

STUDIES IN PROVERBS

The Biblical book of Proverbs is the most valuable collection of proverbial wisdom sayings to be found anywhere in the world. Many others have stated wise proverbial sayings - in many times and places and languages - but the proverbs which are found in the Bible are the only proverbs which we can be confident have been inspired by God.

The book of Proverbs will begin with an explanation of its importance and value for those who give it the close attention it deserves. This explanation is followed by a series of longer proverbial wisdom songs or poems which develop a theme in some detail. This sets the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs apart from most of the remainder of the book, where the proverbs are mostly short wisdom sayings - most of which consist of only one verse or only two lines. The final two chapters of Proverbs return to the pattern of the first nine chapters, with longer sections of poetry which pursue a specific theme.

The fact that Solomon indicates in some of the earlier chapters of the book that he was particularly interested in providing wise guidance for his sons makes it evident that Proverbs is a book which contains valuable information for young people. But it soon becomes evident that there is wisdom in the proverbs which is applicable to people of all ages and both genders.

Because there is never a day when we do not come upon issues which are addressed in one or more of the proverbs or thematic sections, the book of Proverbs is highly relevant to any person who is interested in acquiring the wisdom which is needed to successfully navigate daily living.

The book of Proverbs is the third book in the collection of

biblical writings which are known (as books are arranged in our English Bible) as “wisdom literature.” They are books which are written in poetic form in the Hebrew language - a language whose poetry follows different patterns than poetry written in English. The other poetic writings in the biblical “wisdom literature” collection include the books of Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. There are also numerous poetic passages in books beyond the “wisdom literature” of the Bible, with poetic statements scattered throughout the books of the Law and the historical books, and extensive poetic passages in many of the prophetic books.

THE AUTHORSHIP OF PROVERBS

The opening verse of the book of Proverbs identifies the content which follows as “the proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel.” So there is **no** good reason to question the fact that the well-known son of David who followed him on Israel’s throne is the person who is referred to. But that doesn’t necessarily prove that Solomon is the author of all of the proverbs which are contained in the book.

Solomon is identified as the author of the opening portion of the book, which is composed of lengthier proverbial “wisdom poems” on various topics. He is again introduced in Proverbs 10:1 as the author of the shorter, more typical proverbial sayings which follow. Proverbs 25:1 introduces some additional proverbs written by Solomon which were apparently added to the collection of the book during the days of King Hezekiah. But Proverbs 24:23 is introduced by the statement: “These also are sayings of the wise” - leading some to question whether the verses which follow in the rest of the 24th chapter were written by Solomon or some other “wise” person or persons (because the word “wise” in the Hebrew text is a plural). And chapters 30 and 31 are each introduced by names other than that of

Solomon:

Proverbs 30:1 - "The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle . . ."

Proverbs 31:1 - "The words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him."

Neither of these names occur anywhere else in the Scriptures, and the persons who bore the names are otherwise unknown apart from their mention in Proverbs 30 and 31.

So it appears that Solomon is the author of most of the proverbs which are found in the book of Proverbs, but there is the likelihood that some shorter parts of the book were written by unknown authors other than Solomon. That Solomon was well qualified to write proverbs and other wisdom literature (e.g. Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon) is very evident because of the gift of wisdom he was granted according to the account in I Kings 3. As a young king, Solomon was keenly sensitive to his need for "an understanding heart to judge [God's] people to discern between good and evil" (I Kings 3:9). So, because He asked the Lord to give him "an understanding heart," and because his request was pleasing to the Lord, his wish was granted. The Lord's promise to him was "I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one arise like you after you" (I Kings 3:12).

The fact that we have in our possession only a small portion of the proverbs and other wisdom writings Solomon produced is revealed in I Kings 4:32, where we are told that "He spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005."

THE SUBJECTS OF THE PROVERBS

The book of Proverbs addresses many subjects and many issues which people encounter as they make their way through life. Though some people believe they see themes addressed in Proverbs which can be grouped together to create an outline, I have never found any such attempts very convincing. While consideration of the context of a biblical text is generally very important to an accurate understanding and interpretation of its meaning, most of the proverbial statements in the book of Proverbs are unrelated to verses which precede and follow. Though there are places where the same theme will be addressed in two or more verses, especially in the “wisdom poems” of the first nine chapters and the closing verses of the book, most of the proverbs are unrelated to the verses which precede and the verses which follow.

There are numerous themes addressed in the book of Proverbs, but most themes will be studied by jumping around in the text from verse to verse where each theme comes up for consideration. The following is a list of some of the themes which come up in Proverbs - along with their locations throughout the book.

Attitudes - 15:13; 15:15; 17:22; 18:14

Business - 11:1; 11:26; 13:23; 14:4; 20:4

Debt - 3:27-28; 11:15; 22:7; 22:26-27

Discipline - 3:11-12; 12:1; 13:24; 19:18; 22:15

Fools - 10:23; 13:19; 14:7; 15:21; 17:12; 19:10; 19:29; 26:4-5; 27:3; 27:22

Gossip - 11:9; 16:28; 17:4; 18:8; 19:5

Humility - 11:2; 12:9; 15:25; 16:18; 22:4

Influence - 4:25-27; 13:20; 22:24-25; 28:10

Justice - 17:15; 18:17; 19:28; 21:15; 28:21; 31:8-9

Laziness - 6:6-11; 15:19; 19:15; 19:24; 21:25-26; 22:13; 24:30-34; 26:14; 16:16

Poverty - 14:31; 18:23; 19:4; 22:2; 22:16; 22:22,23; 28:6; 28:19; 29:7

Reverence for God - 1:7; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:2; 14:27; 22:4

Riches - 10:15; 11:14; 11:16; 11:28; 13:8; 13:11; 13:22; 14:24; 15:6; 16:16; 18:11; 19:4; 22:1; 23:4-5; 27:23-24

Righteousness - 4:18-19; 10:11; 10:31; 11:8; 11:23; 12:5; 12:10; 12:26; 12:28; 13:5; 13:6; 14:34; 20:7; 21:3; 29:7

Speech - 10:19; 12:18; 13:3; 14:3; 14:23; 15:2; 15:4; 15:28; 16:21; 16:24; 18:4; 18:6; 21:23; 25:11; 25:15; 26:20

Success - 12:1; 15:22; 16:3; 17:2; 17:20; 19:21; 21:5; 22:16; 28:19

Temper - 12:16; 14:17; 14:29; 15:18; 16:32; 19:19; 22:24-25; 29:11; 29:22

Truth - 8:8; 12:6; 12:13; 12:17; 12:19; 12:22; 18:17

Wickedness - 12:12; 14:32; 21:7; 28:1

Women - 11:16; 11:22; 12:4; 18:22; 19:13; 19:14; 21:19;in
27:15,16; 31:10-31

As this partial list of only some of the subjects addressed in the book of Proverbs clearly shows, the topics it addresses will be found scattered throughout the collection. The book of Proverbs contains a wealth of information from God's perspective on these and other significant subjects, so it is well worth the time and effort anyone will invest in seeking to "mine" its treasures.

THE POETRY OF PROVERBS

Hebrew poetry is not characterized by the use of rhyme and rhythm as English poetry is. It is based on the comparison and contrast of words and thoughts. A typical line of Hebrew poetry will make a statement, followed by a second statement which builds on the first or contrasts with the first or illustrates the first in what is known as parallelism. Understanding a proverbial thought can often be enhanced by an appreciation of the various types of parallelism which are being employed.

1. Synonymous Parallelism - the thought of the first line is repeated in the second line.

“Do not love sleep, lest you become poor;
Open your eyes, and you will be satisfied with food.”
(20:13)

2. Antithetical Parallelism - the second line is contrasted with the thought of the first line.

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

3. Synthetic or Ascending Parallelism - the second line complements or completes the thought of the first line.

“It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich,
And He adds no sorrow to it.” (10:22)

4. Parabolic parallelism - the first line gives an illustration and the second line gives an application.

“As a ring of gold in a swine’s snout,
So is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion.” (11:22)

5. Comparative Parallelism - the second line is compared with the first line.

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

The varied structures in the book of Proverbs adds interest to the many topics and the practical wisdom which they contain.

“The Beginning of Knowledge”

Proverbs 1:1-3

Q - What do we hope will be the result of the years of education which we and our children experience in the schools of our nation?

It is generally agreed that life is likely to be improved for those who receive an education. People who do not learn how to read and to write and to understand the basics of math will find themselves handicapped in many of life's opportunities. Once a solid foundation for further learning has been laid down in the study of learning's essentials, learning can be significantly advanced by building on the essentials. There are many things in life which don't make any sense unless you begin at the beginning!

The Biblical book of Proverbs offers a course of study which has some prerequisites. A correct understanding of the issues of life begins with the fear of the Lord!

I. The Author of the Proverbs 1:1

Q - Does Proverbs 1:1 require that Solomon wrote all of the book of Proverbs? Though Solomon is the acknowledged author of most of the book of Proverbs, there are portions which may have been written by other authors - e.g. 24:23 ff. which introduces “sayings of the wise” (where the word “wise” is a plurel); 30:1-33, attributed to Agur the son of Jakeh; and 31:1-9, attributed to King Lemuel.

II. The Purpose of the Proverbs 1:2-3

A. To Know Wisdom and Instruction 1:2a

Q - What is the test of whether a person “knows” wisdom and instruction? Truly knowing wisdom and instruction is evidenced by putting wisdom and instruction to practice in a person’s life.

Q - What does the person who “knows” wisdom know? The person who “knows” wisdom knows how to skillfully apply what they know to the practical issues of life because Solomon’s word for wisdom (*chokmah*) describes “skill” in doing whatever is done.

Q - What does the person who “knows” instruction know? The person who “knows” instruction knows how to live in a disciplined manner because Solomon’s word for instruction (*musar*) can be translated by the words “discipline, chastening, and correction.”

B. To Discern Sayings of Understanding 1:2b

Q - How would you explain what it means to “discern the sayings of understanding”? To discern (*bin*) sayings of understanding (*binah*) could be translated “to discern discernment” or “to understand understanding,” so it means to truly understand what is being said when spoken words actually reveal an understanding of the subject being addressed.

C. To Receive Instruction in Wisdom, Righteousness, Justice and Equity 1:3

1. Instruction can help develop “wise behavior”

Q - What might be the difference between the “wisdom” of verse 2 and the “wise behavior” of verse 3? The “wisdom” of verse 2 refers to skill in applying knowledge to the practical issues of life, while “wise behavior” refers to the knowledge to be applied (*sakal* - prudence).

2. Instruction can help develop righteousness

Q - What does the person who receives “instruction in righteousness” receive? The person who receives instruction in righteousness becomes disciplined in doing what is right - as the Lord reveals what is right.

3. Instruction can help develop justice.

Q - What does the person who receives “instruction in justice” receive? The person who receives “instruction in justice” becomes disciplined in making good judicial decisions.

4. Instruction can help develop equity

Q - What does the person who receives “instruction in equity” receive? The person who receives “instruction in equity” becomes disciplined in making decisions which are “fair” for all concerned.

Think About It: As you can see from its opening verses, the book of Proverbs is a book intended to help us deal with some of the very practical and important issues of our lives. All who understand it and take it seriously will find their lives immeasurably enriched as a result.

Apply It: To what extent are we open to become informed and disciplined in doing things which are skillful, well-informed, right as defined by the Lord Himself, law-abiding, and fair for all who are affected by our decisions?

“Benefits of Pursuing Knowledge”

Proverbs 1:4-7

Q - What are some of the benefits you have derived from the education and experience you have acquired in life?

The book of Proverbs is classed among the “wisdom literature” of the Bible, because it is designed to give a person the practical knowledge of wisdom (*chokmah* - the skillful application of that which is known). And because the Lord Himself is the personification of wisdom, true knowledge and wisdom begin with the true knowledge of the Lord Himself!

The pursuit of knowledge in the Proverbs promises many benefits . . .

I. The Results of the Study of Proverbs 1:4-5

A. Prudence for the Naive 1:4a

Q - Why are the naive in need of prudence? Naivety is the simplicity characteristic of those who are young and inexperienced which often gets them into trouble, while prudence has been defined as the ability to use reason skill and caution for a successful outcome in life. The naive need prudence so they can be successful in life, and the proverbs lead to prudence.

B. Knowledge and Discretion for the Young 1:4b

Q - How would knowledge and discretion be particularly beneficial to the youth? Because the naivety which is characteristic of those who are young complicates their lives, accurate knowledge and discretion would be particularly beneficial because of their ability to help them make better decisions.

C. Increased Learning for the Wise 1:5a

Q - What is the importance of hearing and increasing learning for someone who is already wise? Because wisdom is one of life's greatest attributes, and because there are degrees of wisdom, someone who is hearing well and who is increasing in learning as a result is on the path to greater wisdom which will always be beneficial.

