisdom is credited with a strategic, almost military power — capable of overturning even fortified strength through skill rather than force.

23 *'Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles'* — a concise restatement of 13:3 and 18:21, the repetition across the book reinforcing just how central guarded speech is to avoiding self-inflicted trouble.

24 *'The proud and haughty man, scoffer is his name; he worketh in the arrogance of pride'* — pride and mockery are named as so closely linked they might as well be synonyms — the scoffer's defining trait traced directly back to arrogance.

25 *'The desire of the sluggard killeth him; for his hands refuse to labor'* — it isn't laziness alone that destroys the sluggard but the gap between what he wants and his refusal to work for it — desire without effort turned lethal.

26 *'There is that coveteth greedily all the day long; but the righteous giveth and withholdeth not'* — constant craving is set against consistent generosity, two opposite postures toward one's own resources.

27 *‘The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind!’* — building on verse 3 and 15:8, this verse intensifies the point — insincere worship is already unacceptable, and worship offered with actively wicked intent is worse still.

28 *‘A false witness shall perish; but the man that beareth shall speak unceasingly’* — dishonest testimony is shown as ultimately self-defeating, in contrast to the credible witness whose word continues to carry weight.

29 *‘A wicked man hardeneth his face; but as for the upright, he establisheth his ways’* — a hardened, defiant expression versus a genuinely established, well-considered path — the wicked project confidence while the righteous actually possess stability.

30 *‘There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against Jehovah’* — the chapter’s climactic theological claim: however impressive human wisdom becomes, none of it can ultimately stand against or outmaneuver God’s purposes.

31 *‘The horse is prepared against the day of battle; but safety is of Jehovah’* — the closing line applies verse 30’s principle concretely: careful human preparation is not wasted or discouraged, but final security is credited to God alone, not to the resources assembled.

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## Reflection

1. Verse 2 warns that every way seems right in a person’s own eyes. What decision are you currently most confident about that you haven’t actually tested against outside counsel?

2. Verses 9 and 19 twice rank peace above comfort in describing domestic conflict. Is there ongoing friction in your own home or close relationships that you’ve been tolerating rather than addressing?

3. Verse 31 credits careful preparation (the horse made ready) while crediting safety itself to God alone. Where do you tend to over-credit your own preparation for outcomes that were ultimately not in your control?



## CHAPTER 22

# A Good Name, and the Words of the Wise

*Chapter 22 opens with some of the book's most quoted verses on reputation, humility, and raising children, then pivots at verse 17 into a new, more sustained section explicitly called 'the words of the wise,' which will run through chapter 24. The tone shifts slightly here — shorter, punchier proverbs give way to a bit more direct exhortation, aimed particularly at protecting the vulnerable and staying clear of dangerous company.*

- 1 *'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold'* — reputation and relationship are ranked above wealth outright, a value judgment the whole book has been building toward since chapter 3.
- 2 *'The rich and the poor meet together: Jehovah is the maker of them all'* — economic status, however consequential day to day, is relativized by the shared fact of a common Creator — a quiet but firm leveling.
- 3 *'A prudent man seeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and suffer for it'* — repeated later at 27:12; foresight and avoidance are credited as genuine wisdom skills, not caution to be embarrassed about.
- 4 *'The reward of humility and the fear of Jehovah is riches, and honor, and life'* — humility and reverence, not ambition, are named as the actual roots from which lasting prosperity, honor, and life grow.
- 5 *'Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse: he that keepeth his soul shall be far from them'* — the crooked path is pictured as literally hazardous terrain, while self-vigilance is what actually provides distance from its dangers.
- 6 *'Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it'* — one of the most familiar verses in the whole book; best read as a general

principle of pattern, not an ironclad guarantee, it still insists early, intentional formation shapes a lifetime.

7 *'The rich ruleth over the poor; and the borrower is servant to the lender'* — a plain economic observation about the real power dynamics debt creates, offered as a caution to be weighed before entering such arrangements.

8 *'He that soweth iniquity shall reap calamity; and the rod of his wrath shall fail'* — the agricultural sowing-and-reaping image (echoed in Galatians 6:7) applies wrongdoing's consequences with the same certainty as a harvest follows planting.

9 *'He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor'* — generosity is described almost as a way of seeing — a 'bountiful eye' that notices need and responds to it.

10 *'Cast out the scoffer, and contention will go out; yea, strife and ignominy will cease'* — removing one habitually contentious person is credited with restoring peace to an entire group — conflict is sometimes concentrated in a single source.

11 *'He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king will be his friend'* — inward integrity paired with gracious speech is shown capable of earning favor even at the highest levels of society.

12 *'The eyes of Jehovah preserve him that hath knowledge; but he overthroweth the words of the treacherous man'* — God's attentive gaze is shown protecting the knowledgeable while actively undoing the schemes of the deceitful.

13 *'The sluggard saith, There is a lion without: I shall be slain in the streets'* — a wry, almost comic picture of laziness dressing itself up as reasonable fear — an absurd excuse invented to avoid simply going to work.

14 *'The mouth of strange women is a deep pit; he that is abhorred of Jehovah shall fall therein'* — the warnings of chapters 5–7 are compressed into a single line, the outcome tied explicitly to a person already estranged from God by other choices.

15 *'Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him'* — foolishness is described as a native starting condition needing active correction, not a rare defect — discipline here is framed as remedial, not punitive for its own sake.

16 *'He that oppresseth the poor to increase his gain, and he that giveth to the rich, shall come only to want'* — both exploiting the poor and currying favor with the already-wealthy are named, surprisingly, as equally foolish routes to eventual poverty.

17 *'Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thy heart unto my knowledge'* — a new section opens with a fresh call to attention, signaling a shift in the collection's source and style from this point through chapter 24.

18 *'For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee, if they be established together upon thy lips'* — wisdom retained internally and then expressed consistently in speech is described as something genuinely enjoyable to carry, not merely dutiful.

19 *'That thy trust may be in Jehovah, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee'* — the ultimate purpose of the whole collection is stated directly here: not mere cleverness, but trust in God, is the intended destination.

20 *'Have not I written unto thee excellent things of counsels and knowledge'* — the teacher again vouches for the quality of what follows (compare 8:6), inviting confidence in the material about to be given.

21 *'To make thee know the certainty of the words of truth, that thou mayest carry back words of truth to them that send thee?'* — the aim includes usefulness beyond the individual — equipping the reader to reliably represent truth to others who depend on their account.

22 *'Rob not the poor, because he is poor; neither oppress the afflicted in the gate'* — the first of the 'words of the wise' proverbs proper is a direct command protecting the vulnerable specifically because of, not despite, their vulnerability.

23 *'For Jehovah will plead their cause, and despoil of life those that despoil them'* — God is named as the poor's personal advocate, promising to take up their case directly against anyone who exploits them.

24 *'Make no friendship with a man that is given to anger; and with a wrathful man thou shalt not go'* — a direct warning about choice of companionship, naming uncontrolled anger specifically as a trait to avoid in close relationships.

25 *'Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul'* — the reasoning behind verse 24 is spelled out plainly: proximity to a habit tends to produce imitation, whether intended or not.

26 *'Be thou not one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts'* — the recurring warning against reckless financial guarantees (compare 6:1; 11:15; 17:18) appears once more, framed here as a matter of personal identity to avoid altogether.

27 *'If thou hast not wherewith to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee?'* — the practical, almost blunt consequence of ignoring verse 26's warning is spelled out — losing even the most basic possessions.

28 *'Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set'* — boundary stones marking inherited land were a serious matter in ancient Israel; the command protects established property rights and generational inheritance from quiet encroachment.

29 *'Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men'* — the chapter's closing line ties diligence directly to advancement — genuine skill and steady effort are shown, in the long run, opening doors to real influence.

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## Reflection

1. Verse 1 ranks a good name above great riches. If you had to choose today between a financial gain and your integrity in how you got it, which value would actually win in practice?

2. Verses 22–23 command protection of the poor specifically because God names himself their advocate. Who in your circle of influence is currently vulnerable in a way that calls for your protection rather than your convenience?

3. Verse 24 warns against close friendship with someone given to anger, because proximity breeds imitation (v.25). Is there a relationship in your life currently shaping your temper in a direction you don't want to go?



PART THREE

## The Words of the Wise

Chapters 22:17–24:34

# The Words of the Wise



## CHAPTER 23

### Buy Truth and Sell It Not

*Chapter 23 continues the 'words of the wise' with a run of very concrete scenarios — dining with a powerful host, chasing wealth, disciplining a child, envying sinners — before closing with the book's most extended, almost novelistic warning against drunkenness. The chapter's center holds one of its most quietly important commands: buy truth, and do not sell it, whatever the price.*

- 1 'When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently him that is before thee' — practical social wisdom: proximity to power requires heightened, careful attention, not relaxed assumption.
- 2 'And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite' — a deliberately shocking image warning against gluttony or greed specifically in a setting where restraint matters for one's reputation and safety.
- 3 'Be not desirous of his dainties; seeing they are deceitful food' — a powerful host's generosity may come with strings attached; the proverb warns against being naively drawn in by hospitality with hidden costs.

