

STUDIES IN PROVERBS

BIBLICAL WISDOM FOR DAILY LIVING



ROBERT A. SNYDER

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*The mission of Spring Branch Academy is
to promote the worship of God
through the exposition of Scripture,
the explanation of history,
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To Countryside Bible Church
in gratitude
and in a desire
to further her ministry in Christ—

*To know wisdom and instruction,
to understand words of insight,
to receive instruction in wise dealing,
in righteousness, justice, and equity;
to give prudence to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the youth—
let the wise hear and increase in learning,
and the one who understands obtain guidance,
to understand a proverb and a saying,
the words of the wise and their riddles.*

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

—Proverbs 1:2-7 (ESV)

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A Paraphrase of Proverbs
The Thirty Words of the Wise
June 2018

In the early 1700s, Isaac Watts wrote hymns in *imitation* of the psalms of David. The idea intrigued me. Instead of merely translating the Hebrew words into English words, perhaps we could also translate the Hebrew forms into English forms—not just for the Psalms, but also for the Proverbs. The following collection is my attempt at this idea.

The poems are based on the “words of the wise” found in Proverbs 22:17-24:34. Although scholars debate the relationship of this set of proverbs to a similar Egyptian collection, it may be that the Egyptian collection is edited under divine inspiration in the light of other biblical revelation (see Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*). If so, we have precedence for reclaiming and modifying secular literature for the truth. In some versions of the Bible, this collection is explicitly said to have “thirty words” (Prov. 22:20 NIV). With this in mind, I present to you thirty poems with occasional exhortations interspersed. The exhortations are given without illustration so that you can whisper them to your child eye-to-eye.

Fathers, the days of planting are limited. While you have opportunity, plant the good seed of truth in the heart of your children before tares overtake the garden. Granted, this collection falls short of the Bible itself, and some paraphrases are looser than others, but the biblical idea is still present and the entertainment given is long-lasting. Therefore, seize the day and sow the seed—and may God grant it a meek reception (cf. James 1:21).¹

Give ear, and hear the words of the wise
And set your heart to what I know,
For words are pleasant, when they arise
Assembled and ready from down below.

That in the Lord may be your trust,
I teach you now today—I must!

Have I not written to you thirty words
In counsel and information,
That you may learn and so return
The truth in recitation?

—from Proverbs 22:17-21

¹ For an illustrated version of this collection, designed for reading to children, see Robert A. Snyder, *Thirty Words from the Holy Book* (Jonesville, MI: Spring Branch Book House, 2018).

One

Do not rob the poor because he is poor,
For Jesus is standing at the door.

—from Proverbs 22:22-23

Two

Do not go with a man of heat;
You'll learn his ways and trap your feet.

—from Proverbs 22:24-25

Three

Do not co-sign your neighbor's debt;
If you default, why lose your bed?

—from Proverbs 22:26-27

Four

Do not move the ancient fence,
Which your fathers set with sense.

—from Proverbs 22:28

Five

Do you see a master crafter?
Unknown now, but not hereafter.

—from Proverbs 22:29

Six

If you dine with a king,
Please remember one thing:
 That you are a bloke,
 And he is a king.
So if you love veal and goat,
Put a knife to your throat:
 The food is a lie—
 A deception. Take note!

—from Proverbs 23:1-3

Seven

Do not wear yourself out
 To get lots of money,
For wings it will sprout
 And fly to the sun-ny.

—from Proverbs 23:4-5

Eight

Do not eat the miser's meat,
For as he thinks, so is he.
He may say, "Eat;" it may taste sweet;
But it will make you dizzy.

—from Proverbs 23:6-8

Nine

Do not school the fool;
He'll despise what is wise.

—from Proverbs 23:9

Ten

Do not move the orphan's fence,
For Jesus Christ is his defense.

—from Proverbs 23:10-11

Put your heart into training,
And your ear into learning.

—from Proverbs 23:12

Eleven

Do not spare the rod,
But listen to God:
You spank the boy well
To keep him from hell.

—from Proverbs 23:13-14

My son,
If your heart is wise,
Then my heart is glad;
When your lips speak right,
How glad is your dad!

—from Proverbs 23:15-16

Twelve

Do not envy sinners,
But always fear the Lord;
Soon you'll be a winner—
Your hope has its reward.

—from Proverbs 23:17-18

My son,
Listen up,
Wizen up,
Know the Way to rise on up.

—from Proverbs 23:19

Thirteen

Do not hang out with those who meet
To over-drink and over-eat,
For drunkenness and gluttony
Will lull you into poverty.

—from Proverbs 23:20-21

Listen to your dad and mom forever,
Buy the truth and sell it—never!
Become wise!
Do what's right!
Give your dad and mom delight.

—from Proverbs 23:22-25

Fourteen

My son, give your heart to me.
A tempting girl is a bottomless pit,
A bandit hard to see.

—from Proverbs 23:26-28

Fifteen

Who has trouble?
Who sees double?
Men at bars with beer that bubbles!
Do not linger over liquor,
Let not in the liquor viper;
Seeing things! Saying things!
Like sleeping behind the wheel:
“They beat me up—it’s no big deal!
They beat me up—I didn’t feel!
Waking up has one appeal:
I cannot wait to fill my cup!”

—from Proverbs 23:29-35

Sixteen

Do not envy evil men,
Nor want them as your friend.
They think up harm,
And talk up trouble;
Hellfire is their end.

—from Proverbs 24:1-2

Seventeen

Wisdom built our house;
Discernment moved us in;
Then knowledge filled our many rooms
With precious, pleasant things.

—from Proverbs 24:3-4

Eighteen

With wisdom, you're strong;
With counsel, you're stronger:
Deliverance comes with many a counselor.

—from Proverbs 24:5-6

A fool is too short
To speak in high court.

—from Proverbs 24:7

Nineteen

Two evil men the world abhors:
He who schemes and he who scorns.

—from Proverbs 24:8-9

Twenty

If you're slack on your back—
Oh, the strength that you lack!

—from Proverbs 24:10

Twenty-One

Save those stumbling down to death.
If you should say, "We did not know,"
Does He not know?
Will He not render
According to each man's agenda?

—from Proverbs 24:11-12

Twenty-Two

Honey is so sweet and wholesome;
Wisdom thus is to your soul, son.

—from Proverbs 24:13-14

Twenty-Three

O wicked man, leave off your plan,
The righteous man to plunder.
The righteous fall and rise again;
The wicked fall down under.

—from Proverbs 24:15-16

Twenty-Four

Do not be happy
When your enemy falls,
Lest God be unhappy
And His wrath, recall.

—from Proverbs 24:17-18

Twenty-Five

Do not fret the evil blaze;
For evil men have numbered days.

—from Proverbs 24:19-20

Twenty-Six

Fear the Lord and fear the king,
Rebellion ruins most everything.

—from Proverbs 24:21-22

Twenty-Seven

It is not good to judge a hood good.
Leave the crook on the hook—or be cursed;
Throw the book at the crook and be blessed.

—from Proverbs 24:23-25

An honest answer is a friendly kiss.

—from Proverbs 24:26

Twenty-Eight

Outside, outside, outside first—
Build your house, after your work.

—from Proverbs 24:27

Twenty-Nine

Do not bear false witness.
Do not say, “A tit for tat, I’ll pay him back.”

—from Proverbs 24:28-29

Thirty

I went by the farm of the lazy,
The farmer whose thinking was hazy:
 The weeds were grown up,
 The fences were down;
I pondered and thought
As I looked all around,
 “So why does this man act so crazy?”
I saw and I thought,
I looked and was taught
The crazy way lazy men say:
 “A wee sleep, a wee nap,
 With my hands on my lap.”
Then poverty steals you away.

—from Proverbs 24:30-34

A Study in Proverbs
Theology in the Book of Proverbs
June 2018

The Sovereignty of God

Creator

“The LORD by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding He established the heavens.

By His knowledge the deeps were broken up and skies drip with dew” (3:19-20).²

“The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old” (8:22).

“While He had not yet made the earth and fields, nor the first dust of the world.

When He established the heavens, I was there,

when He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep,

when He made firm the skies above,

when the springs of the deep became fixed,

when He set for the sea its boundary so that the water would not transgress His command,

when He marked out the foundations of the earth;

then I was beside Him, as a master workman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him,
rejoicing in the world, His earth, and having my delight in the sons of men” (8:26-31).

“The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil” (16:4).

The Plans of Man and the Sovereignty of God

“The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD” (16:1).

“Commit your works to the LORD and your plans will be established” (16:3).

“The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps” (16:9).

“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD” (16:33).

“Many plans are in a man’s heart, but the counsel of the LORD will stand” (19:21).

“Man’s steps are ordained by the LORD, how then can man understand his way?” (20:24).

“The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes” (21:1).

“There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the LORD” (21:30).

“The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the LORD” (21:31).

The Justice of God

Abomination vs. Delight – Justice Rooted in the Character of God

“Do not envy a man of violence and do not choose any of his ways.

For the devious are an abomination to the LORD; but He is intimate with the upright” (3:31-32).

“There are six things which the LORD hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him:

haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,

a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies,

and one who spreads strife among brothers” (6:16-19).

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

“The perverse in heart are an abomination to the LORD, but the blameless in their walk are His delight” (11:20).

“Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal faithfully are His delight” (12:22).

“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is His delight” (15:8).

“The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but He loves one that pursues righteousness” (15:9).

“Evil plans are an abomination to the LORD, but pleasant words are pure” (15:26).

“Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; assuredly, he will not be unpunished” (16:5).

“He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous,

both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD” (17:15).

“Differing weights and differing measures, both of them are abominable to the LORD” (20:10).

“Differing weights are an abomination to the LORD, and a false scale is not good” (20:23).

“To do righteousness and justice is desired by the LORD more than sacrifice” (21:3).

“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, how much more when he brings it with evil intent!” (21:27)

² Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this study are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

Economics – Just Balance and Weights

- “A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is His delight” (11:1).
“A just balance and scales belong to the LORD; all the weights of the bag are His concern” (16:11).
“Differing weights and differing measures, both of them are abominable to the LORD” (20:10).
“Differing weights are an abomination to the LORD, and a false scale is not good” (20:23).