D. Wise Counsel for the Understanding 1:5b

Q - What would make wise counsel a beneficial acquisition for a man of understanding? The fact that a man possesses understanding does not yet mean that he knows well how to apply his understanding to the issues in his life, so his acquisition of wise counsel will make his understanding more beneficial.

E. The Understanding of Proverbs, Figures, Wise Words and Riddles 1:6

Q - Why is it worth mentioning that studying Proverbs will help a person “to understand a proverb”? Because proverbs are a particular form of communication, studying them will improve a person's ability to understand what they are intended to communicate.

Q - How would studying the Proverbs help someone understand “a figure”? Because studying Proverbs increases a person's understanding, he is more likely to understand the significance of a “figure,” a mellow translation for the word which Solomon used (*melitzah* - satire, a mocking poem).

Q - What is not surprising about the fact that studying Proverbs helps a person understand “the words of the wise”? Because Proverbs is found among Hebrew Scripture's “wisdom literature,” it is not surprising to learn that its study helps a

person understand the meaning of “the words of the wise.”

Q - Why might the study of Proverbs help a person understand “riddles”? Though the book of Proverbs does not include any “riddles,” much of its content requires the careful consideration which is required for understanding a riddle (*chidah* - a riddle; an enigmatic, perplexing saying or question).

II. The Place to Begin in the Study of the Proverbs 1:7

Q - Why is “the fear of the LORD” essential to “the beginning of knowledge”? Because genuine knowledge requires an understanding of reality, it includes the reality that all men will one day give an account of themselves to the Lord as the ultimate judge of every thought, word and deed in their lives.

Q - How does Solomon characterize the person who despises the wisdom and instruction which can be found in the study of Proverbs? Solomon characterizes the person who despises the wisdom and instruction which can be found in the study of Proverbs as a “fool” (the Hebrew word *evil*, pronounced ehvil).

Think About It: An accurate understanding of the book of Proverbs should lead a person to a healthy fear of the Lord.

Apply It: Do we fear the Lord - in the sense that we recognize our ultimate accountability to Him in every thought, word and deed - enabling us to trust Him for salvation and to understand and apply the wisdom which is found in the book of Proverbs?

“The Rewards of Respect”

Proverbs 1:8-9

Q - What are some of the benefits which come into the life of a child who is respectful toward his parents?

The family of Israel’s King David, in which Solomon grew up, was a large family with a mixed record as far as godly living goes. As a wealthy king, Solomon’s father did what many other kings of his day did. He married several wives (at least eight wives and at least ten concubines). So it is hardly surprising that neither his wives nor his children received the attention they should have received from a godly husband and father. But Solomon, who perhaps fared better than some of his siblings in his relationship with his parents, was aware of the importance of being respectful toward both his father and his mother - as Proverbs 1:8-9 reveals.

I. The Challenge to Obey One’s Father and Mother 1:8

A. The Command Concerning One’s Father 1:8a

Q - What is the importance for a child of listening to what his father has to say? Because most fathers have far more knowledge and experience than their children do, and because most fathers have their children’s best interests in mind, it is important for children who want to do well to take advantage of the knowledge, experience, and the love their fathers have to offer.

Q - What is frequently the “tone” of the instruction given by a father to his child/children? Fathers frequently instruct their children in the form of commands, and Solomon’s word for “instruction” (*musar* - discipline, chastening, correction)

has a firm tone to it.

B. The Command Concerning One's Mother 1:8b

Q - What is likely to happen in the life of the child who forsakes his mother's teaching? The child who forsakes his mother's teaching is likely to miss out on some important direction in his life, and he may easily find himself in some kind of trouble for his oversight.

Q - What is frequently the difference between the instruction of a father and the teaching of a mother? While fathers are more likely to tell their children what to do, mothers are more likely to explain what they should do and why they should do it (though Solomon's word for "teaching" is the Hebrew word *torah* (direction, instruction law), most often translated "law" in the Bible).

II. The Results of Obeying One's Father and Mother 1:9

A. The "Graceful Wreath" for the Head 1:9a

Q - What would be the significance of a "graceful wreath" to be worn on the head of the child who listens to his father's instruction and his mother's teaching? A graceful wreath would be an attractive item of head-wear, sometimes fashioned out of plants and probably more often out of cloth.

B. The "Ornaments" for the Neck 1:9b

Q - Why would "ornaments" about the neck of an attentive and obedient child be worthy of pursuing? Like modern necklaces, an ornament about the neck would be a decorative and perhaps costly piece of neck ware intended to enhance a person's appearance.

Q - How did the life of the young boy Samuel illustrate Solomon's promise in verse 9 (in contrast to the sons of Eli, the priest who was Samuel's "mentor" - I Samuel 2:25) according to I Samuel 2:26? I Samuel 2:26 reports that "Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the LORD and with men" in view of his good behavior as a young boy at the Tabernacle where he was placed by his mother as an assistant to Eli, the priest.

Q - How did the youthful Lord Jesus demonstrate the point Solomon is predicting in verse 9 in His own childhood according to Luke 2:52? When Jesus returned to Nazareth with His parents after the family's visit to Jerusalem He continued in subjection to His parents and He "kept increasing in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and men." So, like Samuel before Him, the respectful behavior of Jesus made Him look very good - as if He were adorned with a graceful wreath on His head and ornaments about His neck.

The "beginning of knowledge," as we have seen (Proverbs 1:7), is "the fear of the LORD." For the child who has started down that good path in life, the next step is to hear his father's instruction and pay attention to his mother's teaching. And the parent who is wise will do everything possible to see that children get headed in these healthy directions early in life - for the benefit of all concerned, and for the honor of the Lord.

Think About It: Children will be richly rewarded in life when they pay careful attention and yield in submission to the instruction of their father and the teaching of their mother - and wise parents will do all they can to see that their children are rewarded in these matters.

“Resisting Evil”

Proverbs 1:10-19

Q - What is an act of evil you have ever become aware of which you have found to be most shocking?

Gang behavior is often a problem in many cities in our nation and our world, but Proverbs 1:10-19 reveals that such behavior is not unique to our times. So Solomon warned his sons not to get involved with gang-like behavior in his day! It is hard to believe what evil things people will commit themselves to do with their lives. And it is sad to see the negative influence they can have on other people whom they recruit to join them in their evil deeds.

I. The Warning Against Evil 1:10

Q - What is there about sinful behavior which a young man might find enticing? Some young people feel a sense of empowerment in resisting authority, by taking matters into their own hands - especially so if they have no respect for the Lord.

Q - What is Solomon’s seemingly simple solution to abstaining from the enticements which sinners might offer? Solomon’s simple solution of resisting sinners’ enticements is not to consent to evil enticements.

II. The Enticement of Evildoers 1:11-14

A. The Prospect of Violence 1:11-12

Q - What problems do you see in the invitation Solomon envisions in verses 11 and 12? I see the problems that (1) the invitation comes from “sinners,” (2) the invitation involves the

shedding of blood, (3) the invitation is intended to affect innocent people without any justifiable cause, and (4) the invitation is intended to result in not only bloodshed but in the death of innocent victims.

B. The Promise of Wealth 1:13-14

Q - What benefits do the enticements which the sinners of this passage give voice to seem to offer? The enticements offered by sinners in this passage are the prospect of gaining materially by joining in sinful behavior.

Q - What are some of the problems a discerning young man should see in the enticements being presented? A discerning young man should be aware that the promise of shared wealth among criminal elements is an illusory prospect.

III. The Dangers of Evil 1:15-19

A. The Caution 1:15

Q - What practical fatherly advice does Solomon offer to his son which could eliminate all dangers? Solomon offers the advice that his son not enter into the path which sinners are inviting him to travel.

B. The Evaluation 1:16-18

1. The Unworthy Goal 1:16

Q - What makes the enticement of the “sinners” Solomon describes unworthy of a son’s serious consideration? The enticement which the sinners Solomon describes are offering to his son is contaminated by evil and deadly violence.

2. The Unwary Outlook 1:17

Q - What does the uselessness of spreading a net in the eyes of any bird have to do with Solomon's warning to his son? Even birds are wary of those who are setting up snares which will trap them, so Solomon is challenging his son to have as much sense as any bird has.

3. The Unsuspecting Victim 1:18

Q - What surprising outcome does Solomon warn his son would result from yielding to the enticements of the sinners he has described? Solomon warns his son that the enticements to sinful behavior he may face lead to self-destructive ends.

C. The Conclusion 1:19

Q - In what sense do the ways of everyone who gains by violence take away their lives? Because violence is sinful, and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), everyone who gains by violence is participating in behavior which will complicate his own life - both in the present and in the future.

Think About It: The ways of evil and violence are deceptive and self-destructive ways - damaging to all who engage in or who are victimized by them.

Apply It: Are we responding to the dangers of evil as the Lord would have us respond by "depart[ing] from evil, and do[ing] good" (Psalm 34:14) - leading to peaceful ends?

“An Opportunity to Wise Up”

Proverbs 1:20-33

Q - When have you seen someone persist in foolish ways to his eventual detriment?

It is hardly flattering that God’s word describes people as “sheep” (Isaiah 53:6), because sheep are prone to go astray. I once heard a rancher describe his sheep as “stupid” animals. Sheep could definitely benefit by a dose of wisdom - and the same is true of people who are often sheep-like!

I. The Call of Wisdom 1:20-23

A. Its Availability 1:20-21

Q - What is the significance of the presence and call of wisdom “in the street,” “in the square,” “at the head of the noisy streets,” and “at the entrance of the gates in the city”? It is significant that wisdom is so readily available to anyone who is paying attention to its presence and call.

B. Its Questions 1:22

Q - To whom does wisdom specifically extend her call in such public places? Wisdom specifically extends her call to those who are naive, simple-minded, scoffers, and fools.

C. Its Offer 1:23

Q - What does wisdom offer to do for those to whom she extends her public calls? Wisdom offers to pour out her spirit and make her words known to those who turn to her reproof.

II. The Charge of Wisdom 1:24-31

A. Its Rejection 1:24-25

Q - How is the rejection of wisdom's offer by those to whom she calls so publicly evident in our world? The existence of sinful and foolish behavior in so many lives around the world makes the rejection of wisdom's offer very evident.

B. It's Response 1:26-28

Q - What is the predictable result of the rejection of wisdom's offer in the lives of those who refuse the offer? The existence of calamity and dreadful things are the predictable result of the rejection of wisdom's offer in so many lives.

Q - What is wisdom's response toward those who reject her kind and generous offer? Wisdom laughs at those who reject her kind and generous offer because she realizes that the rejection of her kind and generous offer will result in defeat.

Q - What is it that makes the rejection of wisdom's offer so serious in the lives of those who turn away from her offer? When the rejection of wisdom's kind and generous offer results in calamity, distress, and anguish, and the rejection of wisdom's offer results in calamity, it is often too late for the person who has spurned wisdom to turn from their error and find the wisdom which has been rejected.

C. Its Reasoning 1:29-30

Q - What reasons for which those who reject wisdom's offer are identified in verse 29? Those who reject wisdom's offer do so because they have hated knowledge, they have not chosen the fear of the Lord, they have rejected wisdom's counsel, and they have

spurned wisdom's reproof.

D. Its Rejection 1:31

Q - What is it that results in the lives of those who reject wisdom's offer to intervene on their behalf? Those who reject wisdom's offer to intervene on their behalf end up eating the fruit of their chosen way and have to find satisfaction in the things they have devised on their own.

III. The Challenge of Wisdom 1:32-33

A. Its Reminder for Fools 1:32

Q - What two terms does wisdom use to identify the sad condition of the wayward and complacent, and with what predictable results? Wisdom identifies the wayward and complacent as naive (*peti* - simple) and foolish (*kesilim* - stupid, dull), with the predictable result that they are killed and destroyed.

B. Its Response to the Wise 1:33

Q - What rich rewards does wisdom predict for those who listen to and respond to her invitation? Wisdom predicts that those who listen to and respond to her invitation will live securely and be at ease from the dread of evil.

Think About It: Wisdom makes itself readily available to improve the lives of all who will listen and respond to what she has to offer, but she also warns of serious consequences for all who reject her offer.

Apply It: Are we benefitting from the wisdom which is readily available to us, or are we headed for trouble because of naive and foolish choices?

“A Father’s Godly Goals”

Proverbs 2:1-11

Q - What are some of the most important things you learned from your father?

It has often been said that “If you aim at nothing you will hit it every time.” There may actually be some exceptions. The Bible tells us, for example, of a Syrian soldier who simply aimed his bow into the air and shot an arrow which ended up killing Israel’s wicked King Ahab - because, though the soldier was aiming at nothing, the Lord was in control of the direction of that arrow (I Kings 22:34-35). But as a general rule, I am sure it is a pretty accurate statement that those who aim at nothing are likely to hit it.

I. The Outlook of a Godly Son 2:1-4

A. His Receptivity 2:1

Q - How does Solomon describe the wise response of the son he addresses to his instruction? Solomon describes his son’s wise response to his instruction as a receptive response.