- 4 *'Weary not thyself to be rich; cease from thine own wisdom'* — the pursuit of wealth is directly named as something a person can exhaust themselves chasing; 'cease from thine own wisdom' suggests self-reliant ambition itself needs to be relinquished.
- 5 *'Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings, like an eagle that flieth toward heaven'* — wealth is pictured as inherently unstable, prone to vanish exactly when it seems most secure.
- 6 *'Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty food'* — a stingy or ill-intentioned host's hospitality is to be refused, tying back to verse 3's warning about deceptive generosity.
- 7 *'For as he thinketh within himself, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee'* — a person's inward calculation, not their outward words of welcome, is named as the true measure of their intent.
- 8 *'The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words'* — the consequence of accepting such false hospitality is described almost physically — wasted effort and wasted goodwill alike.
- 9 *'Speak not in the hearing of a fool; for he will despise the wisdom of thy words'* — practical discernment about audience: wisdom offered to someone unwilling to receive it isn't merely wasted, it invites contempt.
- 10 *'Remove not the ancient landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless'* — echoing 22:28, the warning is sharpened here by naming the fatherless specifically — exploiting the most legally and socially defenseless.
- 11 *'For their Redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against thee'* — God himself is again named as legal advocate for the vulnerable (compare 22:23), a direct warning to anyone tempted to exploit them.
- 12 *'Apply thy heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge'* — a brief return to the book's foundational call, both heart and ears engaged together, before the chapter turns to its longest sustained topic: discipline and drunkenness.
- 13 *'Withhold not correction from the child; for if thou beat him with the rod, he will not die'* — discipline is again commended (compare 13:24; 22:15), with a reassurance that appropriate correction, though painful, is not the harm parents might fear it to be.

14 *'Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from Sheol'* — discipline's ultimate stakes are named directly — not mere behavior management but rescue from a destructive path that ends in death.

15 *'My son, if thy heart be wise, my heart will be glad, even mine'* — the teacher's own personal joy is tied to the student's growth, a warm, relational note amid the chapter's more severe material.

16 *'Yea, my heart will rejoice, when thy lips speak right things'* — the father's gladness is specifically tied to speech, echoing the book's ongoing emphasis on the tongue as the clearest evidence of a formed heart.

17 *'Let not thy heart envy sinners; but be thou in the fear of Jehovah all the day long'* — envy of the wicked's apparent success is named as a real temptation, countered not with argument but with sustained, all-day reverence for God instead.

18 *'For surely there is a future; and thy hope shall not be cut off'* — the antidote to envy is a longer view — confidence in an ultimate outcome that outlasts present appearances.

19 *'Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thy heart in the way'* — a fresh call to attention introduces the chapter's extended closing warning about drunkenness.

20 *'Be not among winebibbers, among gluttonous eaters of flesh'* — the warning names company, not just personal habit — avoiding the crowd defined by excess is itself part of the wisdom being urged.

21 *'For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty; and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags'* — both indulgences, drink and food, are tied to the same eventual outcome: material ruin brought on by loss of self-governance.

22 *'Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old'* — honor for parents is extended explicitly into their old age, when they are most easily dismissed or neglected.

23 *'Buy the truth, and sell it not; yea, wisdom, and instruction, and understanding'* — one of the chapter's most important lines: truth is worth paying any price to acquire, and once possessed, should never be traded away for anything offered in exchange.

24 *'The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice; and he that begetteth a wise child will have joy of him'* — parental joy, named negatively for the foolish son elsewhere (17:21,

25), is here affirmed in its positive form.

25 *'Let thy father and thy mother be glad, and let her that bare thee rejoice'* — the son is directly urged to be the cause of exactly the joy just described — living in a way that gives his parents something to celebrate.

26 *'My son, give me thy heart; and let thine eyes delight in my ways'* — the appeal becomes intensely personal and relational, asking not just obedience but the heart itself, just before the chapter's most vivid warning begins.

27 *'For a harlot is a deep ditch; and a foreign woman is a narrow pit'* — the danger already described at length in chapters 5–7 is compressed into a single sharp image, a trap easy to fall into and hard to climb out of.

28 *'Yea, she lieth in wait as a robber, and increaseth the treacherous among men'* — her danger is described as actively predatory and, worse, self-replicating — multiplying unfaithfulness rather than remaining contained to a single victim.

29 *'Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath complaining? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?'* — a rapid-fire series of questions builds suspense before naming, in the following verses, exactly whose life this describes.

30 *'They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek out mixed wine'* — the answer to verse 29's questions arrives: habitual, deliberate drunkenness, sought out rather than merely stumbled into.

31 *'Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its color in the cup, when it goeth down smoothly'* — as with the adulteress in chapters 5–7, the warning targets the moment of visual, sensory appeal, before any drink is actually taken.

32 *'At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder'* — the same honey-to-bitterness pattern used for the adulteress (5:3–4) is applied here to alcohol — pleasant at first taste, venomous in its aftermath.

33 *'Thine eyes shall behold strange things, and thy heart shall utter perverse things'* — impaired perception and impaired speech are named together as drunkenness's direct effects, distorting both what a person sees and what they say.

34 *'Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast'* — two disorienting, precarious images capture the loss of stability

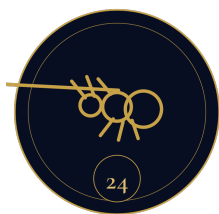
and safety that comes with intoxication.

35 ‘They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not hurt; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again’ — the chapter’s final, chilling line voices addiction itself — injury no longer registering, and the very next thought already reaching for more.

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## Reflection

1. Verse 23 commands buying truth and never selling it. Is there a truth you once held clearly that you’ve since quietly traded away for comfort, approval, or convenience?
2. Verses 29–35 build slowly toward naming what they describe — the danger of habitual drinking. Is there any pattern in your own life that, examined honestly, follows this same trajectory from pleasant to controlling?
3. Verse 17 counters envy of sinners with sustained reverence for God rather than argument. What would it look like this week to replace comparison with a deliberate return to that posture?



## CHAPTER 24

# Rescue Those Drawn Toward Death

*Chapter 24 closes the 'words of the wise' section with instructions on courage in adversity, the obligation to intervene for those in danger, and a warning against gloating over an enemy's downfall. A short second collection, explicitly labeled 'these also are sayings of the wise,' follows — ending with the book's second visit to the sluggard's overgrown field, this time observed and reflected on firsthand.*

- 1 *'Be not thou envious against evil men; neither desire to be with them'* — the chapter opens with the same warning as 23:17, now widened from mere envy to the desire for actual companionship with wrongdoers.
- 2 *'For their heart studieth oppression, and their lips talk of mischief'* — the reason for avoiding them is given directly: their inner life is oriented, deliberately and habitually, toward harm.
- 3 *'Through wisdom is a house builded; and by understanding it is established'* — the image of building recurs (compare 14:1; 9:1), applying wisdom to the practical, structural task of establishing a stable household.
- 4 *'And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches'* — knowledge is credited not just with structural stability but with actual abundance filling the rooms once built.
- 5 *'A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth might'* — wisdom is equated directly with strength, redefining power in terms of understanding rather than mere physical force.
- 6 *'For by wise guidance thou shalt make thy war; and in the multitude of counsellors there is safety'* — nearly identical to 20:18, applying the value of counsel once more to

the highest-stakes decision imaginable.

7 *‘Wisdom is too high for a fool: he openeth not his mouth in the gate’* — the fool is excluded not by external barrier but by his own incapacity; the public forum of decision-making (the gate) simply isn’t accessible to someone unwilling to pursue wisdom.

8 *‘He that deviseth to do evil, men shall call him a man of mischievous devices’* — reputation is shown following naturally and accurately from habitual intention, not just from action.

9 *‘The thought of foolishness is sin; and the scoffer is an abomination to men’* — foolish scheming is condemned even at the level of thought alone, before it becomes visible action.

10 *‘If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small’* — a bracing, almost diagnostic proverb: how a person holds up under pressure reveals the true measure of their inner strength, not their performance in easier times.

11 *‘Deliver them that are carried away unto death, and those that are ready to be slain see that thou hold back’* — a direct, urgent command to actively intervene on behalf of someone in mortal danger, not merely to avoid causing harm oneself.

12 *‘If thou sayest, Behold, we knew not this: doth not he that weigheth the hearts consider it? ... shall not he render to every man according to his work?’* — claimed ignorance is shown as no defense before a God who weighs hearts directly; willful non-involvement doesn’t escape accountability.

13 *‘My son, eat thou honey, for it is good; and the droppings of the honeycomb, which are sweet to thy taste’* — a simple, pleasurable image opens the next short unit, setting up an explicit comparison in the verse that follows.