Defender of the Poor

- “He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, but he who is gracious to the needy honors Him” (14:31; cf. 22:2).
“The LORD will tear down the house of the proud, but He will establish the boundary of the widow” (15:25).
“He who mocks the poor taunts his Maker; he who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished” (17:5; cf. 22:2).
“He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered” (21:13).
“Do not move the ancient boundary or go into the fields of the fatherless,
for their Redeemer is strong; He will please their case against you” (23:10-11).
“One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and He will repay him for his good deed” (19:17).
“The rich and the poor have a common bond, the LORD is the maker of them all” (22:2).
“Do not rob the poor because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate;
for the LORD will plead their case and take the life of those who rob them” (22:22-23).
“Deliver those who are being taken away to death, and those who are staggering to slaughter, Oh hold them back.
If you say, ‘See, we did not know this,’ does He not consider who weighs the hearts?
And does He not know it who keeps your soul?
And will He not render to man according to his work?” (24:11-12)
“The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: the LORD gives light to the eyes of both” (29:13).

Enemies

- “When a man’s ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him” (16:7).
“Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;
or the LORD will see it and be displeased, and turn His anger away from him” (24:17-18).
“Do not say, ‘I will repay evil’; wait for the LORD, and He will save you” (20:22).
“If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;
for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you” (25:21-22).

Eyes of the LORD and the Heart of Man

- “For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, and He watches all his paths” (5:21).
“The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good” (15:3).
“Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD, how much more the hearts of men!” (15:11).
“All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the LORD weighs the motives” (16:2).
“The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests hearts” (17:3).
“The foolishness of man ruins his way, and his heart rages against the LORD” (19:3).
“The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the LORD has made both of them” (20:12).
“The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all the innermost parts of his being” (20:27).
“Every man’s way is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the hearts” (21:2).
“The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge, but He overthrows the words of the treacherous man” (22:12).

Justice – Discriminating between the Righteous and the Wicked

- “The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the dwelling of the righteous” (3:33).
“The LORD will not allow the righteous to hunger, but He will reject the craving of the wicked” (10:3).
“It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it” (10:22).
“The way of the LORD is a stronghold to the upright, but ruin to the workers of iniquity” (10:29).
“Assuredly, the evil man will not go unpunished, but the descendants of the righteous will be delivered” (11:21).
“The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous” (15:29).
“The mouth of an adulteress is a deep pit; he who is cursed of the LORD will fall into it” (22:14).
“Do not fret because of evildoers or be envious of the wicked;
for there will be no future for the evil man; the lamp of the wicked will be put out” (24:19-20).
“Many seek the ruler’s favor, but justice for man comes from the LORD” (29:26).

Favor from God

“Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.
So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man” (3:3-4).
“Though He scoffs at the scoffers, yet He gives grace to the afflicted” (3:34).
“For he who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD” (8:35)
“A good man will obtain favor from the LORD, but He will condemn a man who devises evil” (12:2).
“He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD” (18:22).

The Knowledge of God

The Necessity of the Word of God for Wisdom

“For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.
He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity,
guarding the paths of justice, and He preserves the way of His godly ones” (2:6-8).
“My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD or loathe His reproof,
for whom the LORD loves He reproves, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights” (3:11-12).
“The one who despises the word will be in debt to it,
but the one who fears the commandment will be rewarded” (13:13).
“A divine decision is in the lips of the king; his mouth should not err in judgment” (16:10).
“He who gives attention to the word will find good, and blessed is he who trusts in the LORD” (16:20).
“It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter” (25:2).
“Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the LORD understand all things” (28:5).
“Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained, but happy is he who keeps the law” (29:18).
“Surely I am more stupid than any man, and I do not have the understanding of a man.
Neither have I learned wisdom, nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One.
Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists?
Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth?
What is His name or His son’s name? Surely you know!
Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.
Do not add to His words or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar” (30:2-6).

Fear of the LORD

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (1:7).
“Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but they will not find me,
because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD” (1:28-29).
“...then you will discern the fear of the LORD and discover the knowledge of God” (2:5).
“Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil.
It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones” (3:7-8).
“The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate” (8:13).
“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (9:10).
“The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened” (10:27).
“In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and his children will have refuge” (14:26).
“He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD, but he who is devious in his ways despises Him” (14:2).
“The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death” (14:27).
“Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and turmoil with it” (15:16).
“The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, and before honor comes humility” (15:33).
“By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil” (16:6).
“The fear of the LORD leads to life, so that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil” (19:23).
“The reward of humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, honor and life” (22:4).
“Do not let your heart envy sinners, but live in the fear of the LORD always.
Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off” (23:17-18).
“My son, fear the LORD and the king; do not associate with those who are given to change,
for their calamity will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin that comes from both of them?” (24:21-22).
“How blessed is the man who fears always, but he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity” (28:14).
“Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised” (31:30).

Trust in the LORD

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.

In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight” (3:5-6).

“The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe” (18:10).

“He who gives attention to the word will find good, and blessed is he who trusts in the LORD” (16:20).

“So that your trust may be in the LORD, I have taught you today, even you” (22:19).

“An arrogant man stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the LORD will prosper” (28:25).

“The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted” (29:25).

Honor the LORD

“Honor the LORD from your wealth and from the first of all your produce;

so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine” (3:9-10).

“He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, but he who is gracious to the needy honors Him” (14:31; cf. 22:2).

“Two things I asked of You, do not refuse me before I die:

Keep deception and lies far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches;

feed me with the food that is my portion,

that I not be full and deny You and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’

or that I not be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God” (30:7-9).

Wife

“He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD” (18:22).

“House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD” (19:14).

Confidence

“Do not be afraid of sudden fear nor of the onslaught of the wicked when it comes;

for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught” (25-26).

“In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and his children will have refuge” (14:26).

Personal God

“...leaves the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God” (2:17).

“...that I not be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God” (30:9b).

A Study in Proverbs
The Tongue – Counsel on Our Words
October 2011

Introduction: The Power of the Tongue

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Proverbs 18:21).³

Destruction: Death is in the power of the tongue.

For example, the way of the hypocrite is destructive:

“The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor,
but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered” (11:9).

As for the wicked, violence covers his mouth (10:11).

Verbal abuse is perhaps more debilitating than physical abuse, since words can penetrate deeper than wounds:

“Rebuke is more effective for a wise man than a hundred blows on a fool” (17:10).

“The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, but who can bear a broken spirit?” (18:14).

Even casual joking involves deception and risks injury:

“Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death,
is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, ‘I was only joking!’” (26:18-19; cf. 12:18a).

A fool’s tongue not only harms others, but leads to self-ruin as well:

“Wise people store up knowledge, but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction” (10:14).

“A fool’s lips enter into contention, and his mouth calls for blows” (18:6).

“A fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul” (18:7).

Construction: Life is in the power of the tongue.

The tongue provides *food* and *drink* for the needy soul:

“The mouth of the righteous is a well of life, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked” (10:11).

“The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of wisdom” (10:21).

“The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death” (13:14).

The tongue also provides *medicine* for the hurting soul:

“There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health” (12:18).

“Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad” (12:25).

“The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and a good report makes the bones healthy” (15:30).

In light of these verses, let us consider how rich each of us can be in words, with much to give to others.

Even the poorest among us can by wise words surpass all others in giving.

Also, as with the fool hurting himself by his tongue, so the tongue of the wise helps himself:

“A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth,
and the recompense of a man’s hands will be rendered to him” (12:14; cf. 18:21, quoted above).

Disclaimer: The tongue is not almighty.

Though the tongue is a powerful tool for good or for bad, it often cannot accomplish the job alone:

“In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty” (14:23).

“The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother” (29:15).

“A servant will not be corrected by mere words; for though he understands, he will not respond” (29:19).

The world may boast, “With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?”

but the LORD speaks on behalf of the oppressed and prevails (Psalm 12:4, 5).

His words are “pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Psalm 12:6).

³ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this study are from the New King James Version (NKJV).

Four Guidelines for the Use of the Tongue

Our words should be true, few, slow, and apropos.

Note: *apropos* (ap-rah-POH) means “to the point, pertinent, at an opportune time.”

Our words should be true.

True and straightforward speech deals kindly with people, like a kiss of greeting:

“It is not good to show partiality in judgment.

He who says to the wicked, ‘You are righteous,’ him the people will curse; nations will abhor him.

But those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will come upon them.

He who gives a right answer kisses the lips” (24:23-26, lit. “a straightforward answer”).

In contrast to such a genuine greeter, the deceiver is all show:

“Fervent lips with a wicked heart are like earthenware covered with silver dross.

He who hates, disguises it with his lips, and lays up deceit within himself;

When he speaks kindly, do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart;

Though his hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness will be revealed before the assembly” (26:23-26).

In particular, we should guard against two common kinds of falsehood:

Flattery – to speak better of others than they truly are

Slander – to speak worse of others than they truly are

In the long run, reproof is better than flattery, which ensnares and ruins others:

“A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, and a flattering mouth works ruin” (26:28).

“Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed.

Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (27:5-6).

“He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward than he who flatters with the tongue” (28:23).

“A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet” (29:5).

As for slander, it is often the source of strife:

“An ungodly man digs up evil, and it is on his lips like a burning fire.

A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends” (16:27-28).

“Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases.

As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife.

The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body” (26:20-22; cf. 18:8).

Our words should be few.

If our words are few, we will *live* and *let live*.

First, we will *live*, in that we ourselves will benefit:

“He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction” (13:3).

“Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles” (21:23).

Speaking few words leads to less sin:

“In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise” (10:19).

Speaking few words leads to less embarrassment:

“Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace;

when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive” (17:28).

Speaking few words leads to less harm due to gossips:

“He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets;

therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips” (20:19).

Second, we will also *let live*, in that we will often pass over faults in silence:

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

“A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter” (11:13).

“A fool’s wrath is known at once, but a prudent man covers shame” (12:16).

“A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims foolishness” (12:23).

“He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends” (17:9).

Trust is built by not revealing secrets, and by not recalling the past unnecessarily.

Ceasing even to whisper about past problems starves the fires of contention (see 26:20, quoted above).

Our words should be slow.

To be hasty in speech is a very bad sign:

“Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (29:20).

Much harm comes from *hot* and *hasty* words:

“A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention” (15:18).

“There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health” (12:28).

Much verbal abuse is caused by speaking before thinking.

The best place to stop the strife is before it begins—with slowness to speak—and it is an honor to do so:

“The beginning of strife is like releasing water; therefore stop the contention before a quarrel starts” (17:14).

“It is honorable for a man to stop striving, since any fool can start a quarrel” (20:3).

Interestingly, hot and hasty words provoke the same, but real persuasiveness often comes from slow, soft speech:

“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (15:1).

“By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded, and a gentle tongue breaks a bone” (25:15).

To be slow to speak gives time to listen:

“He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him” (18:13).

“The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him” (18:17).

“Also it is not good for a soul to be without knowledge, and he sins who hastens with his feet” (19:2).

To be slow to speak gives time to think:

“The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness” (15:2).

“The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil” (15:28).