B. His Attentiveness 2:2

Q - What does a son need to do in order to benefit from the wisdom and understanding his father has to offer? A son needs to listen attentively in his pursuit of understanding in order to benefit from his father’s wisdom and understanding.

C. His Eagerness 2:3

Q - How can a wise son display the genuineness of his desire for wisdom and understanding? A wise son can display the

genuineness of his desire for wisdom and understanding when he cries out for discernment and lifts his voice for understanding.

D. His Pursuits 2:4

Q - What objects of material value does Solomon indicate are illustrative of the value of wisdom and understanding? Solomon indicates that silver and hidden treasures are illustrative of the value of wisdom and understanding.

II. The Outcome for a Godly Son 2:5-11

The son who is willing to listen to the instruction of his father and, even more importantly, his heavenly Father, will discover that he has not wasted his time!

A. His Relationship with God 2:5

Q - What does Solomon identify as the supreme values which are available to the son who eagerly pursues wisdom and understanding? Solomon identifies the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God as the supreme values which are available to the son who eagerly pursues wisdom and understanding.

B. His Acquisition of Wisdom 2:6

Q - What is it which makes the personal relationship with the Lord identified in verse 5 such an important relationship? A personal relationship with the Lord is such an important relationship because the Lord is the one who gives wisdom as its source, and His mouth is the source of knowledge and understanding.

C. His Preservation 2:7-8

Q - What valuables does the Lord have in store for sons who are upright, walking in integrity, pursuing justice and wor-

thy to be described as “godly ones”? For sons who are upright, walking in integrity, and pursuing justice and worthy to be described as “godly ones” the Lord stores up sound wisdom, He provides a shield of protection and preservation, and He guards the paths of justice.

D. His Discernment 2:9-11

Q - What benefits does verse 9 offer to the son whose pursuit of wisdom and understanding leads to discernment? For the son whose pursuit of wisdom and understanding leads to discernment verse 9 offers the ability to discern righteousness and justice and equity and every good course.

Q - What benefits do verses 10-11 promise to those who achieve wisdom, knowledge, discretion and understanding? Verses 10-11 promise wisdom in the heart, the pleasantness of knowledge to the soul, the protection of discretion, and the watchfulness of understanding to those who achieve wisdom, knowledge, discretion and understanding.

Think About It: The son (or any other person) who is open to Godly instruction will be richly rewarded for it, because God has rich blessings in store for all who know and fear Him.

Apply It: Have the instructions and commands of our earthly fathers provided us the benefits the Lord intended them to provide because we have given them our attention? Have they been important enough in our thinking to make us seriously seek the face of our heavenly father - the ultimate source of all the good things which life has to offer?

“Avoiding Evil Influences”

Proverbs 2:12-22

Q - What are some of the surest ways a person can take to avoid evil influences?

Though there are many young people who experience many complications in life because they choose and follow unwise companions, Solomon had higher hopes for his sons.

I. Deliverance from the Evil Way 2:12-15

A. The Promise of Deliverance from the Way of Evil 2:12a

Q - How did Proverbs 2 begin (v. 1) to provide the son of Solomon a plan for escaping the way of evil? Proverbs 2 began with Solomon’s challenge for his son to receive his words and treasure his commands.

B. The People on the Way of Evil 2:12b-15

1. Their Perverse Speech 2:12b

Q - How does Proverbs 6:12 help us understand the importance of being delivered from the man who speaks perverse things? Proverbs 6:12 identifies the person who has a perverse mouth as a “worthless person.”

2. Their Problematic Paths 2:13-15

Q - What is it that causes people to leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness (v. 13, cf. John 3:19-20)? Jesus explained that people love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil and they do not want their evil

deeds exposed by the light/Light.

Q - How will Solomon assess the condition of those who delight in doing evil in Proverbs 10:23? Solomon exposes the condition of those who delight in doing evil as a condition of wickedness in Proverbs 10:23.

Q - What does Proverbs 21:8 say is likely to be true of the person who prefers crooked paths? Proverbs 21:8 says that the person who prefers crooked paths does so because he is guilty (not wishing to be exposed as such).

II. Deliverance from the Evil Woman 2:16-19

A. The Promise of Deliverance from the Strange Woman 2:16a

Q - Why might Solomon have chosen to describe the immoral woman as a “strange woman”? The immoral woman Solomon describes is “strange” in the sense she pursues relationships which are “foreign” to her proper relationships, and because many of the women who sought immoral relationships with Jewish men were cult prostitutes from foreign nations surrounding Israel.

B. The Problems of the Strange Woman 2:16b-19

1. Her Adultery 2:16b

Q - How does verse 16b eliminate any doubt about the behavior which makes the woman he has in mind a “strange woman”? Solomon’s description of the “strange woman” as an “adulteress” eliminates any doubt about her immorality.

2. Her Flattery 2:16c

Q - What is the purpose for which the “strange woman . . . the adulteress” flatters with her tongue (cf. 7:14-18)? The “strange woman” flatters with her tongue because she is trying to entice a man to engage in immoral behavior with her (often for a fee) and she believes that flattering him will convince him to fall into her trap.

3. Her Desertion 2:17

Q - Who does Solomon have in mind by his reference to the “companion of her youth,” and what “covenant of her God” has been “forgotten”? The companion of her youth, whom she has left, is the man she first married, and the covenant of her God which she has forgotten is the marriage vows she spoke when she promised to be faithful in her marriage relationship.

4. Her Destination 2:18

Q - How does verse 18 accentuate the importance of being delivered from the woman Solomon is describing? Verse 18 accentuates the importance of being delivered from the adulteress because becoming involved in a sexual relationship with her leads to various forms of death as sinful behavior always does (Romans 6:23).

5. Her Deadline 2:19

Q - In what sense can those who go to the “strange woman . . . the adulteress” never return again and fail to “reach the paths of life”? Sinful behavior, once experienced, can never be un-experienced, and it never leads to a positive outcome, but complicates life in a variety of ways.

III. Deliverance from Destruction and Instability 2:20-21

A. The Prospect for the God-fearing Man 2:20-21

1. His Companions 2:20

Q - Who are some biblical examples of the “good men” who kept the paths of righteousness the wise young man might aspire to walk with in life’s paths? Joseph would be the classic example of a good man who kept the paths of righteousness when he was being tempted to sinful behavior by Potiphar’s wife. And Daniel was certainly tempted to conform to pagan norms in order to please his pagan masters and colleagues.

2. His Constancy 2:21

Q - In what sense could Solomon’s son expect to “live in the land” and “remain in it” if he sought to be upright and blameless? Solomon’s son could expect to “live in the land” and “remain in it” by upright and blameless behavior in the sense that he would experience what Jesus described as “abundant life” (John 10:10), and his behavior would produce stability in his life - keeping him from running away from problems in fear as a result of broken relationships.

B. The Prospect for the Wicked 2:22

Q - In what sense might Solomon’s son expect to be cut off from the land and uprooted from it if he chose to be wicked and treacherous? Wicked and treacherous behavior results in broken relationships and hostility from people who have been wronged as a result of it - including death-threatening hostility.

Think About It: People who know and fear the Lord will be delivered from godless men and women and the problems which go along with their lifestyles.

Apply It: If we want to enjoy life at its best; if we want to enjoy stability in our lives - we need to stay away from the path of the wicked and treacherous! So it is Solomon's challenge to his son - and to us - to commit to the fear and the knowledge of the Lord, because a commitment to godly ways will deliver from all kinds of trouble!

“Rewards of a Godly Life”

Proverbs 3:1-6

Q - What are some rewards you have experienced by conforming your life to the direction found in God’s Word?

The Four Spiritual Laws, a Gospel tract published by Cru (Campus Crusade for Christ), has been shared with many millions of people around the world. I have often used it to share the message of the gospel when I have had the opportunity, often sharing it with people who have stopped by the office of churches I have served seeking financial help in times of need. The first of the four Spiritual Laws states that “God loves you, and has a wonderful plan for your life.” Solomon would have subscribed to the truth of that “law.”

I. The Importance of a Father’s Teaching 3:1-2

A. The Challenge to Obey 3:1

Q - Why did Solomon have reason to believe his teaching and his commandments deserved his son’s careful attention?
Solomon had been granted wisdom by the Lord in response to his request for an “understanding heart” (I Kings 3:9) in his role as king of Israel.

B. The Reward of Obeying 3:2

Q - On what basis could Solomon (or any other father) promise his son length of days and years of life and peace?
The Lord has promised prolonged days and well-being to those who honor their father and mother (Exodus 20:9; Deuteronomy 5:16) - though this should be viewed as a general rule.

II. The Importance of Kindness and Truth 3:3-4

A. The Challenge of Kindness and Truth 3:3

Q - How can a person go about binding intangibles such as kindness and truth around the neck and writing them on the tablet of their heart? As Deuteronomy 11:18 reveals, impressing the words of the Lord on the heart is equivalent to binding intangibles such as kindness and truth around the neck and writing them on the tablet of the heart. The Lord intends these qualities to become a regular part of the believer's nature.

B. The Reward for Kindness and Truth 3:4

Q - How could Solomon be so sure his son would find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man by his pursuit of kindness and truth and peace? Solomon was aware that pursuing godly qualities like kindness and truth and peace can always be expected to please the Lord and other people - as Proverbs 8:35 reveals to be true of all wise behavior.

III. The Importance of Trusting the Lord 3:5-6

A. The Challenge to Trust 3:5

1. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart"

Q - What would prevent someone from trusting in the Lord with all of their heart? It is the natural inclination of the sinful human heart to place its own human interests ahead of competition from any other thing.

2. "And do not lean on your own understanding."

Q - Why would Solomon advise against leaning on one's

own understanding? Because human understanding is limited at best and often seriously flawed, it is not able to provide dependable guidance by comparison with the understanding the Lord provides for His people in His word.

3. “In all your ways acknowledge Him”

Q - What is the likelihood that anyone will acknowledge the Lord in all of his ways? Though it is a lofty goal (cf. Matthew 5:48), acknowledging the Lord in everything a person does is unlikely due to the sinful condition of the human heart.

B. The Reward of Trusting 3:6b

Q - What would be the benefit of “straight paths” for anyone who qualifies for them? Straight paths are ways in life which avoid the distractions and detours of sin which complicate the lives of all who fail to choose the Lord’s direction for their lives.

Think About It: The best results in life will be experienced by people who are fully committed to the Lord and the revelation of His word - values which Solomon sought to encourage in the life of the son(s) he advised in the book of Proverbs.

Apply It: To what extent are we benefitting by our commitment to trusting the Lord in every issue we face in life - beginning (most importantly) with the salvation of our souls, but including as well all of the details, both small and large, which we encounter along the paths of life?

“And More Rewards of a Godly Life”

Proverbs 3:7-12

Q - What are some practical steps a person who would like to be rewarded by the Lord can take to experience God's blessings?

Many religious people, trusting in their own performance to achieve the Lord's approval and blessings, become quite impressed with their own “righteousness,” but the Scriptures assure us that self-righteousness is not the path to the Lord's blessings. Many others view their wealth as an indication of the Lord's blessing on their diligence, so they “build bigger barns” (Luke 12:18) to permit them to “eat, drink and be merry” as a result of their material prosperity (Luke 12:19) - giving little thought to the importance of honoring the Lord by means of the riches He has provided them (Luke 12:20). Sometimes people who are self-righteous or materialistic reject the Lord's discipline for their failures, but they shouldn't reject it because He always does what He does out of His heart of love for His people's well-being.

I. The Importance of Humility 3:7-8

A. The Challenge of Humility 3:7

Q - What is problematic for those who are wise in their own eyes? Pride is always problematic because “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6).

Q - What is the relationship between fearing the Lord and turning away from evil? People who fear the Lord in view of the day when He will judge their sins will turn away from sin (I Peter 1:17).

B. The Reward for Humility 3:8

Q - What is there about humility which could be expected to provide physical healing? Humility results in an unstressed mental and emotional condition which is consistent with good health.

II. The Importance of Right Material Priorities 3:9-10

A. The Challenge to Honor the Lord 3:9

Q - Why does the Lord deserve to be honored by the use of the wealth His people possess? The Lord is the source of every good thing which people possess (James 1:17), so He should be honored by the use of things which come from Him.

Q - What are some practical reasons for honoring the Lord with the “first of the produce” His people’s wealth provides? Honoring the Lord first with what a person possesses places Him in the position of priority which He deserves in His people’s lives, and it assures that He receives what He desires and deserves before it get spent on other things of lesser importance.

B. The Reward for Honoring the Lord 3:10

Q - Can you think of biblical evidence that the rewards of this verse are a generalization and not a firm commitment in every situation? The experience of Job, who lost His children and his wealth in spite of the fact that he had carefully honored the Lord, is a classic example of the fact that righteous living is sometimes accompanied by material loss - though Job’s righteous living was fully rewarded when all was said and done.

III. The Importance of God’s Discipline 3:11-12

A. The Challenge to Respond to Discipline 3:11

Q - What are some of the ways in which the Lord might discipline his “children”? The Lord might discipline His children by such things as difficult weather, material loss, troubled health, or possibly even physical death.