14 *‘So shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul, when thou hast found it; then shall there be a reward, and thy hope shall not be cut off’* — wisdom’s effect on the soul is compared directly to honey’s sweetness on the tongue — genuinely, tangibly pleasurable, not merely useful.

15 *‘Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the habitation of the righteous; destroy not his resting-place’* — a direct warning against plotting harm to someone’s home or place of safety, naming the target’s vulnerability explicitly.

16 *'For a righteous man falleth seven times, and riseth up again; but the wicked are overthrown by calamity'* — righteousness is not defined by never failing but by resilience — repeated recovery, in contrast to the wicked's more final collapse.

17 *'Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thy heart be glad when he is overthrown'* — even justified satisfaction at an enemy's downfall is restrained here; the proverb asks for a character that doesn't need an opponent to suffer in order to feel settled.

18 *'Lest Jehovah see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him'* — gloating over an enemy's ruin is warned against partly because it risks redirecting God's own corrective attention away from that enemy and, implicitly, toward the one gloating.

19 *'Fret not thyself because of evildoers; neither be thou envious at the wicked'* — the warning against envy of the wicked (compare 23:17; 24:1) returns a third time in this section, suggesting how persistent and tempting this particular struggle actually is.

20 *'For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the lamp of the wicked shall be put out'* — the reasoning behind verse 19's command: whatever the wicked seem to have now, it has no durable future.

21 *'My son, fear thou Jehovah and the king; and company not with them that are given to change'* — reverence for God is paired with respect for legitimate civil authority, and both are set against association with habitual rebels or agitators.

22 *'For their calamity shall rise suddenly; and the destruction from them both, who knoweth it?'* — the consequences of defying both divine and civil authority are described as arriving without warning, from a source too unpredictable to fully anticipate.

23 *'These also are sayings of the wise. To have respect of persons in judgment is not good'* — a new, shorter collection begins with its own heading; its first concern, favoritism in judgment, echoes 18:5 and reinforces impartiality as foundational to justice.

24 *'He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous; peoples shall curse him, nations shall abhor him'* — false acquittal of the guilty is condemned in the strongest social terms — not just wrong, but something that earns collective contempt.

25 *'But to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them'* — honest correction, though harder in the moment, is shown earning genuine

goodwill in contrast to flattering falsehood.

26 *'He kisseth the lips who giveth a right answer'* — an honest, well-considered answer is compared to an intimate gesture of affection — truthfulness pictured as a form of genuine care, not mere correctness.

27 *'Prepare thy work without, and make it ready for thee in the field; and afterwards build thy house'* — practical sequencing advice: secure your livelihood and provision first, then invest in the comforts of home — priorities placed in a wise, sustainable order.

28 *'Be not a witness against thy neighbor without cause; and deceive not with thy lips'* — baseless accusation is condemned alongside outright deceit, both treated as violations of the same basic obligation to truthful speech.

29 *'Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me; I will render to the man according to his work'* — a direct rejection of personal retaliation, echoing 20:22's command to leave vengeance to God rather than administering it oneself.

30 *'I went by the field of the sluggard, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding'* — the teacher becomes an eyewitness again (compare chapter 7), grounding the coming description in personal observation rather than abstract warning.

31 *'And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, the face thereof was covered with nettles, and the stone wall thereof was broken down'* — neglect's visible, concrete results are described in vivid detail — not a single dramatic failure, but the slow accumulation of untended decline.

32 *'Then I beheld, and considered well; I saw, and received instruction'* — the teacher models the very posture this whole book calls for: careful observation followed by genuine reflection, turning an ordinary sight into a lesson.

33 *'Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep'* — repeated word for word from 6:10, the sluggard's own rationalizing voice returns, now attached to the specific, visible ruin just described.

34 *'So shall thy poverty come as a robber, and thy want as an armed man'* — the chapter closes exactly as 6:11 did, the repetition across the book driving home, one final time, how directly small delays compound into real loss.

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## Reflection

- 1. Verse 11 commands active intervention for those 'drawn toward death,' rejecting the excuse of claimed ignorance in verse 12. Is there a person or situation right now where you've told yourself it isn't your responsibility to get involved?*
- 2. Verse 16 defines righteousness not as never falling but as repeatedly rising. What is one recent failure you're still treating as final rather than as something to recover from and continue past?*
- 3. The teacher in verses 30–32 turns a simple walk past a neglected field into a lesson through careful observation. What ordinary thing have you walked past recently without stopping to actually consider what it was teaching you?*



PART FOUR

## Hezekiah's Collection

Chapters 25–29

# Hezekiah's Collection



## CHAPTER 25

### A Word Fitly Spoken — Hezekiah's Collection Begins

*A new collection opens here, explicitly credited to scribes working under King Hezekiah generations after Solomon, preserving proverbs that had circulated but not yet been compiled. The chapter is unusually rich in comparison-based sayings — 'as X, so Y' — covering royal courts, self-restraint, and the surprising command to feed a hungry enemy.*

<sup>1</sup> 'These also are proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out' — Solomon wrote three thousand proverbs in his lifetime (1 Kings 4:32), far more than fit in this book; Hezekiah's men, working roughly two and a half centuries later during his revival of true worship, curated and copied out this second collection. Wisdom worth keeping, this heading insists, is wisdom somebody eventually takes the trouble to write down.

<sup>2</sup> 'It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the glory of kings is to search out a matter' — divine mystery and royal investigation are named as parallel forms of glory, each fitting to its proper role — God need not explain everything, while a king's honor lies precisely in diligent inquiry.

3 *'As the heavens for height, and the earth for depth, so the heart of kings is unsearchable'* — the vastness of sky and earth becomes a picture for how difficult it is to fully know the true mind of someone in power.

4 *'Take away the dross from the silver, and there cometh forth a vessel for the refiner'* — removing impurity is the necessary first step before anything useful can be shaped; the image sets up verse 5's direct application.

5 *'Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness'* — political stability, as in chapter 16 and 20, is tied directly to removing corrupt influence from positions of counsel and power.

6 *'Put not thyself forward in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men'* — practical court etiquette warns against self-promotion in the presence of superior authority.

7 *'For better is it that it be said unto thee, Come up hither, than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince'* — the wisdom of humility here is almost identical in spirit to Jesus' parable of choosing the lowest seat at a banquet (Luke 14:7–11) — let recognition come as invitation, not self-assertion.

8 *'Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbor hath put thee to shame'* — a warning against rushing into conflict or accusation before knowing the full situation, since an overconfident start can end in embarrassing reversal.

9 *'Debate thy cause with thy neighbor himself, and disclose not the secret of another'* — direct, private confrontation of a grievance is commended over spreading it to third parties, protecting both the relationship and any confidences involved.

10 *'Lest he that heareth it revile thee, and thine infamy turn not away'* — the cost of violating verse 9's counsel is named specifically: a damaged reputation that, once spread, is very hard to undo.

11 *'A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in network of silver'* — one of the most beautiful images in the book: the right word at the right moment is compared to a crafted work of art, valuable specifically because of its fitness to the moment, not just its content.

12 *'As an ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear'* — correction well-given and well-received is compared to fine jewelry — a

striking reframe of criticism as something that can actually adorn, not merely wound.

13 *'As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him'* — reliability in carrying out a task is compared to unexpected, refreshing relief during hard labor — trustworthiness experienced as genuine comfort.

14 *'As clouds and wind without rain, so is he that boasteth himself of his gifts falsely'* — the promise of a gift that never materializes is compared to a storm that gathers dramatically but produces nothing — all appearance, no substance.

15 *'By long forbearing is a ruler persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone'* — patience and gentleness are credited with a power that force lacks, capable of overcoming even something as seemingly immovable as bone.

16 *'Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it'* — even a genuinely good thing, taken to excess, turns harmful — a caution against overindulgence in things that are not themselves wrong.

17 *'Let thy foot be seldom in thy neighbor's house, lest he be weary of thee, and hate thee'* — practical wisdom about hospitality and boundaries: even welcome company can wear out its welcome through overfamiliarity.

18 *'A man that beareth false witness against his neighbor is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow'* — three different weapons pile up to emphasize just how violent and damaging dishonest testimony really is, whatever its outwardly civil appearance.

19 *'Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint'* — relying on someone unreliable is compared to relying on an already-injured body part — useless at the exact moment it's needed most.

20 *'As one that taketh off a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon soda, so is he that singeth songs to a heavy heart'* — forced cheerfulness aimed at genuine grief is shown as not just unhelpful but actively jarring and wrong, like removing a coat in winter.

21 *'If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink'* — quoted directly in Romans 12:20; the command overturns the instinct toward retaliation, extending basic kindness even, and especially, to someone who has wronged you.

22 *'For thou wilt heap coals of fire upon his head, and Jehovah will reward thee'* — the image likely pictures shame or conviction produced in the enemy by unexpected kindness, not literal harm, with the added promise that God himself notices and rewards such restraint.