“He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit” (17:27).

Our words should be apropos.

It is a delight to have the right word at the right time:

“A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!” (15:23; cf. v.2).

In fact, it is an art to speak aptly—a real work of beauty:

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.

Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear” (25:11-12).

Interestingly, even the best information spoken at the wrong time or in the wrong way can backfire:

“Like one who takes away a garment in cold weather, and like vinegar on soda,
is one who sings songs to a heavy heart” (25:20).

“He who blesses his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning,
it will be counted a curse to him” (27:14).

Sources:

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, New King James Version, Copyright © 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Many of the ideas behind this material came from Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*,

Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1964), pp. 46-49.

A Study in Proverbs
Principles on Parenting
October 1995

The Proverbs were designed not only to instruct the naïve, but also to equip the wise (1:2-6). Therefore, in accordance with their design, may parents arm themselves with these sayings—storing them away, evaluating their own lives by them, and using them in conversation—and as a result, may their children learn to fear God as the true source of wisdom and as their ultimate authority. *God bless you in raising the next generation for Christ!*

The following verses on parenting are taken from chapters 10-31 in the book of Proverbs.

The Risks and Rewards of Parenting

- “A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother” (10:1).⁴
- “A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son despises his mother” (15:20).
- “He who begets a fool does so to his sorrow, and the father of a fool has no joy” (17:21).
- “A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her who bore him” (17:25).
- “A foolish son is destruction to his father, and the contentions of a wife are a constant dripping” (19:13).
- “My son, if your heart is wise, my own heart also will be glad;
and my inmost being will rejoice, when your lips speak what is right” (23:15-16).
- “The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise son will be glad in him” (23:24).
- “Be wise, my son, and make my heart glad, that I may reply to him who reproaches me” (27:11).
- “Her children rise up and bless her...” (31:28).

The Effects of the Parents’ Personal Life on the Family

Deliverance

“Assuredly, the evil man will no go unpunished, but the descendants of the righteous will be delivered” (11:21).

Security

“In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and his children will have refuge” (14:26).
“He who returns evil for good, evil will not depart from his house” (17:13).

Inheritance

“A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children,
and the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous” (13:22).
“There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man swallows it up” (21:20).

Longevity

“The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish woman tears it down with her own hands” (14:1).
“The LORD will tear down the house of the proud, but He will establish the boundary of the widow” (15:25).

Prosperity

“A rigorous man who walks in his integrity—how blessed are his sons after him” (20:7).
“By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established;
and by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches” (24:3-4).

Generational Differences

“Grandchildren are the crown of old men, and the glory of sons is their fathers” (17:6).
“The glory of young men is their strength, and the honor of old men is their gray hair” (20:29).

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this study are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

Children: Description

Dependable Worker

“He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely,
but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully” (10:5).

Teachable

“A wise son accepts his father’s discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke” (13:1).

Good Actions

“It is by his deeds that a lad distinguishes himself if his conduct is pure and right” (20:11).

Children: Duties

Never Harm Parents

“He who assaults his father and drives his mother away is a shameful and disgraceful son” (19:26).

“He who robs his father or his mother, and says, ‘It is not a transgression,’
is the companion of a man who destroys” (28:24).

“There is a kind of man who curses his father and does not bless his mother” (30:11).

“The eye that mocks a father, and scorns a mother,
the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it” (20:17).

Listen to Parents

“Cease listening, my son, to discipline, and you will stray from the words of knowledge” (19:27).

“Listen, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way” (23:19).

“Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old” (23:22).
(Adulthood does not free a son from parental advice.)

Make Parents Glad

“Let your father and your mother be glad, and let her rejoice who gave birth to you” (23:25).
(The previous verse explains how this happens—through the son being wise and righteous.)

Imitate Parents

“Give me your heart, my son, and let your eyes delight in my ways; for a harlot is a deep pit...” (23:26-27a).

Savor Wisdom

“My son, eat honey, for it is good, yes, the honey from the comb is sweet to your taste;
know that wisdom is thus for your soul;
if you find it, then there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off” (24:13-14).

Fear Authority and Be Conservative

“My son, fear the LORD and the king; do not associate with those who are given to change;
for their calamity will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin that comes from both of them” (24:21-22)?

Obey Authority

“He who keeps the law is a discerning son, but he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father” (28:7).

Do Not Party

“He who loves wisdom makes his father glad,
but he who keeps company with harlots wastes his wealth” (29:3).

“Do not give your strength to women, or your ways to that which destroys kings.
It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire strong drink” (31:3-4).

God's Support Group: Siblings and Servants

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

"A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle" (18:19).

"He who pampers his slave from childhood will in the end find him to be a son" (29:21).

"A servant who acts wisely will rule over a son who acts shamefully,
and will share in the inheritance among brothers" (17:2).

Parental Duties

Instruction

Chapters one through nine are filled with introductory sayings about teaching and motivating children. For example, see 1:8-9; 2:1-2; 3:1-2, 21-24; 4:1-2, 10-13, 20-22; 5:1-2; 6:20-23; and 7:1-4.

Discipline

"He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently" (13:24).

"Discipline your son while there is still hope, and do not desire his death" (19:18).

"Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it."

(Literally, it says, "...according to his way," which could be good or bad.)

"Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him" (22:15).

"Do not hold back discipline from the child, although you beat him with the rod, he will not die.

You shall beat him with the rod, and deliver his soul from Sheol" (23:13-14).

"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother" (29:15).

"Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; he will also delight your soul" (29:17).

Inheritance

"House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD" (19:14).

Love First

"Better is a dish of vegetables where love is, than a fattened ox and hatred with it" (15:17).

Provide First

"Prepare you work outside, and make it ready for yourself in the field;
afterwards, then build your house" (24:27).

"She rises also while it is still night and gives food to her household and portions to her maidens" (31:15).

"She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her household are clothed with scarlet" (31:21).

"She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness" (31:27).

A Study in Proverbs
Laziness – A Common Cause of Poverty
August 2013

Introduction

One common cause of poverty is *laziness*.

The lazy man is a common category in Proverbs, and, therefore, we should expect to find a lot of lazy people in life. The word often used to label the lazy man is “sluggard”, which has reference in English to a *slug*—not very fast! The opposite term to the “sluggard” is the “diligent” (10:4; 12:24, 27; 13:4).⁵ Just as the righteous and the wicked are opposite kinds of people, so are the diligent and the lazy.

The Traits of Laziness

1. Missed Opportunities

“The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing” (20:4).

Timing is everything. When opportunity knocks, we must work.
The lazy person is slack in opportunity, and so lacks in necessity.

“He who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame” (10:5).

Prudence is the virtue of working ahead for a foreseen time of need.
Interesting, God grants to a need a particular time for filling it; however, the time may be before the need.
Also, when the time is not seized, it does not return, nor is there necessarily opportunity later to meet the need.
Do not rashly assume that there will be another opportunity later to meet that need.
Please note: The mention of sleep is not accidental. Harvest often demands early mornings and late nights.

In contrast, the ant—a little insect in God’s creation—shows more sense than a lazy person:

“Four things on earth are small, but they are exceedingly wise:

the ants are a people not strong, yet they provide their food in summer; ...” (30:24-25).

“Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.

Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.

How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?

A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,

and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man” (6:6-10).

Note the following traits:

1. The ant prepares food ahead of the time it is needed.
2. The ant does not need a boss to tell him to prepare ahead of time.

Therefore, the ant is both prudent and self-disciplined.

Wisdom involves the proper order of things and then seizing the opportunities as God brings them:

“Prepare your work outside; get everything ready for yourself in the field, and after that build your house” (24:27).

“Whoever tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who guards his master will be honored” (27:18).

2. Incomplete Projects

“Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth” (12:27).

Again, laziness is not simply the lack of working at all, but also the lack of finishing off a project.

Diligence includes follow-through to the end.

“The sluggard buries his hand in the dish and will not even bring it back to his mouth” (19:24).

“The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth” (26:15).

Again, it is not the start of work that counts, but the finishing of work.

Also, giving a meal to a lazy man may not help him, for he lacks initiative to make use of good things he has.

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this study are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

3. Involuntary Labor

“The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor” (12:24).

The lazy man will not work unless forced to work.

“The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor.

All day long he craves and craves, but the righteous gives and does not hold back” (21:25-26).

The lazy man is stubbornly insistent about not working.

He also will complain and complain of lack until it “kills” him, but even then he refuses to work!

In contrast, the ant works in due season without being told by a boss:

“Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.

Without having any chief, officer, or ruler,

she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest” (6:6-7).

4. Excuse-Making

“The sluggard says, ‘There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!’” (22:13).

“The sluggard says, ‘There is a lion in the road! There is a lion in the streets!’” (26:13).

Lazy people are full of excuses and extreme thinking: “I shall be killed!”

Oddly enough, what will truly kill him is refusing to work (21:25)!

Please note that the lazy man may truly believe his irrational fears, and not think that they are excuses.

Therefore, in seeking to help the lazy, be skeptical on the reasons given for not working.

“The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly” (26:16).

The lazy man does believe his own reasoning, and even considers it to be true wisdom.

However, the facts never prove this wisdom out—he lacks and lacks and lacks.

5. Insomnia

“As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed” (26:14).

A lazy person does not sleep well, in contrast to the satisfying sleep of a laborer (Eccl. 5:12).

6. Oversleeping

Twice the Proverbs quote this little saying, both times as traits of the lazy man:

A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,

and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man” (6:6-10; 24:30-34).

The Results of Laziness

1. Poverty

“A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” (10:4).

Diligence implies the persistent plodding of a hard worker.

Laziness is not simply the lack of work, but the lack of persistently working to completion.

2. Loss of Freedom

“The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor” (12:24).

Freedom requires diligence.

3. Unemployment

“Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him” (10:26).

It hurts to depend upon a lazy person.

4. Unfulfilled Desires

“The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied” (13:4).

Laziness and diligence are opposites; both deserve a word study.

5. A Hard Life

“The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway” (15:19).

Lazy people encounter lots of obstacles in life, and find it difficult to make progress.

6. Ruined Property

“Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys” (18:9; cf. 28:24).

Vandalism and laziness both result in a broken possessions, in which things are found incomplete.

To be lazy leads to ruining things.

*“I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense,
and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns;*

the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down.

Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received a little instruction.

A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,

and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man” (24:30-34).

It is publicly obvious to others that the cause to this ruin is simply laziness.

Take too many breaks and you will go broke.

Too many naps and you will be nabbed by poverty.

7. A Comatose Existence

“Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger” (19:15).

Sleepiness is both a cause and a result of laziness.

Laziness is the cause of a coma (“deep sleep”), which in turns leads to hunger.