Q - What might cause someone who is a child of God to reject His discipline? Someone who is a child of God might reject the discipline of the Lord out of a sense of personal pride or unrealistic expectations.

Q - Why is it not a wise move to “loathe His reproof”? The person who is trusting the Lord (as every person should) ought to respect His dealings in His people’s lives, never loathing anything which comes from the hand of the Lord.

B. The Reason for Responding to Discipline 3:12

Q - What is it that makes the Lord’s reproof, in the life of one of His children, like that in the case of a good human father, an act of love? The Lord only reproves His children when reproof is deserved, and He always does what He does (as any good human father should do) out of His desire to promote that which is good in His people’s lives.

Think About It: Humility, right material priorities, and sensitivity to divine discipline are all things which the Lord will richly reward in the lives of His people. They are all a part of His perfect plan in the lives of those who will experience His best.

Apply It: Because the Lord has rich rewards for people who pursue His plan for their lives, we need to make the commitment to follow His plan if we want to experience life at its very

best - the “abundant life” which Jesus came to bring to all who fully put their trust in Him (John 10:10).

“Life’s Best”

Proverbs 3:13-18

Q - What would you include among the very best things a person can experience and enjoy in life?

Across our nation and around the world fathers (and mothers) are busy providing for the needs of their families. In our day and age it takes quite a bit to keep a family in business. Families need food and clothing, and it is very beneficial to have housing and transportation, and when you add furnishings and insurance and toys and spending money to the list of “needs,” someone is going to have to invest some serious effort to see that everything is available. But some of the so-called “needs” which are actually among life’s greatest values have not been included in the list of “needs” just mentioned.

I. The Blessing of Wisdom and Understanding 3:13-14

A. The Fact of Blessing 3:13

Q - What is it about wisdom which makes the man who finds it “blessed”? Wisdom is the ability to make the best use of a person’s knowledge and to apply it practically to the issues which come up on the road of life.

Q - What are some sources to which the person who is interested in finding wisdom and understanding can turn? Wisdom may be found in education or wisdom literature or the advice of people who are wise, but the best source is found in the Lord as recorded in the pages of His word.

B. The Extent of Blessing 3:14

Q - Why can it be said that finding wisdom and understanding is better than acquiring silver and fine gold? Because wisdom is the ability to do skillfully whatever a person does it can be used to earn silver and gold - and other things which are sometimes gained in ways which are not wise.

II. The Description of Wisdom and Understanding 3:15-18

A. Their Value 3:15

Q - What is it that makes wisdom and understanding more precious than anything else - including precious jewels - which a person might desire? Because wisdom and understanding can enable a person to acquire precious jewels and many other valuables they are more precious than any of the things which they enable a person to acquire.

B. Their Benefits 3:16

Q - How is it that long life is to be found in the “right hand” (the place of honor) of wisdom and understanding? Because wisdom and understanding enable the person who possesses them to live in the best way possible, they promote health and longevity in a person’s life.

Q - What do wisdom and understanding have to do with the acquisition of riches and honor? Because riches and honor are best acquired by people who live skillfully and intelligently, they are most likely to be gained by people who possess the wisdom and understanding which lead to them.

C. Their Ways 3:17

Q - How do wisdom and understanding contribute to the pleasantness and peacefulness of the person who possess them?

Because wisdom and understanding enable a person to live life to its fullest potential, they make life pleasant and they result in peaceful relations for those who possess them.

D. Their Enrichment 3:18

Q - What makes the tree of life an appropriate symbol for the possession of wisdom and understanding? The tree of life, which first appeared in the garden of Eden, was intended to enrich and lengthen life, so it is an appropriate symbol for the possession of wisdom and understanding which also enrich and lengthen life.

Q - What is required with respect to wisdom and understanding for the person who hopes to experience all the benefits included in these verses? The person who hopes to experience all the benefits included in the verses of this passage is required to “hold fast” to the wisdom and understanding represented by the symbol of the tree of life.

Think About It: Wisdom (along with understanding) is one of life’s most valuable assets - adding length and quality and wealth and security to life.

Apply It: As we work to make provisions for the needs of our families, it is most important that we work diligently to help them acquire wisdom and understanding. So we would do well to ask ourselves to what extent our loved ones lives are being enriched because we are exposing them to the benefits which come when we prize the wisdom and understanding which find their source in the all-wise (omnisapient) God and His inspired word.

“New and Improved”

Proverbs 3:19-26

Q - Who stands out in your mind as a person whose life was significantly improved because of their embrace of God’s word and the gift of salvation which the Lord offers?

History’s pages are full of the accounts of people whose lives have been transformed by a trusting relationship with the Lord and by the application of the truths of His word to their situation in life. Chuck Colson, for example, known as “The Hatchet Man” in the Nixon administration, followed his seven months in prison for the part he played in the infamous Water-gate Scandal, as a spiritual leader and the founder of “Prison Ministries” because his life was transformed when he found salvation in Christ during his prison term.

I. The Historical Value of Wisdom and Understanding 3:19-20

A. Creation of the Universe 3:19

Q - What is a notable example of the wisdom the Lord used in founding the earth? The fact that the earth travels a predictable path, suspended as it is in space, is just one notable example of God’s wisdom in founding the earth.

Q - What is there about the heavens which clearly demonstrates the Lord’s understanding in their establishment? The vastness of space and the orderly arrangement of the many and varied heavenly bodies which fill it is a clear demonstration of His understanding.

B. The Formation of the Earth 3:20

Q - What might Solomon have had in mind by His reference to the understanding the Lord demonstrated in breaking up the deeps? The separation of earth’s land masses by the deeps between them clearly demonstrates God’s understanding.

Q - How does the dew which drips from the skies illustrate the knowledge of the Lord? In many places (e.g. the Monterey Peninsula in central California, where I grew up) where moisture in the air provides substantial support for plant and animal life illustrates the Lord's ability to use dew to sustain life on earth.

II. The Protective Value of Wisdom and Understanding 3:21-26

A. The Challenge to Keep Wisdom and Discretion 3:21

Q - How would Solomon's son go about keeping sound wisdom and discretion? Solomon's son would go about keeping sound wisdom and discretion by seeking wisdom and discretion from the Lord, through His word and through people who possess them (e.g. his father), and putting wisdom and discretion into practice in his life.

Q - What are some things which we might expect to happen in the life of someone who is successful in keeping sound wisdom and discretion? We might expect someone who is successful in keeping sound wisdom and discretion to live his life skillfully, in every respect, avoiding the many pitfalls which can complicate life along its paths.

B. The Benefits of Keeping Wisdom and Discretion 3:22-24

1. Life and Adornment 3:22

Q - What would it mean for someone to experience life for his soul? Life for a person's soul would result in what Jesus referred to as "abundant life" (John 10:10) with respect to the immaterial aspects of his being.

Q - What is Solomon suggesting by his reference to adornment for a person's neck? Just as people enhance their

physical appearance by the things they wear around their necks, so wisdom and discretion make a person more “attractive” in every respect when they are evident in his life.

2. Security and Stability 3:23

Q - What is the importance of security in a person’s walk in life? The person who is secure is safe from danger and disaster in every aspect of his life - physically, mentally, emotionally, materially and spiritually.

Q - What is Solomon implying by his promise that people who find sound wisdom and discretion will not stumble? Solomon is suggesting that people who find sound wisdom and discretion will, as a result, avoid the falls and injuries which can occur if they “stumble” along the path of life.

3. Fearlessness and Sound Sleep 3:24

Q - How might wisdom and discretion help alleviate fear and promote sweet sleep in the night for those who possess them? Wisdom and discretion lead to the making of practical provisions for a person’s safety and security, both day and night, and healthy relations with people who could otherwise create dangers for those who are not wise and discerning.

C. The One Behind Wisdom and Understanding 3:25-26

Q - How might the possession of wisdom and discretion protect someone from sudden fear and the onslaught of the wicked? Because wisdom and discretion contribute to healthy human relations, those who possess them are less likely to be harmed by wicked people who, as a result, have little reason to oppose and harm them.

Q - How might Proverbs 3:5-6 help to illuminate the significance of verse 26? Because the Lord provides confidence for those who trust Him (as 3:5 says we should do), and be-

cause trusting the Lord rather than human understanding, results in straight paths in life (which 3:6 promises to those who trust the Lord), Proverbs 3:5-6 helps the believer to see how to take advantage of the message of verse 26.

Think About It: People who want to live well need to pursue the wisdom and understanding which the Lord provides for those who place their trust in Him.

Application: Acquiring God's wisdom and understanding is a life-time pursuit which is deserving of all of the time and effort we can give to it. It is Solomon's challenge to fathers that they do for their children what his father did for him - starting early in life with an emphasis on the wisdom and understanding of the Lord which will enable them to realize life at its very best!

“Avoiding Evil”

Proverbs 3:27-35

Q - What are some things in life which you would say should be “avoided like the plague”?

The Corona Virus pandemic which hit America and the world in 2019/20 was not unlike other “plagues” which have affected planet earth down through the centuries - e.g. the “Black Death” which took the lives of over fifty million people between 1346 and 1353. But there are many other things in life which, like plagues, should be avoided, and Solomon warned his son in Proverbs 3:27-35 about some of the things in life which he should be avoiding.

I. Avoiding Unnecessary Debt 3:27-28

A. Withholding a Payment 3:27

Q - What is wrong with withholding payment to people who deserve to be paid when you actually have the resources with which to pay them? The laborer is worthy of his hire, so the person who has done what he was being paid to do should be rewarded with the payment which was agreed upon.

B. Inconveniencing a Creditor 3:28

Q - Why would it be a problem to pay just a day late when there is no reason to pay late? Withholding payment which is due for even a day is essentially a form of robbery which may be an inconvenience for the person “robbed.”

II. Avoiding Contention with Neighbors 3:29-30

A. Harming a Neighbor 3:29

Q - Why should the neighbor to whom Solomon refers in verse 29 not be harmed by the person who lives beside him? Security is what every neighbor should be entitled to expect when he lives next door to someone who is a righteous person.

B. Contending with an Innocent Man 3:30

Q - What is plague-like about contending with a neighbor who has done nothing to be contentious about? Just as plagues inflict harm indiscriminately upon the people who are harmed by them, so contention causes harm to people who have done nothing to deserve the harm contention causes.

III. Avoiding Unworthy Ideals 3:31-32

A. Envy the Man of Violence 3:31

Q - Why might anyone even be tempted to envy a man of violence? People who are engaged in violence often seem to derive benefit by means of the violence they commit (as, for example, gang violence often results in wealth at the expense of their victims).

Q - What are some of the “ways” of a violent person which should be avoided like the plague? God’s people should never be willing to take unfair advantage of anyone by using force or deceit or any of the other tactics violent people use to get what they want.

B. Appraising the Crooked Man 3:32

Q - What is significant about the word Solomon uses to describe the Lord’s feelings toward a devious man? The word “abomination” (*toebah* - abominable, detestable, loathsome) is a word used to describe some of the strongest negative feelings anyone ever experiences.

Q - What are some of the benefits which might be experienced in an intimate relationship with the Lord? An intimate relationship with the Lord would provide the upright person with divine wisdom and guidance and friendship. The Hebrew word *sod* speaks of engaging in counsel with the Lord Himself!

IV. Avoiding God's Disfavor 3:33-34

A. God's Curse on the Wicked 3:33

Q - Who comes to mind as a scriptural example of a wicked man whose "house" was cursed by the Lord? Cain, the first murderer, was cursed with the curse of Genesis 4:10-12 which made him a wanderer who would have little success in raising crops which had been his offering to the Lord which the Lord regarded less than Abel's offering of an animal sacrifice.

Q - What does Solomon assure us is true of the experience of the person whose dwelling is blessed by the Lord? Solomon identifies the person whose dwelling is blessed by the Lord as a righteous person.

B. God's Grace for the Afflicted 3:34

Q - What should the person who scoffs at things of spiritual importance (including the Lord Himself) expect to experience as a result of his scoffing? The person who scoffs at the Lord and at things of spiritual importance should expect to receive scoffing from the Lord Himself in return.

Q - What makes God's grace particularly appropriate in the lives of those who are "afflicted" (*anav* - poor, afflicted, humble, meek)? People who are "afflicted" are in need of divine favor, and God's grace has often been described as "undeserved favor."

V. Avoiding Dishonor 3:35

A. The Inheritance of the Wise

Q - How did Jesus, the wisest person who has ever lived, experience the reward which Solomon predicted for the wise? Though Jesus has His detractors, His name is and will forever be the most honored name of all names (Philippians 2:9-11).

B. The Display of Fools

Q - Who stands out in your thinking as a fool whose foolishness resulted in the display of dishonor? Judas Iscariot so dishonored his name by his denial of Jesus that his name is seldom ever given to any human being to this day.

Think About It: God's people should avoid every form of evil, including unnecessary debt, contention, violence, wickedness and dishonor.