23 *'The north wind bringeth forth rain; so doth a backbiting tongue an angry countenance'* — gossip and its consequence, anger, are linked as naturally and predictably as a weather pattern.

24 *'It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a contentious woman in a wide house'* — repeated almost word for word from 21:9, reinforcing how seriously the compilers of this later collection still regarded the earlier warning about domestic strife.

25 *'As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country'* — the relief of welcome news after a long wait is compared to the most basic, urgent physical need — water to someone genuinely thirsty.

26 *'As a troubled fountain, and a corrupted spring, so is a righteous man that giveth way before the wicked'* — a righteous person compromising under pressure is compared to a community's clean water source becoming polluted — the damage reaches everyone who depended on their integrity.

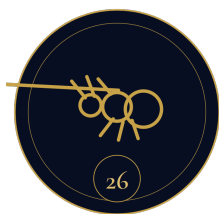
27 *'It is not good to eat much honey; so for men to search out their own glory is grievous'* — the honey image from verse 16 returns, now applied specifically to self-promotion: seeking one's own honor in excess turns sour, just like overindulgence in something sweet.

28 *'He whose spirit is without restraint is like a city that is broken down and without walls'* — the chapter's closing image pictures self-control as a city's essential defense — without it, a person is left exposed to whatever comes, with nothing left to hold the line.

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## Reflection

- 1. Verses 21–22 command kindness toward a hungry or thirsty enemy rather than retaliation. Is there someone who has wronged you where a concrete act of kindness, rather than distance or payback, is the harder but wiser path?*
- 2. Verse 11 compares a well-timed word to a crafted work of art. Think of the last time you said exactly the right thing at exactly the right moment — what made the timing, not just the content, so fitting?*
- 3. Verse 28 compares an undisciplined spirit to a city without walls. Where in your life right now do you feel most exposed because self-control has been missing rather than present?*



## CHAPTER 26

# The Anatomy of a Fool

*Chapter 26 is unusually concentrated — eleven of its verses (1–12) are devoted entirely to the fool, more sustained attention than any other single topic gets in one place in the book. It then moves through the sluggard once more and closes with the most detailed portrait yet of the deceptive, quietly destructive person who hides malice behind pleasant words.*

1 *‘As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honor is not seemly for a fool’* — two images of weather arriving at the wrong season open the chapter, framing honor given to a fool as something fundamentally out of place, however it happens.

2 *‘As the sparrow in her wandering, as the swallow in her flying, so the curse that is causeless alighteth not’* — an undeserved curse is compared to a bird in flight, never landing — reassurance that unjust words spoken against someone need not be feared as automatically effective.

3 *‘A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the back of fools’* — each requires its own fitting instrument of correction; the proverb doesn’t relish punishment so much as observe that some forms of folly, like some animals, only respond to firm, direct correction.

4 *‘Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him’* — the first of a deliberate pair of seemingly contradictory proverbs; here, matching a fool’s foolishness risks becoming indistinguishable from him.

5 *‘Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit’* — the second half of the pair, seemingly reversing verse 4: sometimes folly must be answered directly, on its own terms, so it isn’t mistaken for wisdom by the fool himself or by onlookers. Read together, the two verses teach discernment — knowing which situation calls for which response, rather than a single fixed rule.

6 *'He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off his own feet, and drinketh in damage'* — entrusting an important task to someone unreliable is compared to self-inflicted injury — the sender bears the consequences of their own poor choice of messenger.

7 *'The legs of the lame hang loose; so is a parable in the mouth of fools'* — wisdom repeated by someone who doesn't understand or embody it is compared to a limb that looks present but doesn't actually function.

8 *'As one that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honor to a fool'* — a sling is useless, even dangerous, with its stone tied down instead of released; honoring a fool is pictured as an equally pointless misuse of something meant to accomplish something else entirely.

9 *'As a thorn that goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools'* — a second image reinforcing verse 7: something potentially valuable, handled by someone unable to wield it properly, becomes a source of injury instead of benefit.

10 *'As an archer that woundeth all, so is he that hireth a fool and he that hireth them that pass by'* — careless hiring — whoever happens to be available, rather than who is actually qualified — is compared to indiscriminate, reckless harm.

11 *'As a dog that returneth to his vomit, so is a fool that repeateth his folly'* — quoted directly in 2 Peter 2:22; one of the most viscerally memorable images in Scripture for describing someone who keeps returning to a destructive pattern despite already having experienced its consequences.

12 *'Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him'* — the section on fools ends with its most surprising twist: self-satisfied confidence is judged worse than open, acknowledged foolishness, since at least the latter remains open to correction.

13 *'The sluggard saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets'* — repeated closely from 22:13, the sluggard's excuse-making returns, exaggerated here into a doubled, almost panicked refrain.

14 *'As the door turneth upon its hinges, so doth the sluggard upon his bed'* — constant motion that goes nowhere — the sluggard is compared to a door that swings without ever actually opening a path forward.

15 *'The sluggard burieth his hand in the dish; it wearieth him to bring it again to his mouth'* — repeated from 19:24, laziness taken to its most absurd extreme reappears, reinforcing just how thoroughly this pattern can take hold.

16 *'The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason'* — the sluggard's self-assessment echoes the self-conceited fool of verse 12; laziness, like folly generally, tends to come wrapped in unearned confidence.

17 *'He that passeth by, and vexeth himself with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears'* — inserting oneself into someone else's conflict is compared to provoking an animal that will predictably bite — a vivid warning against unnecessary meddling.

18 *'As a madman who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death'* — the image builds toward its comparison in the next verse, describing reckless, indiscriminate danger.

19 *'So is the man that deceiveth his neighbor, and saith, Am not I in sport?'* — deceit disguised as harmless joking is compared to the madman's random violence — both cause real damage while the perpetrator disclaims responsibility.

20 *'For lack of wood the fire goeth out; and where there is no whisperer, contention ceaseth'* — gossip is identified as fuel for ongoing conflict; removing its source is shown as often sufficient to end the strife itself.

21 *'As coals are to hot embers, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to inflame strife'* — a person prone to conflict is compared to fuel actively feeding a fire, not merely present near it but functioning to keep it burning.

22 *'The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts'* — repeated from 18:8; gossip's appeal is compared once more to something tempting and easily consumed, absorbed deeper than intended.

23 *'Fervent lips and a wicked heart are like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross'* — attractive speech masking corrupt intent is compared to cheap pottery given a false silvery coating — appealing on the surface, worthless underneath.

24 *'He that hateth dissembleth with his lips; but he layeth up deceit within him'* — the outward mask of civility is distinguished sharply from the hostility actually being stored up inside.

25 *‘When he speaketh fair, believe him not; for there are seven abominations in his heart’* — the number seven, again suggesting completeness, emphasizes just how thoroughly corrupted this person’s inner life actually is, however pleasant their speech.

26 *‘Though his hatred cover itself with guile, his wickedness shall be openly showed before the assembly’* — concealment is described as only temporary; eventually, public exposure catches up with what was hidden.

27 *‘Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein; and he that rolleth a stone, it shall return upon him’* — the recurring self-trapping image (compare 1:17–18; 11:6) closes the portrait of the deceiver: the very schemes designed to harm others tend to circle back on their author.

28 *‘A lying tongue hateth those whom it hath wounded; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin’* — the chapter’s closing line notes an unsettling psychological pattern: the liar often ends up resenting the very people they’ve deceived, and flattery, far from being harmless, is shown actively working toward someone’s ruin.

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## Reflection

1. Verses 4–5 give two seemingly opposite instructions about answering a fool, requiring discernment rather than a fixed rule. Think of a recent conversation with someone acting foolishly — would engaging or disengaging have served better, and did you choose rightly?

2. Verse 12 says a self-satisfied fool has less hope than an ordinary one. Where might your own confidence currently be closing you off from correction you actually need?

3. Verses 23–28 describe someone whose pleasant words mask real hostility. Is there a relationship in your life where you sense this happening — either from someone else toward you, or, more searchingly, from you toward someone else?



## CHAPTER 27

# Iron Sharpens Iron

*Chapter 27 is one of the warmest chapters in the book on friendship — honest wounds from a friend valued over an enemy's flattery, the sharpening effect of one person's countenance on another's, the value of a nearby neighbor over a distant relative. It closes with an unexpectedly practical passage on tending flocks, grounding all this relational wisdom in the plain necessity of diligent, attentive work.*

- 1 *'Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth'* — a check against presumption; confident plans for the future are fine, but certainty about them is not warranted by anything within human control.
- 2 *'Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips'* — genuine honor is shown to require an outside source; self-praise, however accurate, can never carry the same weight.
- 3 *'A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's vexation is heavier than they both'* — the emotional burden of dealing with a fool's irritability is compared to the heaviest, most literal physical loads imaginable — an exaggeration used to make a very real point about relational exhaustion.
- 4 *'Wrath is cruel, and anger is overwhelming; but who is able to stand before jealousy?'* — jealousy is ranked as more dangerous still than open anger, perhaps because it operates quietly and persistently rather than in a single visible outburst.
- 5 *'Better is open rebuke than love that is bidden'* — honest confrontation is valued above affection that never actually shows itself; love that stays silent when correction is needed isn't fully love.