In other words, laziness produces a deeply-ingrained pattern of living that is as innervating as a coma.

In many regards, a lazy man is just plain oblivious to the big picture.

Conclusion

The essence of laziness is not the absence of work, but the absence of initiative and diligence.

In practice, laziness appears in taking too many breaks, in not finishing projects, and in working only when required.

In contrast, diligence seizes opportunities before need arises, and perseveres to the end.

A Study in Proverbs
The Causes and Cure of Poverty
Fall 2014

Proverbs – Nine Causes of Poverty

1. **Pride** – ignoring instruction and spurning reproof
“Poverty and disgrace come to him who ignores instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is honored” (13:18).⁶
2. **Oppression** – income swept away through injustice (broken systems)
“The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice” (13:23).
3. **Wrongdoing** – the wicked
“The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, but the belly of the wicked suffers want” (13:25).
4. **Stinginess** – the miser in misery
“A stingy man hastens after wealth and does not know that poverty will come upon him” (28:22).
5. **Pleasure** - to love food, drink, or sleep
*“Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich” (21:17).
“Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread” (20:13).*
6. **Laziness** – the lack of diligence at the right time or for the right duration
“A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” (10:4).
7. **Debt** – limits freedom
“The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is slave of the lender” (22:7).
8. **Hastiness** – quick-fix plans
“The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty” (21:5).
9. **Bad Company** – partying and sexual immorality
*“Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat,
for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags” (23:20-21).*

Wisdom – The General Cure of Poverty

*“Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding,
for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold.
She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.
Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor” (3:13-16).*

The God-Factor

God made the world in wisdom; therefore, by wisdom we make it in the world (3:19-23).

Wisdom and the Fear of God

Wisdom begins with the fear of God (1:7; 9:10).

Wisdom comes from the word of God (2:6).

Therefore, we must decide whom we will trust:

*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (3:5-6; cf. 22:19).
“Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered” (28:26).*

Wisdom and the Thoughts of God

With regard to overcoming poverty, it is necessary to think as God thinks about finances:

God finds economic value in wisdom and godly character (8:10-11, 18-21; 24:3-4; 31:10-31).

God denies that there is such a thing as “financial security” (11:28; 23:4-5; 27:23-27).

God often emphasizes the social aspects of poverty (14:20; 19:4, 7).

Wisdom and the Ways of God

With regard to overcoming poverty, it is necessary to act in ways that trust the ways of God:

God has established a general link between diligence and prosperity (10:4).

God generally honors those who honor Him, and who do what is right in the fear of Him (3:9-10; 10:3).

God blesses the generous, who paradoxically prosper (11:24-25).

When we honor the poor, we honor their Maker (14:31).

When we give to the poor, we lend to the Lord (19:17).

When we sell freely to the poor, we are blessed by the poor (11:26).

⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this study are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

The Causes and Cure of Poverty

Introduction

If our bodies are weak and sickly, we visit a doctor for his counsel on what *may* be wrong. So also, if our finances are weak, we should seek counsel too regarding possible causes.

The book of Proverbs is God's book of counsel on practical areas of life.

Theme Question

According to the book of Proverbs, what are some common causes of persistent poverty?

Nine Causes of Poverty

Pride

"Poverty and disgrace come to him who ignores instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is honored" (13:18).

Oppression

"The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice" (13:23).

Wrongdoing

"The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, but the belly of the wicked suffers want" (13:25).

Stinginess

"A stingy man hastens after wealth and does not know that poverty will come upon him" (28:22).

Pleasure

"Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich" (21:17).

"Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread" (20:13).

Laziness

"A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich" (10:4).

Debt

"The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is slave of the lender" (22:7).

Hastiness

"The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty" (21:5).

Bad Company

*"Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat,
for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags" (23:20-21).*

The Cure of Poverty

Wisdom

*"Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding,
for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold.
She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.
Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor" (3:13-16).*

Cause One Pride

The Danger of Pride

To reject correction and discipline is foolish, for it brings poverty and shame:

“Poverty and disgrace come to him who ignores instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is honored” (13:18).

Pride will not listen to correction or value discipline.

Pride really does lead to destruction:

“The LORD tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow’s boundaries” (15:25).

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

When calamity comes, it will be too late, even as wisdom herself warns us:

*“Because I called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded,
because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof,*

*I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you,
when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon you.*

*Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;
they will seek me diligently but will not find me.*

*Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD,
would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof,*

therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices.

*For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them;
but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster” (1:24-33).*

The Value of Wisdom

In contrast, we should know the economic value of wisdom:

*“Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding,
for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold.*

She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor” (3:13-16).

How interesting! Wisdom has a better return on investment than money.

Again, listen to wisdom talk to you:

*“Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold,
for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her...*

Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness.

My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver.

*I walk in the way of righteousness, in the paths of justice,
granting an inheritance to those who love me, and filling their treasuries” (8:10-11, 18-21).*

She invites you to her table:

“Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars.

She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table.

She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town,

‘Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!’

To him who lacks sense she says,

‘Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.

Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight” (9:1-6).

Just as having the goose is better than having one of her golden eggs, so wisdom is better than money:

“How much better to get wisdom than gold! To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver” (16:16).

With wisdom, you have the best building materials for your home:

*“The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down” (14:1).
“By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established;
by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches” (24:3-4).*

Interestingly, money itself will not acquire wisdom for you:

“Why should a fool have money in his hand to buy wisdom when he has no sense?” (17:16).

Wisdom only comes through a relationship of reverent fear toward God, and through His word:

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (9:10).

“For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding” (2:6).

Therefore, make the soul investment to “purchase” wisdom through knowing God:

“Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding” (23:23).

Let the typical pursuit of money become the picture of your soul’s pursuit of wisdom:

“...if you seek it [understanding] like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures...” (2:4).

Cause Two Oppression

Injustice and the Role of Government

Not all poverty is self-inflicted. Some comes through circumstances beyond our control, such as oppression:

“The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice” (13:23).

*“There are those whose teeth are swords, whose fangs are knives,
to devour the poor from off the earth, the needy from among mankind” (30:14).*

Enforcing justice is the responsibility of governments:

*“It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink,
lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted.*

Give strong drink to the one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress;

let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more.

Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute.

Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy” (31:4-9).

The Injustice of Government

Unfortunately, due to its power to enforce justice, government itself can become the means of injustice:

“Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people” (28:15).

“By justice a king builds up the land, but he who exacts gifts tears it down” (29:4).

“If a king faithfully judges the poor, his throne will be established forever” (29:14).

Governments do much to cause poverty, especially through heavy taxation, inflation, and corrupt judges.

By devaluing the nation’s currency, the government changes the “scales” of economic transactions.

God cannot stand false standards in economic transactions:

“A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight” (11:1).

“A just balance and scales are the LORD’s; all the weights in the bag are his work” (16:11).

“Unequal weights and unequal measures are both alike an abomination to the LORD” (20:10).

“Unequal weights are an abomination to the LORD, and false scales are not good” (20:23).

In modern society, inflation caused in part by a devalued currency in essence steals the savings of the thrifty.

Our Responsibility

Though oppression produces genuine victims, knowing that government often oppresses gives us responsibility:

“When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you,

and put a knife to your throat if you are given to appetite.

Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food” (23:1-2).

In an age of government aid to the poor, we have here a timely warning.

Not all aid is aid; therefore, let us carefully inquire of the Lord before we accept the king’s food.

Cause Three Wrongdoing

The General Consequences of Right and Wrong Behavior

Essential to the allure of folly is that somehow doing wrong will lead to happiness:

*“The woman Folly is loud; she is seductive and knows nothing.
She sits at the door of her house; she takes a seat on the highest places of the town,
calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way,
‘Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!’
And to him who lacks sense she says,
‘Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.’
But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol” (9:13-18).*

The Bible is clear about the general and opposite consequences of doing what is right and of doing what is wrong:

*“Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death” (10:2).
“Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence” (10:6).
“What the wicked dreads will come upon him, but the desire of the righteous will be granted” (10:24).
“Whoever is wicked covets the spoil of evildoers, but the root of the righteous bears fruit” (12:12).
“The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, but the belly of the wicked suffers want” (13:25).
“In the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but trouble befalls the income of the wicked” (15:6).*

Granted, for a season, crime does pay:

“A gracious woman gets honor, and violent men get riches” (11:16).

However, these wages are illusionary:

“The wicked earns deceptive wages, but one who sows righteousness gets a sure reward” (11:18).

Ultimately, it only the long-term consequences that will matter:

*“Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel” (20:17).
“The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death” (21:6).*

Eventually, what goes around comes around:

*“Whoever misleads the upright into an evil way will fall into his own pit,
but the blameless will have a goodly inheritance” (28:10).*

Even stealing out of supposed necessity has consequences, despite the sympathetic understanding of others:

*“People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry,
but if he is caught, he will pay sevenfold; he will give all the goods of his house” (6:30-31; cf. 30:9).*

Therefore:

“Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice” (16:8).

Common Forms of Wrongdoing

The Proverbs present three forms of wrongdoing that lead to poverty—stealing, bribery, and social oppression.

Stealing is the most obvious form of wrongdoing, and it comprises the essence of gang activity:

*“My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.
If they say, ‘Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason;...
we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder;...
Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain;
it takes away the life of its possessors” (1:10-11, 13, 19).*

Interestingly, the conclusion here may indicate that everyone eager for unjust gain is one sense a gangster.

Another common form of crime is bribery—to accept a gift for doing wrong, as if every man has his price:
“Whoever is greedy for unjust gain troubles his own household, but he who hates bribes will live” (15:27).
“The wicked accept a bribe in secret to pervert the ways of justice” (17:23).
“To show partiality is not good, but for a piece of bread a man will do wrong” (28:21).

What makes a bribe tempting is that it works:

“A bribe is like a magic stone in the eyes of the one who gives it; wherever he turns he prospers” (17:8).
“A man’s gift makes room for him and brings him before the great” (18:16).
“A gift in secret averts anger, and a concealed bribe, strong wrath” (21:14).

Often it is those in authority who are tempted with a bribe, which in turn often leads to the oppression of others:
“A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor, but he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days” (28:16).

Interestingly, in America, where the people have the power to vote, bribery often comes from the politicians.

Finally, another form of wrongdoing is taking advantage of the poor:

“Whoever oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth, or gives to the rich, will only come to poverty” (22:16).
“Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate,
for the LORD will please their cause and rob of life those who rob them” (22:22-23).
“Whoever multiplies his wealth by interest and profit gathers it for him who is generous to the poor” (28:8).
“A righteous man knows the rights of the poor; a wicked man does not understand such knowledge” (29:7).