Apply It: It is very important that we see the things Solomon has warned his son about as the death-dealing plagues they actually are! So how alert are we to the evils to be avoided in our lives? If we are serious in our pursuit of God's blessing and honor in our lives, we will need to avoid every evil way and pursue righteousness instead.

“Challenging the Child”

Proverbs 4:1-9

Q - What are some things a wise parent should want most to see in the life of his child?

It is a sad fact of life that there are many young people in our nation today who are making very bad choices and heading in very harmful directions. The young man who attempted to assassinate Donald Trump at a large rally in Pennsylvania in July of 2024 is just one of many examples which could be cited of youthful potential being wasted as a result of bad choices. But it doesn't have to be this way! Solomon offered some very wise and constructive advice to his son in Proverbs 4:1-9.

I. The Challenge to Hear Instruction 4:1-2

A. The Challenge Stated 4:1

Q - Why is it a good idea for a child (boy or girl) to pay careful attention to the instruction of a father? The Lord's instruction for children to honor their fathers and mothers provides very good reason for children to pay attention to the instruction of their fathers. In addition, fathers have lived much longer and learned far more than children have.

B. The Challenge Substantiated 4:2

Q - What made Solomon an unusually valuable source of sound teaching and instruction? The gift of unusual wisdom which the Lord gave to Solomon in response to his request for wisdom and knowledge to rule His people (II Chronicles 1:10) made Solomon an unusually valuable source of sound teaching and instruction.

II. The Challenge to Keep Commandments 4:3-4

A. The Setting for the Challenge 4:3

Q - What was unusually significant about the father who shared the responsibility for raising Solomon in his early years? Solomon's father, King David, was not only the largely successful king of Israel but, in spite of his failings, a man who was very sensitive to the Lord - described by God Himself as "a man after God's own heart" (I Samuel 13:14).

B. The Statement of the Challenge 4:4

Q - What did Solomon's father assure him he could expect if his heart held fast his words and if he kept his father's commandments? Solomon's father assured him that he could expect to live - a word which speaks of not only physical life but a quality of life in contrast to death in all of its forms - if he kept his father's commandments.

III. The Challenge to Acquire Wisdom 4:5-7

A. The Challenge Stated 4:5

Q - What did Solomon's father suggest he had to offer to his son which should neither be forgotten nor neglected? Solomon's father suggested that he had wisdom and understanding to offer if his words were neither forgotten nor neglected.

B. The Challenge Substantiated 4:6

Q - What did Solomon need to do in order to be guarded and watched over by his father's instruction? In order to be guarded and watched over by his father's instruction Solomon needed to love wise instruction and never forsake it.

C. The Challenge Strengthened 4:7

Q - How does Proverbs 8:17 help the reader understand

the significance of Solomon's challenges in 4:7? Proverbs 8:17 says that wisdom needs to be loved and diligently sought.

IV. The Challenge to Prize Wisdom 4:8-9

A. The Pursuit of Wisdom 4:8

Q - What benefits did Solomon assure his son he would experience if he prized and embraced wisdom? Solomon assured his son that he would be exalted and honored if he prized and embraced wisdom.

B. The Reward of Wisdom 4:9

Q - What would be the practical significance of a garland of grace and a crown of beauty for Solomon's son if he set his heart and mind to seek wisdom as his father was challenging him to do? The placement of a garland of grace or a crown of beauty on someone's head was an attractive form of head wear and, in the case of the crown, a sign of authority.

Think About It: Parents who spend time instructing their children in wisdom and understanding are doing them an invaluable service, and children who develop an appetite for wisdom and understanding are doing themselves a great service as well.

Apply It: Wisdom and understanding should be taught to every child by his parents while he is still impressionable, because there is significant benefit for those who gain understanding and wisdom while they are young. And because of their value for all who possess them, we who are not so young should always engage in the pursuit of wisdom and understanding as long as we live because wisdom and understanding will beautify and protect the lives of all who possess them!

“Contrasting Choices”

Proverbs 4:10-19

Q - What contrasting choices faced Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden which continue to face every human being who makes his way through life on planet earth?

Our country and our planet have come to a time when there is a great deal of confusion over what is right and what is wrong. Such confusion does not bode well for the future in the hands of human beings because, as the Prophet Isaiah warned his people in his own day (Isaiah 5:20): “Woe to those who call evil good; and good evil.” King Solomon sought to bring clarity to the difference between good and evil in the life of the son he addressed in Proverbs 4:10-19.

I. The Challenge of Wisdom and Upright Living 4:10-13

A. The Challenge to Accept Wise Words 4:10-12

Q - What is the relationship between hearing and accepting a father’s sayings and experiencing many years in life? The child who hears and accepts his father’s sayings increases the likelihood that his life will go well - and lives which go well are more likely to last longer.

Q - What enabled Solomon to be so certain (v. 11) that the direction he gave his son was the way of wisdom and the way of upright paths? Solomon had committed himself to trust in the Lord early in life (though he didn’t always do it), and he was granted the gift of wisdom which enabled him to write the book of Proverbs with its life-enriching instruction.

Q - What is required to keep a son or daughter’s steps in life (v. 12) from being impeded and to keep them from stum-

bling? Hearing and responding properly to wise words of instruction will keep a person's steps from being impeded and from stumbling.

B. The Challenge to Take Hold of Instruction 4:13

Q - What is it that makes Solomon's challenges in this verse so practical and necessary? Taking hold of and guarding wise instruction leads to "life" in all of its forms.

II. The Warning Against Wicked and Evil Ways 4:14-17

A. The Commands Given 4:14-15

Q - When do sons and daughters become endangered by wicked paths and the way of evil men? When sons and daughters encounter direction and instruction which diverges from the truth they should have learned from their parents and other wholesome influences in their lives, they are faced with dangers which wicked paths and the ways of evil men present to them.

Q - What would be required (v. 15) to enable a child to avoid and pass by wicked people and their wicked ways? A child who avoids and passes by wicked people and their wicked ways will need to be informed by and committed to wise and truthful information and instruction.

B. The Reasons Given 4:16-17

Q - How could doing evil and making people stumble possibly become so motivating that it would keep someone from sleeping? People who are motivated by material gain in their pursuit of evil ways, and who create obstacles in order to trip up their intended victims, often pursue their harmful aims into the night hours when they could be sleeping instead.

Q - Who could Solomon be describing (v. 17) in our culture by the destructive diet he refers to? Solomon could easily be describing gang members and other criminals in our culture by the diet to which he refers in verse 17.

III. The Contrast Between Righteous and Wicked Ways 4:18-19

A. The Path of the Righteous 4:18

Q - What makes the light of dawn and the increasing brightness of the full sun a fitting picture of the path of righteousness? The path of righteousness is well pictured by the light of dawn and the increasing brightness of the full sun because it is a path which is characterized by light - in contrast to the darkness which evil-doers prefer as cover for their evil deeds (John 3:19).

B. The Way of the Wicked 4:19

Q - What makes darkness a fitting illustration of the plight of the wicked? Darkness is a fitting illustration of the plight of the wicked because wicked people do not know where their deeds are leading them for lack of clear vision.

Think About It: People who choose to live by God's standards can expect to avoid complications and to live a life of quality and quantity. Those who follow the wicked can expect a life of confusion.

Apply It: How committed are we to walking in the light, which characterizes the way of the Lord, so that we can have fellowship with the Lord and with others who are walking in the light and be assured that "the blood of Jesus [God's] Son" is cleansing "us from all sin" (I John 1:7)?

“Fatherly Advice”

Proverbs 4:20-27

Q - When have you gotten tripped up (literally or figuratively) because you were not paying close enough attention to where you were going or what you were doing?

Some two thousand years ago our planet was blessed with the incarnation of the God who made it, as Jesus Christ came to live among men. It would be very safe to say that no one has ever enriched life on earth as much as Jesus has. Many millions of people who have put their trust in Him have had their lives transformed, and the followers of Jesus have changed the course of human history. Though King Solomon lived before the incarnation of Jesus, he had wise and helpful advice for his son(s) which was consistent with that of Jesus Himself - “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3).

I. Solomon’s Call to Attention 4:20-22

A. What Deserves Your Attention 4:20

Q - What was it about the words and sayings of King Solomon which made them deserving of his son’s attention? King Solomon was not only the father of his son, to be honored according to God’s word, but one of the wisest fathers who ever lived because of God’s gift of wisdom in his life.

B. How to Give Your Attention 4:21

Q - What practical steps did Solomon want his son to take in the process of paying attention to the words and sayings he was sharing? Solomon wanted his son not to let his words and sayings fade out of his sight, but to keep them in his heart (by

reading what his father was writing down and paying close attention to what he was reading).

C. Why You Should Give Your Attention 4:22

Q - What benefits did Solomon assure his son he would experience if he took the advice of verses 20 and 21? Solomon assured his son that taking the advice of verses 20 and 21 would enhance the quality of his life and improve the health of his body.

II. Solomon's Call to Action 4:23-27

A. Watch Your Heart 4:23

Q - Why is it so important for a child to exercise diligence in the attention he pays to the condition of the heart to which Solomon refers? What happens in the heart of any person determines the direction in which his life will go because it is from the heart that the "springs of life" flow.

B. Watch Your Mouth 4:24

Q - What is the relationship between the challenges of verse 23 and those of verse 24? One of the most important steps in watching over the heart is the step of exercising care in the use of the tongue (cf. James 3:2).

Q - How did Jesus accentuate the importance of the relationship between the heart and the mouth in Luke 6:45? Jesus revealed that the good and evil things which proceed out of the heart of a man will become evident by means of the things which proceed out of his mouth - so deceitful speech and devious lips are evidence of a deceitful and devious heart.

C. Watch Your Gaze 4:25

Q - What is the practical significance of looking directly ahead and fixing a person's gaze straight in front of him? The person who is looking directly ahead of him is less likely to be distracted by things along the path of life which are not worthy of his consideration.

D. Watch Your Feet 4:26-27

Q - Why is it important for a young person (or any other person, for that matter) to pay close attention to where their feet take them, avoiding turns to the right or the left? It is important for every person to pay close attention to the direction his feet take him because there are places which are good for him to go, and there are other places which are harmful or even destructive for those who go to such places.

Q - How does verse 27 accentuate the importance of avoiding turns with one's feet (or, from verse 25, the direction of one's gaze) to the right or the left? Verse 27 reveals that Solomon is thinking of places on the right or the left of center as places of evil.

Think About It: A child can enrich his life and health by paying attention to fatherly advice, like the advice we find in the pages of God's word. But enriched lives are not only for children!

Apply It: What are some practical steps we can take to enrich our lives in conformity with the instruction which is found in the pages of the Scriptures?

“Adultery Alert”

Proverbs 5:1-6

Q - How has an adulterous relationship you are aware of, which you can safely share, complicated the lives of those involved?

The so-called “sexual revolution” which adversely affected our nation and our world during the latter half of the twentieth century resulted in a significant downward direction of the sexual behavior of many people. The seriousness of sexual immorality was clearly revealed by the fact that it was frankly addressed in the seventh of the Ten Commandments given by the Lord to the people of Israel: “You shall not commit adultery.” In 1623 the Baker and Lukas publishers printed a Bible in England which came to be known as the “Wicked Bible” because the little word “not” was omitted in the seventh commandment: “Thou shalt **not** commit adultery.” The printers were heavily fined by the High Commission and the whole edition destroyed.

I. Solomon’s Call to Attention 5:1-2

A. The Challenge of Wisdom and Understanding 5:1

Q - How does Proverbs 5:1 differ from a very similar verse in Proverbs 4:20? Proverbs 4:20 calls on Solomon’s son to give attention to his “words” and incline his ear to his “sayings,” while 5:1 calls him to give attention to his “wisdom” and incline his ear to his “understanding.”

B. The Promise of Discretion and Knowledge 5:2

Q - What benefits did Solomon assure his son if he would pay careful attention to his wisdom and understanding? Solo-

mon assured his son that he would “observe discretion” and “reserve knowledge” if he would pay careful attention to his wisdom and knowledge.

II. Solomon’s Caution Regarding the Adulteress 5:3-6

A. Her Smooth Speech 5:3

Q - What was Solomon’s wisdom and understanding intended to help his son recognize regarding the ways of an adulterous woman? Solomon’s wisdom and understanding were intended to help his son recognize that the lips of an adulteress “drip honey” (that is, they sound very sweet), and that her speech sounds “smoother than oil” (i.e. she can sound very convincing in the things which she says).

B. Her Bitter Product 5:4

Q - Why did Solomon’s son need to be informed about the pleasant-sounding words which are a significant part of the methodology of an adulteress? Solomon’s son needed to be warned about the pleasant-sounding words frequently employed by an adulteress because they lead to a very bitter experience and result in injury and even death, like that inflicted by the sharpness of a two-edged sword.