6 *'Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are profuse'* — one of the book's most quoted lines on friendship: painful honesty from someone who genuinely cares is worth more than lavish but hollow flattery from someone who doesn't.

7 *'The full soul loatheth a honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet'* — appetite, whether physical or otherwise, reshapes perception entirely; the same thing can taste like luxury or like relief depending entirely on need.

8 *'As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place'* — rootlessness, whether of home, calling, or community, is pictured as leaving a person exposed and disoriented, the way a bird away from its nest is vulnerable.

9 *'Oil and perfume rejoice the heart; so doth the sweetness of a man's friend that cometh of hearty counsel'* — wise, sincere counsel from a friend is compared to the most immediately pleasurable sensory experiences of the ancient world — not a duty, but a genuine delight.

10 *'Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not... better is a neighbor that is near than a brother far off'* — proximity and proven loyalty are ranked, in a moment of real need, above formal family ties that lack either.

11 *'My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me'* — the father's own reputation is shown as bound up with his son's character — a reminder that individual choices ripple outward into family standing.

12 *'A prudent man seeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and suffer for it'* — repeated from 22:3, the same warning about foresight and avoidance returns, its repetition suggesting how often this simple wisdom goes unheeded in practice.

13 *'Take his garment that is surety for a stranger; and hold him in pledge that is surety for a foreign woman'* — repeated from 20:16, the practical consequence of ignoring the suretyship warnings scattered throughout the book is restated once more.

14 *'He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him'* — even genuine kindness, delivered without any sensitivity to timing or manner, can land as an intrusion rather than a gift — a reminder that how something is given matters alongside what is given.

15 *'A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike'* — the comparison from 19:13 returns, likening constant domestic friction to a persistent,

wearing leak rather than a single dramatic storm.

16 *'He that would restrain her restraineth the wind; and his right hand encountereth oil'* — the futility of trying to control a contentious spirit by force is compared to two equally impossible tasks — holding wind, or getting a grip on oil.

17 *'Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend'* — perhaps the best-known verse in the chapter: real friendship involves productive friction, not mere comfort — each person made sharper, more capable, through honest engagement with the other.

18 *'Whoso keepeth the fig-tree shall eat the fruit thereof; and he that regardeth his master shall be honored'* — attentive care, whether of a tree or an employer, is shown yielding its own natural reward — fruit for the caretaker, honor for the faithful servant.

19 *'As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man'* — a striking observation about shared humanity: looking honestly at another person's heart tends to reflect something recognizable about your own.

20 *'Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied; and the eyes of man are never satisfied'* — human desire is compared to the grave itself — an appetite with no natural limit, a sober warning against assuming that getting more will finally be enough.

21 *'The refining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; and a man is tried by his praise'* — how a person responds to being praised is named as its own kind of test — an unexpected angle, since most assume character is tested only by hardship, not by flattery.

22 *'Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with bruised grain, yet will not his foolishness depart from him'* — an extreme, almost violent image used to make a sobering point: some folly is so deeply embedded that even the harshest external measures can't grind it out from within.

23 *'Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds'* — the chapter shifts abruptly into practical, agrarian counsel, opening a short passage on the necessity of attentive, ongoing stewardship.

24 *'For riches are not for ever; and doth the crown endure unto all generations?'* — even the most secure-seeming wealth or power is named as impermanent, a reason to invest in something more durable — ongoing, attentive work rather than assumed, static

security.

25 *'The hay is carried, and the tender grass showeth itself, and the herbs of the mountains are gathered in'* — the natural cycle of growth and harvest is described appreciatively, grounding the wisdom that follows in the rhythms of ordinary, seasonal labor.

26 *'The lambs are for thy clothing, and the goats are the price of the field'* — diligent care of livestock is shown yielding concrete, practical provision — clothing and even the means to acquire land.

27 *'And there will be goats' milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and maintenance for thy maidens'* — the chapter closes with abundance flowing outward from careful stewardship — sufficient not only for the caretaker but for the whole household under his care.

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## Reflection

1. Verse 6 values a friend's honest wound over an enemy's flattering kiss. Who in your life gives you this kind of honest friction, and how do you typically respond when they do?

2. Verse 17 pictures friendship as iron sharpening iron — productive, even uncomfortable friction, not just comfort. Is your closest friendship currently sharpening you, or has it settled into something safer and less honest?

3. Verses 23–27 shift suddenly into practical stewardship of flocks and fields. What area of your own responsibilities have you been managing on assumption rather than through the kind of diligent attention this passage describes?



## CHAPTER 28

# Confess and Forsake — Wickedness, Rulers, and the Poor

*Chapter 28 returns forcefully to social justice — corrupt rulers, oppression of the poor, dishonest gain — while also offering one of the book's clearest statements on repentance: concealing sin fails, confessing and forsaking it finds mercy. Fear and boldness, hiding and confession, run through the chapter as recurring, opposite pairs.*

- 1 *'The wicked flee when no man pursueth; but the righteous are bold as a lion'* — guilt itself is shown producing fear even without an actual threat, while a clear conscience is credited with a courage that needs no external justification.
- 2 *'For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof; but by men of understanding and knowledge the state thereof shall be prolonged'* — political instability and turnover are tied directly to a nation's moral condition, while wise, knowledgeable leadership is credited with lasting stability.
- 3 *'A needy man that oppresseth the poor is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food'* — oppression is especially bitter when it comes from someone who should understand poverty firsthand; the destructive rain image suggests total, unmitigated loss.
- 4 *'They that forsake the law praise the wicked; but such as keep the law contend with them'* — a person's own moral standard determines how they evaluate others; abandoning the law leads naturally to approving what should be opposed.
- 5 *'Evil men understand not justice; but they that seek Jehovah understand all things'* — moral perception itself is tied to relationship with God — justice isn't simply obvious to everyone equally; wickedness is shown actually clouding one's ability to see it clearly.

6 *'Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich'* — repeated in spirit from 19:1 and 28:6 itself elsewhere in the book, the comparison insists again that integrity in poverty outranks corruption in wealth.

7 *'Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son; but he that is a companion of gluttons shameth his father'* — choice of companionship (compare 13:20) is again shown to be a defining, visible marker of a young person's character.

8 *'He that augmenteth his substance by interest and increase, gathereth it for him that hath pity on the poor'* — exploitative gain is described as ultimately temporary, destined in the end to benefit someone more generous than its original collector.

9 *'He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination'* — a striking claim: refusing to listen to God's instruction corrupts even the sincerity of worship offered afterward; the two cannot be separated.

10 *'Whoso causeth the upright to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit; but the perfect shall inherit good'* — the recurring self-trapping image returns once more, applied specifically to someone who deliberately corrupts another person's integrity.

11 *'The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out'* — wealth is shown as no guarantee of actual insight; genuine understanding, wherever it's found, sees through mere self-assured confidence.

12 *'When the righteous triumph, there is great glory; but when the wicked rise, men hide themselves'* — public mood itself is shown tracking directly with who holds power — celebration under righteous leadership, concealment and fear under wicked rule.

13 *'He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy'* — one of the clearest statements on repentance anywhere in the Old Testament: concealment guarantees failure, while honest confession paired with genuine change is what actually secures mercy.

14 *'Happy is the man that feareth alway; but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief'* — a healthy, ongoing reverence and self-vigilance (not anxiety) is contrasted with the calcified defiance of a hardened heart.

15 *'As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear, so is a wicked ruler over a poor people'* — two of the most feared predators of the ancient world capture just how dangerous unrestrained power becomes when wielded against people with no means to defend

themselves.

16 *'The prince that lacketh understanding is also a great oppressor; but he that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days'* — lack of understanding in a ruler is linked directly to oppression, while freedom from greed is tied once more to the book's recurring promise of longevity.

17 *'A man that is laden with the blood of any person shall flee unto the pit; let no man stay him'* — the guilt of violent bloodshed is described as so serious that it drives the guilty toward their own destruction, with the proverb offering no rescue for the unrepentant.

18 *'Whoso walketh uprightly shall be delivered; but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once'* — integrity is credited with providing genuine protection, while a crooked path is described collapsing suddenly rather than gradually.

19 *'He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread; but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough'* — nearly identical to 12:11, steady labor is contrasted once more with the temptation to chase empty pursuits or company instead.

20 *'A faithful man shall abound with blessings; but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be unpunished'* — faithfulness over time is set against the impatience of trying to get rich quickly, the latter treated as morally suspect rather than merely inefficient.

21 *'To have respect of persons is not good; neither that a man should transgress for a piece of bread'* — favoritism in judgment is condemned again, this time paired with the observation that even small, seemingly minor bribes (a piece of bread) can corrupt a person's integrity.