A particularly vulnerable class of poor are aging parents:

“Whoever robs his father or his mother and says, ‘That is no transgression,’
is a companion to a man who destroys” (28:24; cf. 18:9).

Oddly, it is not always the rich who oppress the poor:

“A poor man who oppresses the poor is a beating rain that leaves no food” (28:3).

Cause Four Stinginess

The Miser and His Mistake

Being unwilling to give may have the appearance of saving money, but in the end it leads to poverty:

“A stingy man hastens after wealth and does not know that poverty will come upon him” (28:22).

“Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered” (21:13).

“Whoever multiplies his wealth by interest and profit gathers it for him who is generous to the poor” (28:8).

God warns us against accepting the apparent generosity of a selfish man:

*“Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy; do not desire his delicacies,
for he is like one who is inwardly calculating.*

‘Eat and drink!’ he says to you, but his heart is not with you.

You will vomit up the morsels that you have eaten, and waste your pleasant words” (23:6-8).

Not all claims to generosity have validity:

“Like clouds and winds without rain is a man who boasts of a gift he does not give” (25:14).

The Wisdom of Generosity

In general, and counter intuitively, generosity leads to greater wealth:

“One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want” (11:24).

Generosity leads to wealth because of the Lord, who is intimately tied to the poor man’s treatment.

Indeed, giving to the poor is a form of worship, and not giving is insulting to God:

“Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him” (14:31).

“Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished” (17:5).

“He who is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed” (19:17).

The human link is found in the idea of blessing—that others indirectly pray for you because of your generosity:

“Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered” (11:25).

“Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor” (14:21).

“Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor” (22:9).

Just as the poor bless the generous man, so there are curses for the man who turns away from helping:

“The people curse him who holds back grain, but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it” (11:26).

“Whoever gives to the poor will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse” (28:27).

Even if you were trying to hurt your enemy, the best way would be through kindness:

*“If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink,
for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you” (25:21-22).*

Cause Five Pleasure

The Folly of Loving Pleasure

In general, having fun is costly, and leads to perpetual poverty:

“Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich” (21:17).

With regard to food and drink, these natural appetites are good and should be satisfied through hard work:

“A worker’s appetite works for him; his mouth urges him on” (16:26).

Overindulgence, however, is not wise, but impoverishing:

*“Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat,
for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags” (23:20-21).*

In addition to food and drink, perhaps other consumables should be mentioned here, such as gasoline.

Loving sleep will also lead to poverty:

“Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread” (20:13).

Sleep is a special mark of the lazy man:

“How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?

*A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,
and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man” (6:8-10).*

“He who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame” (10:5).

“Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger” (19:15).

“As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed” (26:14).

Notice the emphasis on just a little sleep, which then sneaks up on a man:

*“A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,
and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man” (24:33-34).*

In addition to food, drink, and sleep, the love of illicit sexual satisfaction will also lead to poverty:

“He who loves wisdom makes his father glad, but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth” (29:3).

How much of American poverty is due to a man’s inability to stop buying pornography?

The Bible may indicate that men will risk debt in order to satisfy sexual addiction:

*“Take a man’s garment when he has put up security for a stranger,
and hold it in pledge when he puts up security for an adulteress” (27:13).*

Even worse than prostitution, which only costs money, adultery may cost one’s life:

“...for the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread, but a married woman hunts down a precious life...

For jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge.

He will accept no compensation; he will refuse through you multiply gifts” (6:26, 34-35).

The Goodness of Moderation

Instead of indulgence, God recommends the goodness of His gifts in moderation, as seen in these verses on honey:

“My son, eat honey, for it is good, and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste.

Know that wisdom is such to your soul;

if you find it, there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off” (24:13-14).

“If you have found honey, eat only enough for you, lest you have your fill of it and vomit it” (25:16).

“One who is full loathes honey, but to one who is hungry everything bitter is sweet” (27:7).

Interestingly, gluttony and narcissism have endless appetites and lead to the opposite of intentions:

“It is not good to eat much honey, nor is it glorious to seek one’s own glory” (25:27).

Cause Six Laziness

The Folly of Laziness and Wisdom of Diligence

Laziness is a common sin, and is a leading cause of poverty and of a hard life:

“A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” (10:4).

“The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied” (13:4).

“The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway” (15:19).

The English name “sluggard” is a graphic reminder of the lazy man’s normal speed—similar to a garden slug!

The opposite of laziness is not simply work, but diligence:

“A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” (10:4).

“The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor” (12:24).

“Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth” (12:27).

“The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied” (13:4).

The diligent develop capital and accept the mess that added responsibility brings:

“Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox” (14:4).

“Prepare your work outside; get everything ready for yourself in the field, and after that build your house” (24:27).

“Whoever tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who guards his master will be honored” (27:18).

“Four things on earth are small, but they are exceedingly wise:

the ants are a people not strong, yet they provide their food in summer; ...” (30:24-25).

In the end, diligence leads to true freedom:

“The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor” (12:24).

The Traits of a Lazy Man

The traits of a lazy man include missed opportunities, incomplete projects, involuntary labor, and excuse-making.

Laziness is not simply the absence of work, but the absence of initiation and persistent perseverance:

“Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.

*Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.
How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?*

A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,

and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man” (6:6-10).

To the lazy man, his delay is just a “little” bit of time—not knowing that too many breaks makes one broke.

In contrast, the ant is self-motivated and timely, doing what needs to be done without needing to be told.

Consider how characteristic it is for the sluggard not to finish a project:

“Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth” (12:27).

“The sluggard buries his hand in the dish and will not even bring it back to his mouth” (19:24).

“The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth” (26:15).

Nor does a sluggard start a necessary project on time:

“The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing” (20:4; cf. 10:5).

So lacking in self-motivation, the lazy man often will not work unless forced to work:

“The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor” (12:24).

Interestingly, it is hard for a sluggard to seek his own folly, for laziness dulls the brain and lulls the person to sleep:

“Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger” (19:15).

Moreover, it is hard for another to convince the sluggard of his folly, for his filled with big talk and excuses:

"In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty" (14:23).

"The sluggard says, 'There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!'" (22:13; cf. 26:13).

"The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly" (26:16).

Ultimately, a lazy man is just plain stubborn, and proves to be as selfish as a miser and a vandal:

"The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor.

All day long he craves and craves, but the righteous gives and does not hold back" (21:25-26).

"Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys" (18:9; cf. 28:24).

Eventually, the sluggard's folly becomes obvious to others around him through the wreckage he leaves behind:

"I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense,

and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns;

the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down.

Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received a little instruction.

A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,

and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man" (24:30-34).

In seeking to help the lazy, it is foolish to hire him; perhaps necessity alone will teach him:

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

"A worker's appetite works for him; his mouth urges him on" (16:26).

The Results of Laziness

The results of laziness include poverty, slavery, unemployment, disappointment, hardship, ruin, and insomnia:

"A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich" (10:4).

"The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor" (12:24).

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

"The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied" (13:4).

"The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway" (15:19).

"Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys" (18:9; cf. 28:24; 24:30-34).

"As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed" (26:14).

A lazy person does not sleep well, in contrast to the satisfying sleep of a laborer (Ecclesiastes 5:12).

In the end, the lazy man slips into a comatose existence, which only furthers his slide into poverty:

"Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger" (19:15).

Interestingly, sleepiness is both a cause and a result of laziness.

Again, the essence of laziness is not the absence of work, but the absence of initiative and perseverance.

In practice, the lazy man takes too many breaks, leaves too many incompletes, and works only when required.

In contrast, the diligent man seizes opportunities before need arises, and perseveres to the end.

Cause Seven Debt

As a result of laziness, people often lose their freedom and find themselves in debt.

The Nature of Indebtedness

By definition, debt is a form of obligation, having the absence of freedom:

“The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is slave of the lender” (22:7).

When a person is in debt, he is technically not the owner of anything:

“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.

Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it’—when you have it with you” (3:27-28).

Therefore, debt is a form of absolute poverty.

The Danger of Incurring Another’s Debts

Proverbs often warns against accepting responsibility for the debts of others, as in co-signing a loan:

*“Whoever puts up security for a stranger will surely suffer harm,
but he who hates striking hands in pledge is secure” (10:15).*

“One who lacks sense gives a pledge and puts up security in the presence of his neighbor” (17:18).

The repetition of this warning implies that accepting the responsibility of another’s debt is not uncommon.

In fact, those who do so are bad risks, and should be required to provide collateral when receiving a loan:

*“Take a man’s garment when he has put up security for a stranger,
and hold it in pledge when he puts up security for foreigners” (20:16).*

*“Take a man’s garment when he has put up security for a stranger,
and hold it in pledge when he puts up security for an adulteress” (27:13).*

The mention of an adulteress points to an interplay of sexual infidelity and financial irresponsibility.

Responsibility for the debts of others jeopardizes the basic necessities of life:

“Be not one of those who give pledges, who put up security for debts.

If you have nothing with which to pay, why should your bed be taken from under you?” (22:26-27).

Apparently, debt and laziness are two related causes of poverty.

Right before discussing laziness, the Bible makes this urgent plea to free oneself from another man’s debts:

*“My son, if you have put up security for your neighbor, have given your pledge for a stranger,
if you are snared in the words of your mouth, caught in the words of your mouth,
then do this, my son, and save yourself, for you have come into the hand of your neighbor:
go, hasten, and please urgently with your neighbor.*

Give your eyes no sleep and your eyelids no slumber;

save yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the hand of the fowler” (6:1-5).

If warning is given against risking the debts of another, how much more should we avoid our own debt!

The Benefit of Savings

Instead of loving pleasure or going into debt, the wise man keeps a reserve supply on hand:

“Precious treasure and oil are in a wise man’s dwelling, but a foolish man devours it” (21:20).

Moreover, the prudent save up for short-term needs, just as the ant does for the winter:

“Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.

Without having any chief, officer, or ruler,

she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest” (6:6-8).

“He who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame” (10:5).

Cause Eight
Hastiness

Another common result of laziness is the temptation to hope in a quick fix, which often fails.

The False Hope of a Quick Fix

In contrast to diligence, haste really does make waste:

“The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty” (21:5).

“Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread,

but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty” (28:19).

“A faithful man will abound with blessings, but whoever hastens to be rich will not go unpunished” (28:20).

Not all activity is fruitful activity—there are “worthless pursuits” as well.

Having “plenty” is usually exciting, but here it is “plenty of poverty,” the opposite of “plenty of bread.”

Even a quickly-gained inheritance will not lead to lasting benefit:

“An inheritance gained hastily in the beginning will not be blessed in the end” (20:21).

Similarly futile would be the instant riches of winning the lottery!