C. Her Downward Direction 5:5

Q - What did Solomon identify as the ultimate outcome of the seemingly pleasurable experience the enticements of an adulteress are intended to anticipate? Solomon identified the ultimate outcome of the seemingly pleasurable experience the enticements of an adulteress anticipate as an outcome of “death” (in its many forms) because her steps “lay hold of Sheol.”

D. Her Unstable Ways 5:6

Q - What would be different about the words and actions of an adulteress if she were pondering the path of life? If the adulteress were pondering the path of life she would be recognizing that life's best experiences always come from the reliable direction received from God in His word.

Q - What is it that contributes to the instability of the ways chosen by an adulteress? Because the wages of sin is always "death" (in one form or another), the ways chosen by an adulteress destabilize anyone who gets involved in them.

Q - What is it that prevents the adulteress from pondering the path of life? The adulteress is prevented from pondering the path of life because she does not understand the instability of her ways, so she continues to pursue immorality and the consequences which result from it - i.e. "death."

Think About It: Wisdom and understanding preserve those who prize them from the complications of death - including physical death and emotional death and social death and spiritual death and eternal death - which frequently result from the immoral behavior of an adulteress!

Apply It: The believer's commitment to God's righteous standards enables him to enjoy the "abundant life" which the Lord Jesus promised to those who trust in Him (John 10:10) - protecting him from the many forms of death which result from sinful behavior. So, to what extent are we committed to God's righteous standards in our pursuit of "abundant life"?

“The Price of Perversion”

Proverbs 5:7-14

Q - What would you say the chances are that, as the saying has it, “what happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas”?

I remember sitting with a friend from the neighborhood on a cement retaining wall in my back yard as a teenager and talking about my friend’s job. He was working as a waiter at a country club in a wealthy community not many miles away. Though he was only a teenager, he had his own sporty little car and he had this job to support it - along with some other things in his life which were far less desirable than a job and a sporty car!

I. Solomon’s Challenge to His Sons 5:7-8

A. His Call to Attention 5:7

Q -Why does Solomon keep repeating the challenge, in one way or another, for his son (or sons) to listen to and not depart from what he has to say (“hear, my son - 1:8; “receive” - 2:1; “do not forget” - 3:1; “do not reject” - 3:11; “Hear, O sons” - 4:1; “Hear, my son” - 4:10; “give attention” - 4:20; 5:1)? Solomon knew that we learn best what we hear repeated more than once, and he knew that what he had to offer to his sons was very important to their well-being.

B. His Challenge to Avoid the Adulteress 5:8

Q - What is Solomon’s advice for avoiding the troubles an adulteress presents in a young man’s life? Solomon’s advice for avoiding the troubles an adulteress presents in a young man’s life is to intentionally and totally avoid the adulteress!

II. Some of the Consequences of Sin 5:9-14

A. The Waste of Time and Youth 5:9

Q - What practical dangers does Solomon warn his son that an adulteress will bring into his life? Solomon observes that an adulteress will bring wasted time and energy into the life of his son - or into the life of any man who gets involved with her.

Q - What is Solomon's one-word assessment of the true nature of the adulteress? Solomon's one-word assessment of the true nature of the adulteress is the word "cruel."

B. The Waste of Wealth 5:10

Q - Who are the "strangers" and the "alien" who are likely to profit from the activities of the adulteress? Solomon may be thinking of the managers who are likely behind the activities of the adulteress, many of whom are "pimped" by criminal entities to do what they do.

C. The Waste of Health 5:11

Q - What might be the cause of the groaning and the consuming of the flesh and body of the clients of the adulteress? The groaning and consuming of the flesh experienced by the clients of the adulteress may be caused by the sense of guilt which accompanies immoral behavior, and perhaps as a result of the social diseases which the sex trade frequently introduces into a man's life.

D. The Waste of Instruction 5:12-13

Q - Who might be included among the teachers and instructors whose reproofs could be spurned in a young man's

life? The teachers and instructors who offer reproofs in a young man's life might include his parents, his teachers, the media, church leaders, and his local, state, and national leaders.

E. The Waste of Reputation 5:14

Q - What could contribute to the “utter ruin” which is a threat to the man who falls for the attractions of an adulteress? The man who falls for the attractions of an adulteress could face “utter ruin” in his relationship with his wife and family members, his church (if he has one) and community, and his own physical, emotional and mental well being.

Q - What “assembly and congregation” might witness and grieve the problems introduced into a man's life by his involvement with an adulteress? Solomon was clearly thinking about the assembly and congregation of the believing people of Israel, but his message for the present age would have reference to community and church members.

Think about It: Any appeal which an adulteress seems to offer to a man will be countered, in the end, by the many physical and social and spiritual complications which come to those who get involved with her.

Apply It: Are we avoiding the problems which sin brings because of the fact that we have committed ourselves to the word and the will of the Lord? And, of course, the more basic issue which needs to be addressed first is raised by the question: Have we begun our commitment to the will of God by responding to His gracious offer of eternal salvation from sin on the basis of the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ?

“Marital Satisfaction”

Proverbs 5:15-23

Q - What is the Lord’s provision for satisfying the sexual appetites He has built into the minds and bodies of human beings?

In the early years of the “rock and roll” movement in our country (and in England) the Rolling Stones (one of the popular rock bands of the day) made their way to the top of popularity charts with, among others, a song entitled “I Can’t Get No Satisfaction.” In addition to its obvious grammatical deficiencies, this song was also characterized by at least the appearance of some moral and spiritual deficiencies. The Lord has clearly provided the path to satisfaction for those who follow His plan.

I. The Challenge of Marital Fidelity 5:15-17

A. Solomon’s Command 5:15

Q - What is Solomon’s reference to a man’s own cistern and his own well intended to convey to his readers? A man’s own cistern and his own well is intended to refer to sexual activity with his wife - in contrast to activity with the adulteress of 5:3-14.

B. Solomon’s Questions 5:16

Q - What is Solomon disparaging by his reference to dispersed springs and water in the streets in a man’s relationship with his wife? By his reference to dispersed springs and water in the streets Solomon is disparaging sexual relations outside of marriage - in a culture where water was such a precious commodity, not to be wasted.

C. Solomon's Challenge 5:17

Q - What important principles in married life are being addressed in verse 17? The important principles of chastity and fidelity in marriage are being addressed in verse 17.

II. The Blessings of Marital Fidelity 5:18-19

A. Solomon's Challenge Stated 5:18

Q - How do the figures of verse 15 ("your own cistern" and "your own well") clarify the significance of the "fountain" in verse 18? The figures of verse 15 help to clarify the understanding that the fountain of verse 18 is the "fountain" of sexual satisfaction provided for a man in the person of his wife.

Q - What does Solomon's reference to "the wife of your youth" imply concerning marital satisfaction? By his reference to the "wife of your youth" Solomon is commending a man's life-long relationship and sexual satisfaction with the wife he married as a young man.

B. Solomon's Challenge Explained 5:19

Q - What are verse 15's comparisons of a man's wife to "a loving hind and a graceful doe" intended to communicate? Because a "loving hind" (doe) and a "graceful doe" are two references to animals which are universally appreciated for their beauty and graceful movements, verse 15's comparisons are recognitions of the pleasing appearance and movements which men enjoy in the physical bodies of their wives.

Q - What does Solomon's encouragement for a man to find satisfaction in his wife's breasts and to be exhilarated always with her love say to those who suggest that the Bible is repressive when it comes to sexual activity? Solomon's encour-

agement for a man to find satisfaction in the physical features and capacities of the body of his wife makes it evident that the Bible is only repressive when it comes to sexual activity if it take place outside of the marriage relationship.

III. The Problems of Marital Infidelity 5:20-23

A. Solomon's Questions 5:20

Q - How has Solomon just ruled out any need for a man to be exhilarated with an adulteress or to embrace the bosom of a foreigner? Solomon has just observed that a man's wife is intended to provide all of the sexual satisfaction he will ever need.

B. Solomon's Cautions 5:21-23

1. The Lord Is Aware 5:21

Q - What does the Lord's awareness and watchfulness of the ways of a man reveal about the seriousness of the message in this passage? The fact that the Lord is aware and watchful of the ways of a man reveals that He intends for a man to restrict his interests and actions in sexual matters to their Scripturally defined boundaries within marriage, and the He is well-aware of those who fail to do so as the ultimate judge of all human behavior.

2. The Price Is High 5:22-23

a. The Cords of Sin 5:22

Q - What is it that makes sexual promiscuity such a captivating and restraining lifestyle? The power of sexual appetite in a man's life makes sexual promiscuity a dangerous path to travel because, sinful behavior which it is, its "wages" result in

death in its many forms (Romans 6:23).

b. The Costs of Ignorance 5:23

Q - How does Solomon explain the sad consequences of sexual immorality? Solomon explains the sad consequences of sexual immorality in terms of death and folly which leads a man far from the right path and the satisfaction which it brings.

Think About It: The Lord will judge those who reject marriage as His ideal provision for people's sexual needs.

Apply It: People can personally experience God's blessing by committing their lives to His view of sexuality and marriage, so believers should push back against the degradation of human culture by the ungodly thinking and practices which so many people in modern society are embracing.

“Unnecessary Debt”

Proverbs 6:1-5

Q - When has financial debt proved to be problematic in your experience?

Most of us probably have more experience with the subject of debt than we ever wanted to have - even if debt has never been a significant part of our lives. When I graduated from college I received offers from several credit card companies, and I accepted a card from an oil company to use for the purchase of gas and repairs for my car. When I first used the card, as I made my way to seminary studies in another state, using the credit card made it seem as if I were traveling without having to pay for the gas it took to drive my car - until the end-of-the-month bill arrived! Another experience with debt came when I decided to borrow money for the purchase of a used car - soon to find that the income I had been counting on to pay for the loan was not as dependable as I had anticipated it would be. So Solomon has some very practical advice for his son on the subject of debt in Proverbs 6:1-5.

I. The Problem of Surety 6:1-2

A. The Possibility of Surety 6:1

Q - What ill-advised form of debt is Solomon considering by his reference to becoming surety for your neighbor? Solomon is considering the debt incurred when someone agrees to serve as a guarantor for the debt which is owed by someone else - perhaps one of his neighbors.

B. The Peril of Surety 6:2

Q - What words of a person's mouth does Solomon have

in mind as ensnaring and captivating words? Solomon is thinking of the verbal promise someone has made to the effect that he is willing to provide assurance that a neighbor's debt will be paid.

II. The Escape from Surety 6:3-5

A. The Call to Humility 6:3

Q - Why does it take humility to accomplish deliverance from the hand of the neighbor Solomon is writing about? It takes humility to accomplish deliverance from the obligations which actually belong to a neighbor because, in asking to be released from responsibility for securing the neighbor's obligations, a person has to acknowledge that he should not have made a promise he is now unwilling or unable to keep.

Q - What procedure does Solomon have in mind for the person who needs to be delivered from the hand of the neighbor for whom he has become surety? Solomon has in mind that the person who needs to be delivered from the hand of the neighbor for whom he has become surety should go to his neighbor and "importune" (beg or even insist < *rahab* - to act stormily, boisterously or arrogantly) that his neighbor release him from the obligation he has earlier agreed to assume.

B. The Call to Urgency 6:4

Q - What is it about surety entanglements which calls for the urgency Solomon is recommending in verse 4? The person who has become surety for the obligations of another never knows when he may be called upon to fulfill his obligation - whether it is convenient, or even possible, or not.

C. The Call to Deliverance 6:5

Q - How are the hunted gazelle and bird appropriate illustrations of the importance and urgency of deliverance from surety on behalf of a person's neighbor? The hunted gazelle or bird is facing the possibility of death, or capture at least, at any moment at the hands of the hunter or fowler - just as the person who has become surety for another is facing the possibility that, at any moment, he may need to fulfill his commitment to pay the debt incurred by his neighbor.

Think About It: The Lord wants His people to remain free of unnecessary debt.

Interestingly, the Lord Himself became surety for our debt when He sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross for our sins! As Hebrews 7:22 puts it: "Jesus has become the guarantee [surety] of a better covenant" (i.e. the New Covenant). It obviously wasn't the wrong thing to do, because it was God Himself who did it! But it was a costly venture - a venture which God knew He could afford to pay for when He entered into the matter. But He was willing to pay a debt we could not pay because of His amazing love for sinners (Romans 5:8).

Apply It: Romans 13:8 challenges us to "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law." How successful are we at avoiding debts we don't need to assume?

“Lesson on Laziness”

Proverbs 6:6-11

Q - When have you seen someone’s life significantly complicated because of laziness on their part?

In Proverbs 24:30-34 Solomon will tell of a sluggard who spends his time resting while the vineyard he owns goes to ruin for lack of the attention it needs because he is lazy and lacking sense. He will tell of the thistles which have gotten out of control and the nettles which are covering the surface of the ground and the stone wall which has broken down - all because the farmer, who should be tending to the needs of his vineyard, is failing to do his job - sleeping on the job with folded hands as poverty comes on like a robber. In Proverbs 6:6-11 Solomon assures us that the sluggard could have learned an important lesson from an insect!