22 *'He that hath an evil eye hasteth after riches, and knoweth not that want shall come upon him'* — greed is described as actually blind to its own outcome — so focused on gain that it fails to see the poverty it's actually racing toward.

23 *'He that rebuketh a man shall afterward find more favor than he that flattereth with the tongue'* — honest correction is shown, over time, earning more genuine respect than flattery ever manages to secure.

24 *'Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression, the same is the companion of a destroyer'* — self-justified theft from one's own parents, however rationalized, is placed in the same moral category as active destruction.

25 *'He that is of a greedy spirit stirreth up strife; but he that putteth his trust in Jehovah shall be made fat'* — greed and trust in God are set against each other as two entirely different foundations for security, one producing conflict, the other genuine flourishing.

26 *'He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool; but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered'* — self-reliance apart from outside wisdom is named directly as foolishness, echoing the book's central warning in 3:5 against leaning on one's own understanding alone.

27 *'He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack; but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse'* — generosity toward the poor is again linked to provision, while willful blindness to their need is met with active curse rather than mere neutrality.

28 *'When the wicked rise, men hide themselves; but when they perish, the righteous increase'* — the chapter's closing line returns to verse 12's observation about visible public response, now extending it to show the righteous actually flourishing once wicked power finally falls.

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## Reflection

1. Verse 13 contrasts concealing sin with confessing and forsaking it. Is there something you're currently managing through concealment rather than honest confession and actual change?

2. Verses 3, 8, 15, and 27 all return to how the poor are treated by those with power or resources. Where in your own sphere of influence, however small, do you have opportunity to act on behalf of someone with less power than you?

3. Verse 26 calls self-reliance apart from wisdom foolish. What decision are you currently making primarily by trusting your own judgment, without seeking outside counsel or wisdom?



## CHAPTER 29

# Where There Is No Vision — The Last of Solomon's Proverbs

*Chapter 29 closes the Hezekiah collection with a final concentrated look at governance, discipline, and the danger of habitual, hardened resistance to correction. Its most famous line — 'where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint' — captures the chapter's larger concern: what happens to individuals and nations alike when guidance is ignored or absent.*

1 *'He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy'* — the danger isn't a single refusal of correction but repeated refusal — a hardening process that eventually forecloses any possibility of recovery.

2 *'When the righteous are increased, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man beareth rule, the people sigh'* — the character of leadership is shown having direct, felt consequences on the general public mood — joy or groaning, depending on who governs.

3 *'Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father; but he that keepeth company with harlots wasteth his substance'* — the book's opening theme of a father's joy or grief (10:1) returns once more, now tied specifically to the temptations warned against back in chapters 5–7.

4 *'The king by justice establisheth the land; but he that exacteth gifts overthroweth it'* — just governance is credited with national stability, while corrupt extraction (bribery, unjust taxation) is shown actively undermining it.

5 *'A man that flattereth his neighbor spreadeth a net for his steps'* — flattery is revealed as a trap disguised as kindness, catching its recipient off guard precisely because it feels good to receive.

6 *'In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare; but the righteous doth sing and rejoice'* — wrongdoing and righteousness are shown producing opposite internal experiences — entrapment on one side, genuine joy on the other.

7 *'The righteous taketh knowledge of the cause of the poor; the wicked hath not understanding to know it'* — awareness of injustice toward the vulnerable is treated as a direct marker of righteousness; indifference to it, a marker of its absence.

8 *'Scoffers set a city in a flame; but wise men turn away wrath'* — the same community can be destabilized or calmed depending on which kind of person has influence within it.

9 *'If a wise man hath a controversy with a foolish man, whether he be angry or laugh, there will be no rest'* — a candid acknowledgment that some disputes simply cannot be resolved through reasoned engagement, because one party isn't operating in good faith to begin with.

10 *'The bloodthirsty hate him that is perfect; and as for the upright, they seek his life'* — integrity is shown provoking active hostility from the violent, not merely indifference — goodness itself can become a target.

11 *'A fool uttereth all his anger; but a wise man keepeth it back and stilleth it'* — total, unfiltered emotional expression is contrasted with the wise person's capacity to restrain and calm their own anger before it's fully released.

12 *'If a ruler hearkeneth to falsehood, all his servants are wicked'* — corruption at the top is shown cascading downward; a leader's willingness to entertain lies effectively trains an entire administration toward the same behavior.

13 *'The poor man and the oppressor meet together; Jehovah lighteneth the eyes of them both'* — echoing 22:2, shared humanity and shared dependence on God's provision are affirmed even across the starkest social divide.

14 *'The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever'* — just treatment of society's most vulnerable is again tied directly to a ruler's own lasting legitimacy and stability.

15 *'The rod and reproof give wisdom; but a child left to himself causeth shame to his mother'* — active correction, not passive neglect, is credited with producing wisdom in a child; the alternative, being left entirely to one's own devices, is shown producing shame instead.

16 *'When the wicked are increased, transgression increaseth; but the righteous shall look upon their fall'* — wickedness is shown compounding when unchecked, while the righteous are promised eventual vindication in witnessing its collapse.

17 *'Correct thy son, and he will give thee rest; yea, he will give delight unto thy soul'* — the long-term relational reward of consistent discipline is named directly — not merely a well-behaved child, but a source of genuine parental peace and joy.

18 *'Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint; but he that keepeth the law, happy is he'* — perhaps the chapter's best-known line: without a clear sense of purpose or divine direction, self-restraint erodes; adherence to God's revealed instruction is what actually anchors ordered, meaningful life.

19 *'A servant will not be corrected by words; for though he understand, he will not give heed'* — verbal instruction alone is shown as insufficient for someone unwilling to actually change, regardless of their intellectual comprehension of it.

20 *'Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him'* — echoing verse 12's judgment on self-conceit, impulsive speech is ranked as an even more discouraging trait than ordinary foolishness.

21 *'He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become a son at the last'* — a caution against excessive indulgence, even toward someone in a position meant to involve discipline and structure, since it tends to blur necessary boundaries over time.

22 *'An angry man stirreth up strife, and a wrathful man aboundeth in transgression'* — the connection between uncontrolled anger and multiplying wrongdoing is stated plainly, reinforcing themes found throughout the book.

23 *'A man's pride shall bring him low; but he that is of a lowly spirit shall obtain honor'* — nearly identical to 16:18 and 18:12, the pride-before-a-fall pattern is restated once more, its frequent repetition throughout Proverbs reflecting how central this warning is to the whole book's worldview.

24 *'Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul; he heareth the adjuration and uttereth nothing'* — complicity through silence, even when legally bound to testify, is treated as genuine self-harm, not a safe, neutral choice.

25 *'The fear of man bringeth a snare; but whoso putteth his trust in Jehovah shall be safe'* — social anxiety and the desire to please others at any cost is named as a trap,

contrasted directly with the safety found in trusting God instead.

26 *'Many seek the ruler's favor; but a man's judgment cometh from Jehovah'* — ultimate vindication or verdict, the proverb insists, rests with God, not with whatever human authority a person is currently trying to impress.

27 *'An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous; and he that is upright in the way is an abomination to the wicked'* — the chapter's closing line, and the final verse of Solomon's proverbs proper, names an unavoidable reality: righteousness and wickedness are not merely different but mutually repellent, each finding the other genuinely offensive.

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## Reflection

1. Verse 25 names *'the fear of man'* as a *snare*, contrasted with *trust in God*. Where in your life are you currently shaping a decision more around others' approval than around what you believe is actually right?
2. Verse 18 says that without vision, people *'cast off restraint.'* What sense of purpose or direction is currently anchoring your own self-discipline — and where has it grown unclear?
3. Verse 11 contrasts a fool who vents all his anger with a wise person who restrains it. Recall your last flash of real anger — how much of it did you actually let out, and what would restraint have looked like instead?



PART FIVE

## The Words of Agur

Chapter 30

# The Words of Agur



## CHAPTER 30

### Agur's Riddles — The Words of a Humble Sage

*Chapter 30 shifts voice entirely. Agur, otherwise unknown outside this passage, opens not with confidence but with confessed inadequacy — more brutish than any man — before delivering some of the most beautifully constructed riddles in the whole Old Testament. His numerical proverbs (three things... yea, four) are a deliberate teaching device that trains the reader to notice patterns across creation, and every one of them still points back to the same reverence for God that chapter 1 named as the beginning of knowledge.*

<sup>1</sup> 'The words of Agur the son of Jakeh; the oracle. the man saith unto Ithiel, unto Ithiel and Ucal:' — Agur is named as author of this whole chapter, an oracle, meaning a weighty, God-given utterance, addressed to two otherwise unknown hearers, Ithiel and Ucal. Wisdom in Proverbs doesn't only come from kings; here it comes from someone almost entirely unknown to history.

<sup>2</sup> 'Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man;' — Agur opens not by claiming wisdom but by disclaiming it, calling himself more

brutish than any man, without even ordinary human understanding. The chapter's credibility is built, unusually, on confessed insufficiency rather than credentials.