In contrast to a quick fix, the diligent pursuit of slow, long-range benefit holds out a better hope for lasting change:

“Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense” (12:11).

“Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it” (13:11).

Cause Nine
Bad Company

The Limited Benefit of Many Companions

In considering the benefit of companions, one solid friend is better than many casual acquaintances:
“A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (18:24).

For our purposes here, we should note that many companions do not guarantee financial security.

The Danger of Bad Company

In considering the previous dangers, it is interesting that many are couched in terms of relationships.

Especially dangerous are companions given to excessive eating, drinking, and to illicit sexual behavior:
“The one who keeps the law is a son with understanding, but a companion of gluttons shames his father” (28:7).
“He who loves wisdom makes his father glad, but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth” (29:3).

The warnings against debt may have prostitution in mind, in which collateral is given to ensure future payment:
*“Take a man’s garment when he has put up security for a stranger,
and hold it in pledge when he puts up security for an adulteress” (27:13).*

As an example, consider Judah’s sinful behavior with his daughter-in-law Tamar (Genesis 38).

Dangerous as well are companions given to violence, such as gangs:

*“My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.
If they say, ‘Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason; ...
we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder; ...
Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain;
it takes away the life of its possessors” (1:10-11, 13, 19).*

Like “second-hand smoke” these relationships involve oneself in the harmful effects of another’s behavior.

Therefore, it is not only important that we ourselves act wisely, but also that we choose our associates wisely:
“Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm” (13:20).

The Cure Wisdom

The God-Factor

The Book of Proverbs gives us generalities and counsel on practical areas in life, including personal finances.

In isolation, the individual proverbs often sound like insightful comments or good advice. In context, however, the proverbs accentuate “the God-Factor” in all of life.

For example, we live in God’s world; therefore, to be wise, we must align with His design.
*“The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens;
by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew.
My son, do not lose sight of these—keep sound wisdom and discretion,
and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck.
Then you will walk on your way securely, and your foot will not stumble” (3:19-23).*

To put it another way, wisdom becomes the link between God making the world and us making it in the world. This link of wisdom between the design of God and the success of man forms the main message of chapter eight.

Therefore, to succeed in any area of life—including personal finances—we need wisdom.

Wisdom and the Fear of God

The source of wisdom is the word of God:

“For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding” (2:6).

The Maker Himself tells us how and why He made the world as He did, and what He will do with it in the future.

To receive this word rightly, we must have a deep respect for His unique authority over our lives:

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

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (9:10).

These two verses give the theme for the whole Book of Proverbs, and shed light on each insight and each counsel.

No one else made us; therefore, no one else can speak authoritatively in all areas of our lives, but God alone.

He alone is the Holy One.

Not surprisingly, in every area of our lives we must decide whom we will trust.

Will it be God?

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (3:5-6; cf. 22:19).

Or will it be ourselves?

“Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered” (28:26).

With regard to personal finances, the results are poverty or blessing—all things considered equal.

To the proud, independent man, the Proverbs give this warning:

“Poverty and disgrace come to him who ignores instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is honored” (13:18).

To the man who fears God, the Proverbs give this encouragement:

“Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding,

for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold.

She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor” (3:13-16).

Wisdom consists primarily in understanding the **thoughts** of God and the **ways** of God.

Wisdom and the Thoughts of God

With regard to overcoming poverty, it is necessary to think the way God thinks about finances.

According to Proverbs, God finds economic value in wisdom and godly character.

God also denies that there is such a thing as “financial security.”

Finally, God often emphasizes the social aspects of poverty.

The Economic Value of Wisdom and Godly Character

In our thoughts, wealth should not be defined too narrowly in terms of money alone.

For example, many happy experiences add a kind of enrichment to our lives:

“All the days of the afflicted are evil, but the cheerful of heart has a continual feast” (15:15).

“House and wealth are inherited from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD” (19:14).

Similarly, wisdom has a better return on investment than money:

“Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding,

for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold.

She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor” (3:13-16).

“The crown of the wise is their wealth, but the folly of fools brings folly” (14:24).

Like the goose that laid the golden egg, wisdom excels money, in part, because wisdom causes money.

In contrast, money cannot buy wisdom:

“Why should a fool have money in his hand to buy wisdom when he has no sense?” (17:16).

Due to its superior value, wisdom should be selected over money:

“Take my [wisdom’s] instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold,

for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her...

Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness.

My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver.

I walk in the way of righteousness, in the paths of justice,

granting an inheritance to those who love me, and filling their treasuries” (8:10-11, 18-21).

“How much better to get wisdom than gold! To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver” (16:16).

“Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding” (23:23).

We should seek wisdom as we would seek after buried treasure:

“...if you seek it [understanding] like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures...” (2:4).

We should respond to wisdom as a young man would to a rich and attractive potential wife:

“Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars.

She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table.

She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town,

‘Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!’

To him who lacks sense she says,

‘Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.

Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight” (9:1-6).

Wisdom is the key to building a stable home:

“By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established;

by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches” (24:3-4).

“The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down” (14:1).

Similarly, godly character is the key for lasting wealth, and for passing along wealth within the family:

*“A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children,
but the sinner’s wealth is laid up for the righteous” (13:22).*

*“A servant who deals wisely will rule over a son who acts shamefully
and will share the inheritance as one of the brothers” (17:2).*

Interestingly, it is sometimes wise to let a family business fall into the hands of a wise employee and not a son.

In contrast to this table of bounty, some seek to live off of wicked behavior and inherit vanity:

“For they [the wicked] eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence” (4:17).

“Whoever troubles his own household will inherit the wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise of heart” (11:29).

The Proverbs especially emphasize the economic value of godly speech:

“The lips of the righteous feed many, but fool die for lack of sense” (10:21).

*“From the fruit of his mouth a man is satisfied with good,
and the work of a man’s hand comes back to him” (12:14).*

“From the fruit of his mouth a man eats what is good, but the desire of the treacherous is for violence” (13:2).

“From the fruit of a man’s mouth his stomach is satisfied; he is satisfied by the yield of his lips” (18:20).

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

“There is gold and abundance of costly stones, but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel” (20:15).

Somehow the speech of a man affects what he has in life; perhaps many lack employment due to poor speech.

In contrast to godly speech, empty speech accomplishes nothing and leads to poverty:

“In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty” (14:23).

So true—how many talk about their plans and then rest in that talk, as if everything will be all right now!

The word “toil” is *צָוָה*, which means “strenuous work.”

Beware! The marketplace is often home to boastful lying:

“‘Bad, bad,’ says the buyer, but when he goes away, then he boasts” (20:14).

Given the value of wisdom and godly character, we should set a premium on godly reputation:

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

As a fitting tribute to the enduring beauty of godly character, the Proverbs ends with this picture of female industry:

“An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.

The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.

She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.

She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.

She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar.

She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens.

She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.

She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong.

She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night.

She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.

She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.

She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet.

She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.

Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.

She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant.

Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.

She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:

‘Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.’

Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates” (31:10-31).

According to this picture, diligence is part of our spiritual life—part of our reverent respect of the Holy One. As such, diligence knows no gender, but is the common virtue of both the godly man and the godly woman.

The Myth of Financial Security

Many people in our culture seek after financial security, under the idea that having money will keep them safe:

“A rich man’s wealth is his strong city; the poverty of the poor is their ruin” (10:15).

“The ransom of a man’s life is his wealth, but a poor man hears no threat” (13:8).

“A rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his imagination” (18:11).

Interestingly, there is a poverty floor, below which the bottom drops out (“ruin”).

Barring a miracle, we simply must have a certain amount of wealth in order to survive.

In contrast to the common assumption about money’s ability, money can only do so much:

“Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death” (11:4).

“When the wicked dies, his hope will perish, and the expectation of wealth [his strength?] perishes too” (11:7).

“Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf” (11:28).

Money also will not last; therefore, it is foolish to seek to accumulate money:

“Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist.

When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven” (23:4-5).

Instead of storing away money, the Proverbs actually advise capital investment for the future:

“Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds,

for riches do not last forever; and does a crown endure to all generations?

When the grass is gone and the new growth appears and the vegetation of the mountains is gathered,

the lambs will provide your clothing, and the goats the price of a field.

There will be enough goats’ milk for your food,

for the food of your household and maintenance for your girls” (27:23-27).

Our goal should be our “daily bread”—to have enough for each day—not too much or little:

“Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die:

Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches;

feed me with the food that is needful for me,

lest I be full and deny you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’

or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God” (30:7-9).

Both extreme poverty and extreme wealth have spiritual dangers.

Remember, all this trouble is due to the sin in our hearts, and not due to the nature of money or to its Giver:

“The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it” (10:22).

The Social Aspects of Poverty

The Proverbs often describe the social aspects of poverty, especially the isolation of the poor in contrast to the rich:

“The poor is disliked even by his neighbor, but the rich has many friends” (14:20).

“Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend” (19:4).

“Many seek the favor of a generous man, and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts” (19:6).

“All a poor man’s brothers hate him; how much more do his friends go far from him!

He pursues them with words, but does not have them” (19:7).

Poverty brings loneliness; therefore, we who know the Lord should be extra careful to visit them.

Poverty also curtails personal liberty, because the rich often have the power and they talk forcefully:

“The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is slave of the lender” (22:7).

“The poor uses entreaties, but the rich answer roughly” (18:23).

Sometimes the poor man is even beat up by another poor man, even though it is utterly nonsensical:

“A poor man who oppresses the poor is a beating rain that leaves no food” (28:3).

Perhaps some seek to overcome the stigma of poverty through the illusion of wealth:
"One pretends to be rich, yet has nothing; another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth" (13:7).
In today's world of easy credit, it would be possible to appear wealthy—for a season.
Interestingly, some who dress and live modestly are actually rich, perhaps in part to their frugal use of old things.

God thinks of the poor in broader categories than simply material deprivation.
God see them as lacking friends, and not simply lacking money.
Moreover, God sees them as people no different than the rich:
"The rich and the poor meet together; the LORD is the maker of them all" (22:2).
"The poor man and the oppressor meet together; the LORD gives light to the eyes of both" (29:13).

In truth, with regard to the wealth of wisdom, the rich may be poor and the poor may be rich:
"A rich man is wise in his own eyes, but a poor man who has understanding will find him out" (28:11).