I. The Lesson from Nature 6:6-8

A. The Challenge of the Ant 6:6

Q - What makes attention to the ways of an ant a challenge for a sluggard to be wise? Ants always appear to be busy as they move about in search of food to be carried back for storage in the underground recesses which are home to their colony.

B. The Industry of the Ant 6:7-8

1. The Ant’s Initiative 6:7

Q - What could make the absence of a chief, officer, or ruler, like that in an ant’s life, problematic for anyone trying to get important things accomplished? Unlike human beings, who

are most productive under the direction of effective leaders, ants appear to keep busy with no indication that they need anyone to direct them. Unlike ants, people (who are compared to wandering sheep in the Bible) need good leadership to be most productive.

2. The Ant's Diligence 6:8

Q - How do ants go about preparing their food in the summer and gathering their provision in the harvest? Ant colonies are most active during the warmer months of the year as they busy themselves looking for food and carrying it back to their colonies to be stored until it is needed.

II. The Question for the Sluggard 6:9

A. The Duration of His Laziness 6:9a

Q - How long does laziness need to last to complicate the life of a sluggard? Laziness immediately begins to complicate the affairs of those who are not making use of their time and energies to do the things which need to be done when they need to be done, so the longer laziness continues, the more complicated things become for those who are not doing what they should be doing.

B. The Termination of His Laziness 6:9b

Q - What is Solomon implying by his question for the sluggard? Solomon is implying that the person he is questioning has been inactive longer than might have been expected.

III. The Evaluation of Laziness 6:10-11

A. The Priority of the Lazy 6:10

Q - What does the sluggard in view use as an excuse for his laziness (cf. 24:33)? The sluggard in view excuses his laziness with the explanation that he thinks he needs a little more sleep before putting his hands to work.

B. The Poverty of the Lazy 6:11

Q - What makes a vagabond and an armed man fitting descriptions of the approach of poverty in the sluggard's life? Just as a vagabond is guilty of aimless wandering, so poverty seems to wander aimlessly into the lives of those who are sluggish; and just as an armed man brings the threat of physical harm into the lives of those he approaches, so poverty brings harmful results into the lives of those who are approached by it.

Think About It: The industrious ant is a rebuke to the person who runs into financial or other difficulties because he spends too much time resting when he should be working.

Apply It: The person who disciplines himself to do the work which needs to be done when it needs to be done is a wise person. So the question which Solomon places before us is obvious: Do our work habits and our spiritual habits reveal a heart of wisdom because they are characterized by alertness and diligence?

“Trouble Ahead”

Proverbs 6:12-15

Q - How do you feel about the fact that gangs which are active along America’s southern border are taking in many millions of dollars as a result of their criminal activities?

One of the seemingly inexplicable mysteries of life on our sin-cursed earth is the mystery of the apparent prosperity of the wicked. We have probably all wondered from time to time why it is that some godless people appear to get all the breaks while some very righteous people seem to have all the problems which they do (cf. Ecclesiastes 7:15; 8:14). Job puzzled over this issue in Job 21:7: “Why do the wicked still live, continue on, also become very powerful?” Solomon also puzzled over the same issue in Proverbs 6:12-15.

I. The Wicked Man’s Ways 6:12-14

A. His False Mouth 6:12

Q - What two strong descriptive adjectives does Solomon apply to the person who “walks with a false mouth”? Solomon applied the strong descriptive adjectives “worthless” (*beliyya-al*) and “wicked” (*aven*) to the person who “walks with a false mouth.”

B. His Winking Eyes 6:13

Q - What are some possible implications of the winking eye in human relations? Though the winking eye can be a flirtatious sign in human relations, it can also be used to signal a person’s intent to deceive.

C. His Shifting Feet 6:13b

Q - How might a wicked person go about sending deceptive signals with his feet? Signals can be sent by the direction in which feet are pointed, by the sliding or tapping of feet, and as a result of other pre-announced signs of a person's intent.

D. His Teaching Fingers 6:13c

Q - Why might a wicked person make use of his fingers to “point” (*yarah* - to throw, to shoot, to teach) as an alternative to speaking? There are times when speaking is too revealing of a person's intentions, but finger signals (e.g. crossed fingers) can conceal dishonorable intentions in human interactions.

E. His Perverse Heart 6:14

When the disciples of Jesus came under criticism from some Pharisees because of their failure to observe certain Jewish traditions regarding the washing of hands before eating a meal, Jesus explained that it was the heart, not ritually unwashed hands, which was the source of defilement they should actually have been concerned about. Mark 7:21-23 records His explanation:

“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”

1. Devising Evil 6:14a

Q - What does Solomon identify as the root cause of the evil which wicked people are continually devising? Solomon identifies perversity in the hearts of wicked people as the root cause of the evil they are continually devising.

2. Spreading Strife 6:14b

Q - How do the evil “devices” of the wicked adversely affect those who are around him? The evil “devices” of those who are wicked often lead unnecessarily to strife among those who are around them.

II. The Wicked Man’s End 6:15

A. The Coming of Trouble 6:15a

Q - Though people who are wicked generally assume that their behavior is going to get them ahead in some respect, what does Solomon predict will come suddenly into their experience at some point? Solomon predicts that sudden calamity is likely to come into the experience of wicked people who are hoping to get ahead as a result of their wicked behavior.

B. The Finality of Trouble 6:15b

Q - What incentive does the final line of verse 15 provide for those who are engaged in wicked ways to change the direction in which they are heading? Solomon provides incentive for wicked people to change their direction because of his warning that wicked ways can be expected to result in incurable brokenness.

Think About It: People who commit their lives to wicked ways will discover that they have chosen a destructive path when they suddenly encounter reality.

Apply It: As the familiar saying has it, “if the shoe fits, wear it.” If our lives are characterized by the things Solomon says are true of “worthless” and “wicked” people, we will either change direction while we still can, or forever pay the high price for our practice of “worthless” and “wicked” ways!

“Seven Abominations”

Proverbs 6:16-19

Q - What are some things you feel so strongly about that you would characterize them as “abominations”?

Christians down through the ages have created numerous lists of sins which they consider particularly egregious. Some have settled upon the “seven deadly sins,” also known as the capital vices or cardinal sins: pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony and sloth. Though we live in an age today when many people believe that anything goes when it comes to human behavior, the Scriptures assure us that the Lord doesn’t see it that way! Solomon weighed in earlier than many others who have compiled their lists of objectionable behaviors when he recorded his divinely inspired list of the “seven abominations” which are found in Proverbs 6:16-19.

I. The Lord’s Feelings Toward Seven Sins 6:16

Q - What is the significance of the poetic device which Solomon uses to identify the things he is going to list which the Lord sees as “abominations? Solomon’s mention of six things which the Lord hates, adjusted in the next line to seven things which are an abomination to Him, is his way of emphasizing the point that there are things which the Lord considers objectionable, so we should consider them objectionable as well.

II. The Lord’s Enumeration of Seven Sins 6:17-19

A. Haughty Eyes 6:17

Q - What is there about “haughty eyes” which the Lord finds so objectionable? “Haughty eyes” are (literally) “eyes [which are] high.” They are the eyes of the person who is

always looking down on those around him. “Eyes which are high” are the eyes of the person who is proud, and “the Lord is opposed to the proud” (James 4:6; I Peter 5:5).

B. A Lying Tongue 6:17

Q - What makes a “lying tongue,” which first appeared in the mouth of the “serpent” in the garden of Eden, such an abomination to the Lord? The lying tongue of the “serpent in the Garden of Eden set humanity on its downward path in sin because of the damage it did. “A lying tongue” is an affront to its maker because it is an assault against the very nature of God - the author and the personification of truth.

Psalm 117:2 tells us that “the truth of the LORD is everlasting.” Jesus told His disciples, in John 14:6, that He IS the truth. John 17:17 quotes the Lord Jesus praying to the Father and saying: “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.” Titus 1:2 describes the Lord as “God, who cannot lie.” And Hebrews 6:18 tells us that “it is impossible for God to lie.”

C. Bloody Hands 6:17

Q - How does Deuteronomy 19:11-13 clearly reveal the aversion the Lord has toward the shedding of innocent blood? The fact that the Mosaic Law imposed a death penalty on the person who was found guilty of shedding innocent blood makes it clear that the Lord is strongly opposed to the shedding of innocent blood.

D. A Wicked Heart 6:18

Q - When have you seen an example of the harm which can result when human hearts get involved in devising wicked plans? The despicable actions of the terrorists who invaded Israel on October 7, 2023 in pursuit of their intention to rid the

land of Israel of the Jewish people was a clear example of the harm which can result when human hearts get involved in devising wicked plans.

E. Feet Running to Evil 6:18

Q - What could be the motivation behind someone's feet running rapidly to evil? Feet running rapidly to evil reveal a commitment to engaging in evil acts and the intention to make haste in going about it.

F. A False Witness 6:19

Q - What is abominable in the case of a false witness who is uttering lies? A witness, by definition, is supposed to be reporting accurately what he/she has observed, so the fact that the witness is a false witness is a contradiction in terms, and the fact that the false witness engages in lying accentuates the impropriety of what is taking place.

G. Spreading Strife 6:19

Q - How does Proverbs 16:28 shed light upon the problem in the life of the one who spreads strife among brothers? Proverbs 16:28 reveals that the person who spreads strife is a perverse person, and that his perverse behavior results in the separation of people who, as intimate friends, should be inseparable.

Think About It: The seven sins which Solomon identifies as things the Lord finds abominable are pride, lying, violence, deviousness, the love of evil, witnessing falsely and divisiveness. The Lord clearly has very strong feelings against such actions because they violate His nature and His will for mankind.

Apply it: Unfortunately, the sins which Solomon has listed in this passage are not uncommon sins - even among believers - so we need to develop strong feelings toward them and carefully avoid them in our own lives.

“Parental Guidance”

Proverbs 6:20-23

Q - Is there a time in your life when you received some unusually helpful guidance from your parents which comes to your mind?

Some of the best advice and direction ever given in this world is the advice and direction which parents give to their children. Much of their advice is very earthy and practical: “Eat your vegetables.” “Put on your jacket.” “Don’t run out into the street.” “Brush your teeth.” But it is good advice and it ought to be followed. And some parental advice is even more important!

I. Solomon’s Exhortation 6:20-21

A. The Exhortation Given 6:20

1. Observe Your Father’s Commandment 6:20a

Q - What makes Solomon’s use of the term “commandment” particularly appropriate with reference to the advice which children receive from their fathers? Father’s tend to provide the advice they give to their children in the form of commandments because of their male ‘psyche’ and their God-assigned role as “head of the home.”

2. Do Not Forsake Your Mother’s Teaching 6:20b

Q - How would you distinguish the “teaching” which children typically receive from their mothers from the “commandment” they are more likely to receive from their fathers? A mother’s generally more intimate and constant role in the lives of her children, along with a woman’s more socially or-

iented outlook in life, tends to make her role a more instructive role than that of the typical father.

B. The Exhortation Expanded 6:21

1. Bind Them on Your Heart 6:21a

Q - What does Solomon mean by his instruction for a child to bind his/her father's commandment and his mother's teaching on his/her heart? Solomon means to challenge the child to consistently "take to heart" the direction which is being provided by parents.

2. Tie Them Up 6:21b

Q - What would you say is the significance of a child tying parental guidance around his/her neck? Solomon is probably suggesting (as he did earlier in 1:9) that the child who pays careful attention to parental direction will look far better to all who encounter him/her as a result, and will persist in obedience to parental guidance.

II. Solomon's Explanation 6:22-23

A. The Benefits of Parental Guidance 6:22

1. It Guides Your Steps 6:22a

Q - What is the significance of guided steps as a result of a child's careful attention to parental instruction? Because life is experienced in a step by step manner, careful attention to parental instruction will improve the accuracy of each step along the path of life for the child who is paying attention.

2. It Guards Your Sleep 6:22b

Q - How might attention to parental guidance watch over a child as he sleeps? An obedient and attentive child lives with fewer regrets which might disrupt restful sleep, and has fewer concerns about opposition from enemies which might also disturb restful sleep.

3. It Speaks When You Awake 6:22c

Q - In what sense does parental guidance talk to a child when he awakens each day? The child who respects parental guidance has a clearer understanding about what should be on his/her agenda for the day as soon as he/she awakens.

B. The Nature of Parental Guidance 6:23

1. The Command Is a Lamp 6:23a

Q - In what sense do the commands of a father serve as a lamp in the life of his child? The commands of a father provide direction with respect to the broad view of the horizon in the life of the child.

2. The Teaching is Light 6:23b

Q - How would you distinguish the lamp-like impact of a father's commandment with the light-like impact of a mother's teaching in the life of a child? The more focused directions which fathers tend to provide by their "commands" in the lives of their children is contrasted with the diffused light which mothers provide by the greater breadth of their teaching in the lives of their children on a day by day basis.