3 *'And I have not learned wisdom, neither have I the knowledge of the Holy One'* — He goes further still: he has not learned wisdom, nor does he have knowledge of the Holy One. This is the posture chapter 1 called the beginning of knowledge — reverent humility — modeled here by the very sage about to speak.

4 *'Who hath ascended up into heaven, and descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in his garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou knowest?'* — Five rhetorical questions, each expecting the same unspoken answer: no one but God. Ascending to heaven, controlling wind, binding water, fixing earth's boundaries, naming His own Son — Agur is deliberately echoing Job 38, putting the reader in the same position Job was put in: silenced by the sheer scale of what only God can do.

5 *'Every word of God is tried: he is a shield unto them that take refuge in him'* — Every word of God is tried, tested like refined metal, which is why He functions as a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Trustworthy words are what make someone safe to hide behind.

6 *'Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar'* — A direct warning against adding to Scripture, a principle Moses had already stated (Deuteronomy 4:2) and Revelation will restate at the Bible's very close (Revelation 22:18). Human additions to God's words don't strengthen them, they falsify them, and falsifying God's word makes the one who adds a liar.

7 *'Two things have I asked of thee; deny me them not before I die.'* — Agur's famous prayer begins: two things asked, and asked urgently, before death makes the asking pointless. What follows is one of the most personally revealing requests in all of Proverbs.

8 *'Remove far from me falsehood and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me.'* — Not wealth, not poverty, just what is needful — the same request Jesus later teaches His disciples to pray, give us this day our daily bread. Sufficiency, not surplus, is the goal.

9 *'Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is Jehovah? or lest I be poor, and steal, and use profanely the name of my God'* — The reasoning behind the prayer: abundance breeds the temptation to deny God, calling His very existence into question, while

desperation breeds the temptation to steal and dishonor His name. Agur understands his own heart well enough to fear both directions equally.

10 *'Slander not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be held guilty'* — A warning against slandering a servant to his master, not because servants are beyond correction, but because the one doing the slandering may find the resulting curse falling back on himself instead.

11 *'There is a generation that curse their father, and bless not their mother'* — The first of the chapter's four 'generation' sayings: a generation defined by cursing their own father and refusing to bless their mother, naming the collapse of the fifth commandment as a marker of a corrupted age.

12 *'There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness'* — A generation convinced of its own purity while still, in reality, unwashed from real filthiness. Self-perception and actual moral condition are shown here to be two entirely different things.

13 *'There is a generation, oh how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up'* — A generation marked by visible arrogance, lofty eyes, lifted eyelids — pride made so plain it is written on the face before it is ever spoken aloud.

14 *'There is a generation whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men'* — A generation whose very teeth are weaponized, swords and knives, turned specifically against the poor and needy. Agur names predatory exploitation of the vulnerable as a defining sin of a corrupted culture, not a minor one.

15 *'The horseleach hath two daughters, crying, Give, give. there are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four that say not, Enough.'* — The horseleach's daughters, crying 'give, give,' introduce the chapter's first numbered riddle: things that are never satisfied. Insatiable appetite is about to be catalogued like a naturalist cataloguing a species.

16 *'Sheol; and the barren womb; the earth that is not satisfied with water; and the fire that saith not, Enough'* — Four things never satisfied: Sheol, a barren womb, dry earth, and fire. Each represents a different kind of hunger, death, longing, thirst, consumption, that by its very nature can never say enough, a sober warning against modeling human appetite on any of them.

17 *'The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it'* — A vivid, almost violent warning against dishonoring parents: the eye that mocks a father and despises a mother pictured as carrion for ravens and young eagles. Contempt for parents, in Agur's world, ends in exposure and ruin.

18 *'There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not:'* — The second numbered riddle opens: things too wonderful to fully trace, a deliberate turn from the ugliness of verse 17 toward pure, marveling wonder.

19 *'The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maiden'* — Four ways that leave no visible track: an eagle's path in the sky, a serpent's path on a rock, a ship's path on the sea, and a man's path with a maiden. All four involve a kind of vanishing wonder that human wisdom can observe but never fully explain.

20 *'So is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness'* — The riddle's dark twist: an adulterous woman moves with that same untraceable ease, eating, wiping her mouth, and denying any wrongdoing at all. What was marvel in verses 18-19 becomes chilling here, untraceability used to hide guilt instead of displaying wonder.

21 *'For three things the earth doth tremble, and for four, which it cannot bear:'* — The third numbered riddle: things the earth cannot bear. The list is about to catalogue status arriving before character is ready to carry it.

22 *'For a servant when he is king; and a fool when he is filled with food;'* — A servant made king, and a fool who is well-fed — the first two of four intolerable reversals, each a picture of power or plenty landing on someone with no formed character to carry it well.

23 *'For an odious woman when she is married; and a handmaid that is heir to her mistress'* — A hateful woman finally married, and a maid who displaces her own mistress complete the four; the earth 'trembles' not at power itself, but at status handed to someone unready for it.

24 *'There are four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise:'* — The fourth numbered riddle turns from what is unbearable to what is exemplary: small creatures on the earth that are nonetheless exceedingly wise. Size, the introduction already implies, is about to be dismissed as the measure that matters.

25 *'The ants are a people not strong, yet they provide their food in the summer;'* — Ants, a people not strong, yet who provide their food in summer — the first example of wisdom substituting for strength, foresight doing what muscle cannot.

26 *'The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks;'* — Conies, feeble creatures, yet who make their houses in the rocks — vulnerability compensated for by choosing the right shelter rather than by fighting for a worse one.

27 *'The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands;'* — Locusts, with no king at all, yet who go forth all of them by bands — order and cooperation achieved without any centralized authority forcing it.

28 *'The lizard taketh hold with her hands, yet is she in kings' palaces'* — The lizard, small enough to take hold with her own hands, yet found within kings' palaces — persistence and opportunism carrying a creature further than its size would predict. Strategy, community, and persistence are what these four small creatures actually have in common.

29 *'There are three things which are stately in their march, yea, four which are stately in going;'* — The final numbered riddle names things that move with visible dignity, a shift from small and wise to large and stately.

30 *'The lion, which is mightiest among beasts, and turneth not away for any;'* — The lion, mightiest among beasts, who turns not away for any — confidence in bearing named first among the four.

31 *'The greyhound; the he-goat also; and the king against whom there is no rising up'* — The greyhound, the he-goat, and a king against whom there is no rising up complete the list. This confidence in bearing is simply observed here, without being either praised or condemned outright, unlike the humility praised earlier in the chapter.

32 *'If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thy hand upon thy mouth'* — Agur's closing counsel returns to where he started: if you have been foolish enough to exalt yourself, or have thought evil, the remedy isn't more talking, it's a hand over the mouth.

33 *'For the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood; so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife'* — Churned milk becomes butter, a wrung nose bleeds, and forced anger, the same way, always produces strife. Consequences aren't arbitrary punishments so much as the natural, physical result of

pressure applied past its limit — a fittingly earthy close to the most humble chapter in the book.

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## Reflection

- 1. Agur begins by confessing he lacks even ordinary human understanding, let alone knowledge of the Holy One (vv.2–3). When was the last time you led with genuine uncertainty rather than a settled answer — and what did it open up?*
- 2. Verses 8–9 pray for neither poverty nor riches, only what is needful, naming the specific temptation each extreme carries. Which side of that prayer is actually harder for you to mean right now?*
- 3. The four small creatures of verses 24–28 thrive through wisdom, not strength or size. Where in your own life are you trying to compensate with force or size for what actually calls for a small, steady strategy instead?*



PART SIX

## The Words of King Lemuel

Chapter 31

# The Words of King Lemuel



## CHAPTER 31

### The Words of Lemuel's Mother, and the Woman Who Fears the LORD

*The book's final chapter has two halves and one unifying thread: instruction that comes through a mother, first spoken (vv.1–9) and then, many understand, embodied (vv.10–31). The second half is a masterwork of Hebrew poetry, twenty-two lines, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order, an acrostic that makes the point structurally as well as verbally: this woman's excellence runs, quite literally, from A to Z. She is Proverbs' answer, in flesh and daily labor, to the personified Wisdom who first called out in chapter 8.*

<sup>1</sup> 'The words of king Lemuel; the oracle which his mother taught him' — King Lemuel is otherwise unidentified in Scripture. What is certain is the source of his instruction: not a tutor or a general, but his own mother, delivering an oracle with the same weight Agur's carried in chapter 30.

<sup>2</sup> 'What, my son? and what, O son of my womb? and what, O son of my vows?' — The threefold repetition, my son, son of my womb, son of my vows, is maternal urgency compressed into a single verse; every relationship she has to him is invoked before she

says a single word of actual instruction.

3 *'Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings'* — The first warning: don't give your strength to women who destroy kings, almost certainly drawn from the same cautionary tradition chapters 5–7 built at length, now compressed into royal-specific counsel from a mother who likely watched it happen in her own court.