Therefore, let us learn to compare things wisely, and value what is "better" in light of the God-factor over us:
"Better to be lowly and have a servant, than to play the great man and lack bread" (12:9).
"Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it" (15:16).
"Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it" (15:17).
"Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice" (16:8).
"How much better to get wisdom than gold! To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver" (16:16).
"It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud" (16:19).
"Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife" (17:1).
"Better is a poor person who walks in his integrity than one who is crooked in speech and is a fool" (19:1).
"What is desired in a man is steadfast love, and a poor man is better than a liar" (19:22).
"A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold" (22:1).
"My son, eat honey, for it is good, and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste.
Know that wisdom is such to your soul;
if you find it, there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off" (24:13-14).
"Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways" (28:6).

If we truly think the way that God thinks, we will assess circumstances better and be able to give Him thanks.

Wisdom and the Ways of God

With regard to overcoming poverty, it is also necessary to follow the ways of God.
God wisely made the world a certain way; therefore, it is wise to "cut with the grain" along those ways.

The most obvious way of God is the connection He has established between diligence and prosperity:
"A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich" (10:4).
"Whoever is slothful will not roast his game, but the diligent man will get precious wealth" (12:27).
"The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied" (13:4).
If there are no other factors involved, it is usually true that diligence will prosper, even for unbelievers.

However, other factors are usually involved, and often lead to the ruin of the wicked.
Moreover, sometimes God is the silent link between seemingly unrelated causes and effects.

For example, those who honor God with the first and the best of their income are usually blessed:
"Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce;
then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine" (3:9-10).
Such honor to God is honored by God, unless higher spiritual purposes and circumstances intervene.

In fact, God generally blesses the person who humbly trusts in Him and does what is right out of reverence for Him:
"The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked" (10:3).
"The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life" (22:4).
"A greedy man stirs up strife, but the one who trusts in the LORD will be enriched" (28:25).
It is good to remember the invisible hand of God providentially working through events for the believer's good.

The paradox is most striking with regard to generosity.

From all appearances, being generous should not lead to prosperity.

However, scientifically observed, generosity is a leading cause of prosperity:

“One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want” (11:24).

“Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered” (11:25).

Conversely, wickedness is not a means of lasting wealth, but of ultimately benefitting the generous man:

“Whoever multiplies his wealth by interest and profit gathers it for him who is generous to the poor” (28:8).

How does such a paradox work?

First, God identifies with the poor as their Maker, and so views how they are treated as how we are treating Him:

“Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him” (14:31).

“Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished” (17:5).

In fact, when we give to the poor we extend a loan to God, who now acts as if He owes us a repayment:

“He who is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed” (19:17).

Therefore, when we honor the poor, we honor their Maker, and so we again see that worship is honored by God.

We should pay close attention to how we view the poor in our heart:

“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (4:23).

Our attitude to the poor is a strong indicator of the state of our heart and of our status as a person:

“Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor” (14:21).

May we never “despise” (belittle or treat as insignificant) the poor for his home, his attire, or his person!

Such sickening pride is offensive to God, for when we insult His handiwork, we insult Him as the Artist.

Second, the poor bless the generous and curse the stingy, thereby invoking God to intervene, which He often does:

“Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor” (14:21).

“Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor” (22:9).

“Whoever gives to the poor will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse” (28:27).

Interestingly, even selling can be a form of generosity, which elicits a blessing from the public:

“The people curse him who holds back grain, but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it” (11:26).

Given the nature of market economics, it could be that holding back would have artificially inflated the price.

If we expect God to hear us when we pray, we should respond heartily when others in need call out to us:

“Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered” (21:13).

A mere promise to help will not fool God:

“Like clouds and winds without rain is a man who boasts of a gift he does not give” (25:14).

Shockingly, this connection between generosity and prosperity even functions for kindness shown to our enemies:

*“If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink,
for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you” (25:21-22).*

Therefore, the invisible link between the generous man and prosperity is the just God who sees and repays.

Ultimately, the God-factor is the all-determining factor of our lives.

If we wish to be wise and get out of poverty, the beginning here, as elsewhere, is the fear of the Lord.

May He be praised forever and ever! Amen.

Sermon: “Theology in the Book of Proverbs”

Countryside Bible Church – June 24, 2018

Text: Proverbs 30:1-9 – Pray.

This text shades off into the Psalms, showing us the continuity of the Wisdom Literature as prophecy.

Introduction

My original view of Proverbs was much like Ecclesiastes—true science, i.e. observe and draw a conclusion.

A proverb is a generalization—not a promise, but what normally happens (all things considered equal).

Certainly, some of Proverbs talks like this, sometimes very explicitly:

Proverbs 27:14 – Blessing your friend with a loud voice in the morning is reckoned a curse.

Proverbs 25:17 – Do not wear out your welcome (a proverb in our own culture).

Proverbs 24:30-34 – “When I saw, I reflected upon it; I looked, and received instruction...” (v. 32).⁷

But this spring, the Lord showed me some proverbs that could never be learned by *mere* observation.

This fact alone makes the book of Proverbs different than some of our famous collections:

e.g. Ben Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanack*

This fact also coincides with a growing conviction that not only is the gospel a mystery, so is the law:

e.g. Ps. 119:104 – “From your precepts I get understanding; *therefore*, I hate every false way.”

Interestingly, these *revealed* proverbs were often overlooked in my normal quest for “practical” information.

In particular, the name of God (Yahweh, or the “LORD”) stood out to me:

“What if I studied references to God the same way as any other topic in Proverbs (e.g. work, friends)?”

Results:

Almost no reference to just God (rare exceptions – e.g. Proverbs 25:2).

Around 70 references to “the LORD” – so God is presented very personal/relational in Proverbs.

To study “fool” or “friend” but not “LORD” would be to miss the most important Person!

Therefore, our topic today: *What does the book of Proverbs tell us about God?*

Doctrine: True wisdom includes *the ways of God* based on *the words of God*.

Think of this visually:

Above us are the expansive ways of God – “as the heavens are higher than the earth” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Below us are the solid words of God – “as a man who dug down deep” (Mt. 7:24-27 – house on a rock).

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Pr. 9:10).

I. True wisdom includes the ways of God.

In studying the Proverbs, it is helpful to read through the entire book and collect verses on a topic.

Then sort the verses out into “piles” that say similar things or deal with similar ideas.

Illus. Sort your laundry into piles—darks, whites, etc.

Collecting and sorting the references to God produced several piles:

1. *Abomination/Delight*

Definition: An abomination is something inherently detestable that can never be put to good use.

Illus. That hated vegetable that no amount of butter or marshmallows could ever rectify.

Examples: Lying lips, evil plans, and *everyone* proud in heart (Pr. 12:22; 15:26; 16:5).

These are things that God *cannot stand!* He *hates* them!

Corporate example: Changing the value of a currency (cf. weights/balances in Pr. 11:1; 20:10; 20:23).

Three times—if you didn’t get it the first time, or even the second time, God wants you to know this.

William Jennings Bryan (1896) tried to move America off the gold standard for the populist cause.

FDR succeeded in the Spring 1933 by calling in the gold and nullifying gold clauses in contracts.

Results: Devaluing the currency made debts easier to pay but robbed those with savings!

Listen! Economic transactions matter to God! This is part of “His concern” (Pr. 16:11).

⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this sermon are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB). Many texts are written out in full as an appendix to this sermon.

Individual example: An unrepentant, wicked person praying to God (Pr. 15:8 – note the parallelism).
God cannot stand so-called worship by those with blood on their hands (cf. Isaiah 1)!
Obj. Of course, it is due to the evil motive in their heart (e.g. trying to be sneaky with God, etc.).
Ans. No, that makes it *worse*, but it is *already* an “abomination” to God (Pr. 21:27).
Doesn't that make us want to reflect upon our own reason for being here this morning?
If I am approaching God with a closed heart and mere appearance of worship, He can't stand it!
Far from pleasing God, it *sickens* Him (cf. Rev. 3:15-16).

Most of the examples of God's ways in the book of Proverbs concern justice under His authority:

2. ***Sovereignty of God***

Example: The thoughts and plans of a ruler are channeled by God's hand to His purpose (Pr. 21:1).
Illus. The tight spot in Jonesville where the St. Joseph River goes by JL's parking lot.
Good or bad, king or president, Republican or Democrat – their heart is not their own!
And if the most sovereign *human* is so mysteriously led by God, then what about the rest of us?
Every human is shaped by God's sovereignty (Pr. 16:1, 9; 19:21).
No wonder we cannot understand our way (20:24)! E.g. *How did I end up here in life?*
What about other factors?
Preparation? Not decisive (Pr. 21:31 – horse/victory).
Luck? Like the toss of a coin or the throw of the dice, every outcome is from the LORD (Pr. 16:33)!
No! There is nothing—no wisdom, understanding, counsel—that stands up against God (Pr. 21:30).
His sovereignty is absolute. Everything is made for His purpose—even the wicked (Pr. 16:4)!

3. ***Care for the Poor***

God has a special, sovereign concern for the poor:
Basis for this concern: Not just a common *nature*, but a common *Maker* (Pr. 29:13; 22:2).
As a result, to oppress the poor or to mock the poor is to taunt God Himself (Pr. 14:31; 17:5).
...as if God were to say, “*Hey, what do you think your doing with My creation!?*”
Listen to how God will plead for the vulnerable of society:
If you rob the poor, God will rob you of life (Pr. 22:23-23).
If you cheat the poor, God will plead their case—and He is a strong Redeemer Pr. 23:10-11).
He “will tear down the house of the proud, but...establish the boundary of the widow” (Pr. 15:25).
And this concern extends beyond those who harm the poor to those who neglect the poor:
If we claim ignorance, does He not know! Our own cries will go unanswered (Pr. 24:11-12; 21:13).
This is very convicting and should give each of us pause for concern...

4. ***God sees everything and discriminates between the righteous and the wicked***

“The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good” (Pr. 15:3).
As Hades and Hell are open before the LORD, so are the hearts of every man (Pr. 15:11).
He tests the hearts, weighs the motives—no matter our self-rationalization (Pr. 17:3; 16:2; 21:2).
As a result, He treats each differently as a matter of social justice (e.g. Pr. 3:33; 10:3; etc.).
“Many seek the ruler's favor, but justice for man comes from the LORD” (29:26).

At this point we run into the chief tension point in the entire Old Testament (so Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*):

It often seems like the wicked prosper and the righteous are punished (e.g. Eccl. 8:14).
For Asaph, this caused a crisis of faith (Ps. 73 – “my feet almost slipped”).
For Job, this caused him to accuse God of injustice (as if to say, “*You wronged me!*”).
And has this not often bothered us?
As with Job and his friends, we quote these Proverbs and then see otherwise.
“*Why?!*” we ask. “*Why did this happen? Why me? Why, Lord!*”
Job and his friends quoted this proverbial wisdom but could not make sense of this particular case.

According to Luther (and I believe he is right), this tension did not find resolution until the Cross of Christ:

“My God, My God, *why* have You forsaken Me?” Jesus asked (Mt. 27:46; cf. Ps. 22:1).

Jesus Himself asked, “Why?”

It must not be sin to ask “Why?” though it will be sin if we do not trust God (see Psalm 22:2ff).

And why would He not ask, “Why”?

There—on the cross—the only truly Righteous One suffered: no violence, no deceit (Isa. 53:9).

He *truly* suffered unjustly in an absolute sense; and to appearances, it looked like He deserved it (Isa. 53:4).

Yet, He was pierced through for our rebellious acts—crushed for our perversities, etc. (Isa. 53:5-6).

So that as a result, every single act that touches us touches first the hand with the wounds:

The book of Revelation describes Him repeatedly as “the Lamb that was slain” (Rev. 5ff).

This is so significant!

In judging the world, the Judge Himself is the first to be judged—with our sin!

In waiting to judge, the Judge is patiently allowing for opportunity to repent, not wishing any to perish.

In allowing His people to suffer, He can truly sympathize with them as an *unjust* sufferer.

So that even though those proverbs of justice are ultimately made *full* in the *End*, in the *Now*, we have Him.

These mysterious ways of God would not be known to us apart from revelation—God must tell us.

Anyone ignorant of these mysterious ways of God cannot be reckoned as wise—we need His words...

II. True wisdom needs the words of God.

Turn with me to Proverbs 2: “If...if...if...then you will discern the fear of the LORD...” (vv. 1-5).

Here is a great promise! Active learning leads to true wisdom in knowing God.

Note: It is not by *observing* but by *listening* to words.

God is speaking to us as “sons” (Heb. 12:5), so the words are *His* words!

And why is this so?

Proverbs 2:6 – Wisdom is from *His* mouth. It takes God’s words to know God’s ways.

Proverbs 2:7 – If we store up words *from Him*, He will store up wisdom *for us*.

And to store up means to *memorize*, to retain for safe-keeping (cf. Pr. 22:17-21).

This is *so critical*—there is no wisdom apart from God’s words:

God never made us to ascertain the larger meaning of things from the mere nature of things.

He talked to us in the Garden and He has been talking to us ever since.

Although the world thought they could become wise, they never knew God (1 Cor. 1:21);

it is only through the apparent “foolishness” of being told the answers that we can truly know Him!

cf. to “discern” the knowledge of God and the ways of justice (Pr. 2:5, 9).

No! Man does not live by bread alone but by *every* word that proceeds from His mouth (Dt. 8:3; Mt. 4:4).

There is no superfluous *book* in the Bible—there is no throw-away *word* in the Bible.

Philosophy is based on theology—and true theology is based on the written word of God!

Illus. William Cowper, “God Moves in a Mysterious Way” (hymn)

Just ponder with me again a few of the ways of God—can they really be ascertained apart from revelation?

So many of God’s ways are counterintuitive:

E.g. Giving leads to gain (Pr. 11:25-26).

We can observe the result, but can we ascertain the reason?

Ans. Although there are human factors (observing and blessing – v. 26), the LORD is still the link.

“One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and He will repay him...” (Pr. 19:17).

The LORD is the true “invisible hand” behind the economic system (cf. Adam Smith).

E.g. Enemies are harmed by doing them good and are benefited by gloating over them (Pr. 25:21-22; 24:17-18).

Again, we can observe the result, but can we ascertain the reason?

Ans. The LORD is watching and rendering accordingly—He hates *all* pride (cf. Pr. 3:34).

No true system of ethics and events in life can ignore the Sovereign Actor behind everything!

And His ways cannot be known apart from Him talking to us!

Therefore, listen to the next chapter:

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;

in all your ways [literally] *know Him*, and He will make your paths straight” (Pr. 3:5-6).

There is no area of life where the knowledge of God would not be appropriate: “In *all* your ways...”

Let's put it another way: *Wisdom is not common sense* – whether book smart or street savvy, sophisticated or not. There is nothing “common” about God—He is holy (cf. Pr. 9:10 again). And there is nothing “common” about the knowledge of God—this must be *discerned* (Pr. 2:5; cf. Heb. 5:14).

Contrary to conventional wisdom, mystery is the norm—we should expect mystery in dealing with God. After all, if creation was made with *wisdom* (Pr. 8) and yields up its secrets to the very few after much research, and with all the appearances often to the contrary, why should God's ways in the moral realm be less difficult? (This is a good bit of the reasoning behind God's response to Job in Job 38-41.)
Clarification: Yes, His name is consistent, but how His name fits with each event is not self-evident.
“We serve an incredibly faithful but notoriously unpredictable God” (Paul Cox).
Illus. As in nature, there is statistical certainty (50/50), but individual event uncertainty (boy or girl?).

Conclusion – Therefore some of the virtues in this book now make more sense:

Fear of the LORD is the *beginning* of knowledge and wisdom (Pr. 1:7; 9:10; cf. 15:33).
The starting point is to say: “I do not know!” (cf. 30:2 – “I am...stupid”).
Now we joke like this, but sometimes it is an inferiority complex or excuse for laziness.
We often put down one form of wisdom (education) for another (experience)—or vice versa.
(Whatever we pick tends to be what we have already, compared to those who threaten us.)
No! *All of us* start with stupidity and if we were *really sincere* about our admission, we'd *seek* it!
“Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the LORD understand all things” (28:5; 1 Cor. 2).

Trust in the LORD is *goal* of wisdom training (e.g. Pr. 22:19).
“He who gives attention to the word will find good, and blessed is he who trusts in the LORD” (Pr. 16:20).
I cannot know that unless He tells me—and He has—so what is my response today?
Illus. Lady in her fifties, after two failed marriages and now married to a drunk, got a greeting card. Her believing mother sent it—but what stood out was not a note, but the verse in the corner:
Proverbs 3:5-6 – “Trust in the LORD with all your heart...”
She thought, “Surely God would have made a better go of this life than I have!”
That started her journey—and three years later she trusted Christ alone for complete salvation.

How about you this morning?

If you are completely honest with yourself, what is the true basis for your “M.O.” (*modus operandi*)?
Are you relying on your education, your experience, your common sense?
Do you even *know* the words of God? If you do not even *know* them, how can you be relying on them?
Listen to the promise of Jesus to Jews who responded favorably to Him:
“If you remain in My words, then you are truly My disciples,
and you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:31-32).

And if you *know* these words, are you *doing* them this morning?
Jesus warned us about hearing without doing (Mt. 7:24-27).
We are told in Scripture to be “doers of the word and not hearers who delude themselves” (Jas. 1:22).
And what are we to do this morning?
Admit we are stupid, fear God, and trust Him with all our heart.
We may never know the answer here to the *Why?* question.

[**Note:** Many of the Scripture texts are found on the next two pages.]

Texts for the Sermon

Abomination vs. Delight

Examples of Abominations

- “Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal faithfully are His delight” (12:22).
- “Evil plans are an abomination to the LORD, but pleasant words are pure” (15:26).
- “Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; assuredly, he will not be unpunished” (16:5).

The Value of a Dollar

- “A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is His delight” (11:1).
- “Differing weights and differing measures, both of them are abominable to the LORD” (20:10).
- “Differing weights are an abomination to the LORD, and a false scale is not good” (20:23).
 - Example: William Jennings Bryan, “You shall not crucify mankind on a cross of gold.”
 - Example: FDR in spring 1933 called in all gold and invalidated gold clauses in contracts (Shlaes 157-59).
- “A just balance and scales belong to the LORD; all the weights of the bag are His concern” (16:11).

The Sacrifices of the Wicked

- “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is His delight” (15:8).
- “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, how much more when he brings it with evil intent!” (21:27)

The Sovereignty of God

People?

- “The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes” (21:1).
- “The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil” (16:4).

Planning?

- “The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD” (16:1).
- “The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps” (16:9).
- “Many plans are in a man’s heart, but the counsel of the LORD will stand” (19:21).
- “Man’s steps are ordained by the LORD, how then can man understand his way?” (20:24).

Preparation?

- “The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the LORD” (21:31).

Luck?

- “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD” (16:33).

Absolute Sovereignty

- “There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the LORD” (21:30).

Defender of the Poor

Here is the theological basis for understanding class strife in society...

- “The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: the LORD gives light to the eyes of both” (29:13).
- “The rich and the poor have a common bond, the LORD is the maker of them all” (22:2).

Therefore...

- “He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, but he who is gracious to the needy honors Him” (14:31).
- “He who mocks the poor taunts his Maker; he who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished” (17:5).

Conversely...

- “One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and He will repay him for his good deed” (19:17).

God has a special eye for the vulnerable...

- “Do not rob the poor because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate; for the LORD will plead their case and take the life of those who rob them” (22:22-23).
- “Do not move the ancient boundary or go into the fields of the fatherless, for their Redeemer is strong; He will please their case against you” (23:10-11).
- “The LORD will tear down the house of the proud, but He will establish the boundary of the widow” (15:25).

God will hold us accountable for what we do and do not do for the vulnerable poor...

- “Deliver those who are being taken away to death, and those who are staggering to slaughter, Oh hold them back.
- If you say, ‘See, we did not know this,’ does He not consider who weighs the hearts?
And does He not know it who keeps your soul?
And will He not render to man according to his work?” (24:11-12)
- “He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered” (21:13).

Eyes of the LORD and the Heart of Man

God knows everything everywhere...

- “The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the LORD has made both of them” (20:12).
- “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good” (15:3).
- “The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge, but He overthrows the words of the treacherous man” (22:12).

God knows the human heart...

- “The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests hearts” (17:3).
- “All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the LORD weighs the motives” (16:2).
- “Every man’s way is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the hearts” (21:2).
- “Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD, how much more the hearts of men!” (15:11).

Justice – Discriminating between the Righteous and the Wicked

- “The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the dwelling of the righteous” (3:33).
- “The LORD will not allow the righteous to hunger, but He will reject the craving of the wicked” (10:3).
- “The way of the LORD is a stronghold to the upright, but ruin to the workers of iniquity” (10:29).
- “...the evil man will not go unpunished, but the descendants of the righteous will be delivered” (11:21).
- “The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous” (15:29).
- “Many seek the ruler’s favor, but justice for man comes from the LORD” (29:26).

Enemies

God is sovereign over our enemies...

- “When a man’s ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him” (16:7).

Therefore, do not take matters into your own hand...

- “Do not say, ‘I will repay evil’; wait for the LORD, and He will save you” (20:22).

Instead, if you would want to hurt your enemy...

- “If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you” (25:21-22).

Conversely, if you would want your enemy to cease hurting...

- “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; or the LORD will see it and be displeased, and turn His anger away from him” (24:17-18).