4 *'It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes to say, Where is strong drink?'* — The second warning begins: it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes to crave strong drink. Privilege, this mother insists, raises the stakes of self-control rather than lowering them.

5 *'Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the justice due to any that is afflicted'* — The reasoning follows immediately: impaired judgment at the top doesn't just harm the ruler, it perverts justice specifically for the afflicted, the very people a ruler exists to protect.

6 *'Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul.'* — A surprising turn: strong drink does have a place, but not on a throne. It belongs instead with the perishing, offered as temporary relief to someone with nothing left to lose.

7 *'Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more'* — Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more — the distinction isn't that alcohol is evil, but that a king cannot afford the numbness a genuinely suffering person sometimes needs.

8 *'Open thy mouth for the dumb, in the cause of all such as are left desolate'* — The mother's counsel turns outward: open your mouth for the mute, for the cause of all who are left desolate. A king's voice exists, in her theology, to be spent on people who have none of their own.

9 *'Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and minister justice to the poor and needy'* — Open thy mouth, judge righteously, minister justice to the poor and needy — the charge climaxes here. Justice, for Lemuel's mother, is the entire point of having a throne at all.

10 *'A worthy woman who can find? for her price is far above rubies'* — The famous opening line of the acrostic: a worthy woman's value outpricing rubies isn't romantic

flattery, it's an economic claim, set in the same marketplace language chapter 8 used for Wisdom herself, who is better than rubies (8:11). The connection is deliberate — this woman is Wisdom made visible in an ordinary household.

11 *'The heart of her husband trusteth in her, and he shall have no lack of gain'* — Her husband's trust in her isn't cautious or partial, it's total, and it directly produces material gain, tying his prosperity to her competence rather than positioning her as a decorative dependent.

12 *'She doeth him good and not evil all the days of her life'* — Her entire life's pattern, all the days, is summarized in one line: consistent good, no evil. Character here isn't measured by a single dramatic act but by decades of unremarkable faithfulness.

13 *'She seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands'* — She seeks wool and flax, and works willingly with her hands — competence paired with genuine desire, not obligation. The poem never once suggests her labor is drudgery.

14 *'She is like the merchant-ships; she bringeth her bread from afar'* — Comparing her to merchant ships casts her as an active importer, not a passive homemaker; she reaches beyond her own household's borders to secure what it needs.

15 *'She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth food to her household, and their task to her maidens'* — She rises before dawn, and her labor immediately provides for two groups, her own household and her servant girls, establishing from the poem's earliest verses that her competence has a generous, outward reach, not just an inward one.

16 *'She considereth a field, and buyeth it; with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard'* — She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. Financial agency and physical labor are shown operating together, not as separate spheres.

17 *'She girdeth her loins with strength, and maketh strong her arms'* — Physical strength is explicitly praised, loins girded, arms made strong, refusing to separate wisdom from bodily vigor and stamina.

18 *'She perceiveth that her merchandise is profitable; her lamp goeth not out by night'* — Her business sense is confirmed by results, she perceives her merchandise is profitable, and her diligence extends into the night; the lamp that doesn't go out becomes, centuries later, an image many readers connect to the wise virgins of Matthew 25.

19 *'She layeth her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle'* — Distaff and spindle, the era's basic textile tools, appear here not as symbols of confinement but of skilled, hands-on productivity, the ancient equivalent of running a small manufacturing operation.

20 *'She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy'* — Her hands, busy throughout the poem with business and craft, open just as readily to the poor and needy. Competence and compassion are presented as the same set of hands doing two kinds of work, not as competing priorities.

21 *'She is not afraid of the snow for her household; for all her household are clothed with scarlet'* — Preparedness, not anxiety, is her posture toward hardship; her household is clothed in scarlet, doubly warm, so winter arrives and finds nothing to threaten.

22 *'She maketh for herself carpets of tapestry; her clothing is fine linen and purple'* — She makes her own tapestries and dresses in fine linen and purple, colors and fabrics associated with royalty and wealth, without the poem ever suggesting this beauty was handed to her. She made it, and she earned it.

23 *'Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land'* — Her husband's public honor, sitting among the elders in the gate, is explicitly credited to her; his standing in the community rests in part on the household she has built, an unusually direct statement of a wife's public influence in an ancient text.

24 *'She maketh linen garments and selleth them, and delivereth girdles unto the merchant'* — Her enterprise reaches an export market, she sells linen garments and delivers to merchants directly, closing the loop on a portrait that has, from the beginning, refused to confine her competence to the house alone.

25 *'Strength and dignity are her clothing; and she laugheth at the time to come'* — Strength and dignity are described as her actual clothing, worn as naturally and constantly as fabric, which is why she can laugh at whatever the future holds rather than fear it. Security built on character doesn't erode with circumstance.

26 *'She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and the law of kindness is on her tongue'* — When she finally speaks, only here, two-thirds through the poem, it's wisdom paired with kindness, the law of kindness on her tongue, establishing that her considerable competence never once curdled into harshness.

27 *'She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness'* — She watches over her whole household's ways and refuses the bread of idleness, the poem's closing indictment of laziness, placed deliberately opposite everything she has just been shown to be.

28 *'Her children rise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her, saying:'* — The poem's emotional peak begins: her own children rise up and call her blessed, her husband also, praise now arriving from the very people who watched her most closely.

29 *'Many daughters have done worthily, but thou excellest them all'* — Many daughters have done worthily, but thou excellest them all — her husband's own words, praise earned in real time from someone who had every opportunity to notice if it wasn't true.

30 *'Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth Jehovah, she shall be praised'* — The poem's real thesis, saved for the second-to-last line: charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, not evil, simply unreliable measures, while a woman who fears the LORD is what actually earns lasting praise. Every domestic, entrepreneurial, and physical virtue just celebrated for twenty-eight verses is finally traced back to this one root, the same root chapter 1 named as the beginning of knowledge itself.

31 *'Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her works praise her in the gates'* — The book's closing line asks that she be given the fruit of her own hands and praised publicly, in the gates, the same public square where Wisdom first cried out in chapters 1 and 8. Proverbs opened with Wisdom calling from the gates and closes with a flesh-and-blood woman being praised in that very place: the invitation of chapter 1 has, by the last verse, become a life.

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## Reflection

- 1. Lemuel's mother roots her son's fitness to rule in self-control, not talent (vv.4–5). Where does your own clarity or judgment most often get compromised, and what would guarding it there actually cost you?*
- 2. The worthy woman's competence and her compassion share the same hands (vv.13–20); capability never crowds out generosity. Is there an area where you've let busyness become an excuse for the giving verse 20 describes?*
- 3. Verse 30 names fear of the LORD, not charm or beauty, as what actually earns lasting praise. If everything temporary about your life were stripped away today, what would still be left to praise?*

## About the Author

Rev. George H. Stoddard is an ordained minister and the founder of In His Hands Ministries International. He is also a Southern Gospel and Christian country songwriter and producer, and a prolific author of Christian nonfiction and Bible study resources reaching readers across a growing library of verse-by-verse guides to Scripture. His work is built on a single conviction: that the Bible is meant to be read closely, book by book and verse by verse, by ordinary believers — not summarized for them.

## About In His Hands Ministries International

In His Hands Ministries International produces Bible study resources, worship music, and outreach tools aimed at putting Scripture directly into the hands of everyday believers. The Beginning of Knowledge is part of an ongoing library of verse-by-verse study guides covering books across both Testaments.

## A Closing Word

Proverbs never really ends — it simply hands the reader back to an ordinary day with a longer list of things to notice: a soft answer, a diligent hand, an honest scale, a friend's wound, a fool's excuse, a woman whose lamp does not go out at night. That was always the point. The fear of the LORD was named as the beginning of knowledge in the very first chapter, not its conclusion, which means this study guide was never meant to be a finish line either. Close the book and go be wise in the next ordinary decision in front of you — that was what all nine hundred and fifteen verses were for.

Nine hundred and fifteen verses. Thirty-one chapters. One relentless argument: that reverence for God is not the reward at the end of a wise life, but the door you have to walk through to begin one.

The Beginning of Knowledge is a complete, verse-by-verse study of the book of Proverbs — every chapter, every verse, from Solomon's opening appeal to a son in chapter 1 to the acrostic praise of a worthy woman in chapter 31. Along the way it covers money and work, anger and friendship, the tongue and the heart, kings and neighbors, fools and sluggards, and the two women — Wisdom and Folly — who stand at the city gate calling every reader by name.

Each chapter opens with a short introduction to its themes, walks verse by verse through the full ASV text with clear, application-driven commentary, and closes with reflection questions built for personal study or group discussion. Whether read straight through in a month or slowly savored a page at a time, this guide is built for one purpose: to help ordinary readers actually live inside the book of Proverbs, not just admire it from a distance.

By Rev. George H. Stoddard — In His Hands Ministries International.