3. Reproofs Are the Way of Life 6:23c

Q - In what sense are "reproofs for discipline" to be seen as a "way of life" for a child? The child who pays careful

attention to the correction parents sometimes need to provide will experience a more enriching path in life than the child who does not.

Think About It: The life of a child will almost always be enriched when he/she respects and obeys the commands of a father and the teaching of a mother and the discipline they provide by reproof when reproof is what is needed.

Apply It: And what Solomon has said of the parental guidance and proper response on the part of human children has direct application to our relationship with our heavenly Father! Our lives will always go best when we respect and obey the commands and instructions which He has given us in the pages of His incomparable word of truth!

“Dangers of Adultery”

Proverbs 6:24-35

Q - When have you seen the sin of adultery introduce danger and destruction into a marriage relationship?

Since the days of the garden of Eden the devil has always done his best to package sin in the prettiest wrapping he can find so that he can conceal the actual contents of the package. He told Eve, in the garden, that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would open her eyes and make her like God - while the reality was (as God had told Adam) that eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil opened her eyes only to her nakedness and brought into her experience the many complications which the Bible refers to as “death”! As Solomon is going to warn his son, the adulteress may appear to be attractive but she actually introduces death, in its various forms, into the lives of her clients!

I. The Warning to Avoid the Adulteress 6:24-29

A. The Warning Introduced 6:24

Q - What has Solomon just written which is intended and able to offer the protection which he envisions in verse 24? Solomon has just written about the commandment which is a lamp, the teaching which is a light, and reproofs for discipline which are the way of life.

B. The Warning Stated 6:25

Q - What is problematic about the beauty and the eyes of the woman Solomon is warning about in verse 25? The beauty of an adulteress and the way she can use her eyes to attract attention to herself are qualities she is using for evil in her

relationships with the men she is seeking to lure into her trap.

C. The Warning Justified 6:26

Q - How is that a man can be reduced to a loaf of bread and even endanger his very life as a result of the actions of an immoral woman? A man's relationship with an adulteress can easily result in the loss of his marriage, his family, his job, his home, his good reputation, and, in some instances, even his life.

D. The Warning Illustrated 6:27-28

Q - What is it about Solomon's two illustrations about the danger posed by an immoral woman which make them powerful? Solomon's two illustrations picture destructive practices (embracing fire and walking on hot coals) which result in pain and physical damage for anyone engaging in them - like the pain and damage which can happen to a man in an immoral relationship.

E. The Warning Applied 6:29

Q - What is the difference between the expectation and the actual experience of the man who engages in an immoral relationship with his neighbor's wife? The man who enters an immoral relationship with his neighbor's wife is expecting a pleasant and satisfying experience, but he is going to be punished for what he has done in any number of ways - not the least of which is judgment by the Lord.

II. The Dangers of the Adulterous Relationship 6:30-35

A. The Dangers Illustrated by Contrast 6:30-31

Q - What distinguishes the illegal but understandable

actions of the thief who steals food to satisfy his hunger and the immoral and despicable actions of the adulterer? The thief who steals to satisfy his hunger is doing what is wrong in order to try to address a legitimate physical need, while the adulterer who engages in immorality with his neighbor's wife (or any other woman) is breaking into a covenant relationship which is an unnecessary and immoral and destructive act which the Lord has strictly prohibited in His word and which He will certainly judge.

B. The Dangers Delineated 6:32-35

1. Adultery Brings Self-Destruction 6:32-33

Q - What is it that makes the actions of the adulterer so much more senseless and destructive and disgraceful than the actions of the thief who steals to satisfy his hunger? The person who steals bread to address his hunger is seeking to address a need which is critical to his survival, while the person who engages in immorality, while seeking to satisfy a sexual appetite, is not seeking to address a desire which is essential for his survival and he is seeking to satisfy a sexual appetite which should be addressed in a moral manner.

2. Adultery Brings Violent Retribution 6:34-35

Q - What danger does the adulterer expose himself to which may even be more serious than the dangers faced by the thief of verse 31? The man who engages improperly with his neighbor's wife may be punished by her jealous husband, and there is nothing he can do to remedy the problem his immorality has caused - while the thief can potentially make up for his theft by paying for the bread which he has stolen.

Think About It: Anyone who is hoping for a fulfilling experience in life will have to avoid the sin of adultery like the

plague it is!

Apply It: Are we avoiding the complications which result from immorality by paying attention to the clear commands and instructions provided by the Lord in the pages of His word?

“He Uncomplicates Things”

Proverbs 7:1-5

Q - When have you seen your experience in life improved as a result of good advice which you received from your parents?

Some years ago the General Motors Acceptance Corporation (which arranges financing for people who want to purchase GM cars on credit) used as an advertising slogan: “GMAC - We uncomplicate things.” Potential customers were encouraged to apply for loans to buy new General Motors cars and were led to believe that they would find that GMAC had made the process of getting a loan as quick and easy as possible. Solomon has promised, earlier in Proverbs (3:5-6), that people who place their trust in the Lord can expect to see Him make their paths “straight” (rather than “crooked” and complicated). In other words, He uncomplicates things!

I. The Challenge of a Father’s Guidance 7:1-3

A. Keeping a Father’s Commandments 7:1

Q - What was it that made Solomon’s words and commandments particularly important in his sons’ lives? Solomon was raised under the godly influence of King David, a “man after God’s own heart,” and was blessed with unusual wisdom as a result of the Lord’s blessing in his life.

Q - What are some ways a father’s commandments can be “treasured” within a son’s heart (cf. Psalm 119:9-11)? A son can “treasure” his father’s commandments in his heart by paying close attention to them, remembering them, and obeying them.

B. Benefitting By a Father's Commandments 7:2

Q - In what sense does the son who keeps his father's commandments "live"? The son who keeps his father's commandments will "live" in the sense that his life will be enriched because of his obedience - experiencing what Jesus referred to as "life . . . abundantly" (John 10:10).

Q - What does it mean for a son to keep his father's commandments "as the apple of [his] eye"? For a son to keep his father's commandments "as the apple of his eye" means to be as committed to keeping them as he is to protecting his eyes from injury and danger.

C. Applying a Father's Commandments 7:3

Q - What is the practical significance for the son who binds his father's commandments on his fingers and writes them on the tablet of his heart? Binding a father's commandments on his fingers means using his fingers (and hands, etc.) for only appropriate and productive things, and writing a father's commandments on the tablet of his heart means remembering and responding obediently to them.

II. The Challenge of Wisdom and Understanding 7:4-5

A. Getting Close to Wisdom and Understanding 7:4

Q - What is the point of referring to wisdom as a sister and calling understanding an intimate friend? Just as family relations are generally close relations, so seeing wisdom as a sister means being close to wisdom, and just as intimate friendships are warm and significant friendships, so seeing understanding as an intimate friend means being well-acquainted with understanding and appreciating its importance in life.

B. Getting Help from Wisdom and Understanding 7:5

Q - How do wisdom and understanding help to keep an obedient son from an adulteress - from a foreigner who flatters with her words? Because relations with an adulteress are harmful relations, and flattery by an adulteress is intended to draw a victim into harmful acts, wisdom and understanding enable a man (young or older) to be aware of danger and firmly resist the appeal and the temptations of the adulteress.

Think About It: Solomon's son would never need to get himself into trouble with an adulteress if he were only careful to listen to words of wisdom and understanding from his earthly father and his heavenly Father. By heeding wise and understanding commands which come from God (often through parents) a person can experience life's best and avoid the destructive forces of immorality.

Apply It: We uncomplicate our lives by heeding God's wisdom and understanding, so are we reaping the benefits which come from showing proper respect for the practical instruction which the Lord has provided for our benefit in His word, often passed on through our parents?

“The Allure of the Adulteress”

Proverbs 7:6-27

Q - When have you seen adulterous behavior lead to disastrous results?

Since Satan’s first offer in the garden of Eden, it has always been true that sinful practices, however appealing they may seem, lead to death. It happened to Eve! Offered the opportunity - by eating the good-looking fruit of a forbidden tree - to be like God Himself, Eve decided to try the fruit. But into her life came guilt and shame and separation from her husband and her God - and eventually the ultimate physical complication of sin - physical death itself. And it has happened to countless other human beings ever since. The rebellions, the killings, the immoralities, the thefts, the lies, etc., etc. - all have complicated human experience on earth and all have jeopardized human security for eternity!

I. The Adulteress’ Victim 7:6-9

A. The Young Man’s Deficiencies 7:6-7

Q - What revealing terms does Solomon use in verse 7 to describe the person he is imagining? Solomon describes the subject of verses 6-7 as “naive,” youthful and “lacking sense.”

B. The Young Man’s Location 7:8

Q - How would the young man being described in verse 8 have been protected from harm by paying attention to what Solomon has already written in 5:8? Proverbs 5:8 warned the sons of Solomon to keep away from the adulteress and to not go near the door of her house.

C. The Young Man's Timing 7:9

Q - What dangers is the young man being described in verses 8 and 9 exposing himself to by his timing? The young man is exposing himself to spiritual danger by aimlessly wandering the streets of the city in the evening, in the middle of the night, and in the darkness - when many sinful deeds take place because "men loved the darkness rather than the Light. for their deeds are evil" (John 3:29).

II. The Adulteress' Characteristics 7:10-12

A. Her Manner of Dress 7:10a

Q - What should have been an initial warning to the young man in this passage that he was in danger? The fact that a woman comes to meet a young man in the night (unusual behavior for a Jewish woman), and the fact that she was dressed in a suggestive manner, should have been sufficient warning that trouble was probably ahead.

B. Her Cunning Heart 7:10b

Q - What are we to understand by Solomon's revelation that the woman in view is "cunning [*natsar* - to watch, guard, keep] of heart"? We are to understand that the woman in view is seeking to keep the young man from realizing the harm to which he is exposing himself by her deceptive ways.

C. Her Boisterous Ways 7:11a

Q - How might an adulteress reveal her boisterous nature (*hamah* - to murmur, growl, roar, be boisterous)? As verse 13 will further reveal, the adulteress is very aggressive in the tactics she uses to get what she wants.

D. Her Rebellious Spirit 7:11a

Q - How might the adulteress reveal that she is rebellious (*sarar* - stubborn or rebellious)? The fact that the adulteress is clearly rebelling against the will of the Lord and is rebelling against the commitments she has made to the husband she claims to have make it clear that she is a rebel.

E. Her Wandering Feet 7:11b-12a

Q - What is problematic in practical terms about the inclination of the adulteress to spend her time in the streets and the squares and the corners rather than her home? It is problematic that a woman, who is characteristically involved in the management of her home, is not at home, but is present in the streets and the squares of the city in the hours of the night.

III. The Adulteress' Tactics 7:13-20

A. Her Bold Action 7:13a

Q - What is the adulteress seeking to accomplish by her brash action in seizing and kissing the young man who has wandered aimlessly into her territory? The adulteress is seeking to overwhelm the young man she has seized and kissed as a result of physical contact with and her apparent attraction to the naive young man in question.

B. Her Misguided Religion 7:13b-14

Q - What is the adulteress seeking to communicate by her claim to have paid her vows with the offer of peace offerings? Because peace offerings, which were presented in the fulfilling of vows, provided meat to be eaten by the offerer and family, the adulteress is offering to provide some food and is implying that she is a worshiper of the Lord.

C. Her Feigned Devotion 7:15

Q - What impact is the adulteress seeking to have on the young man in view by the claim to have sought him out earnestly? The adulteress is seeking to flatter the young man with the suggestion that she is particularly interested in him.

D. Her Careful Preparation 7:16-17

Q - What are the preparations the adulteress claims to have made intended to communicate? The preparations the adulteress claims to have made are intended to communicate that she has made careful and sensuous and perhaps even costly preparations for what she is hoping to experience with the young man.

E. Her Invitation 7:18

Q - What has the adulteress left to imagination regarding her intentions with the invitation of verse 18? The adulteress has left almost nothing to imagination regarding her intentions with her invitation in verse 18.

F. Her Assurance of Privacy 7:19-20

Q - What does the adulteress' claims concerning her husband (literally "the man") add to the appeal of her invitation? The claim of the adulteress that her husband has gone out of town for a predictable amount of time add the prospect of safety from interruption by an irate husband if the young man responds to her invitation to engage in immoral behavior.

IV. The Adulteress' Victory 7:21-23

A. The Means of Her Victory 7:21

Q - How does Solomon summarize the actions of the adulteress which explain her success in achieving her aim?
Solomon summarizes the actions of the adulteress in terms of persuasive enticements and flattering speech in her success in seducing her victim.

B. The Meaning of Her Victory 7:22-23

Q - How does Solomon describe the price to be paid by the young man who falls for the enticements of the adulteress?
Solomon describes the price to be paid by the young man who falls for the enticements of the adulteress in terms of slaughter, discipline due to foolishness, a pierced liver, a snare, and the loss of life.

V. The Adulteress' Destructiveness 7:24-27

A. The Warning Stated 7:24-25

1. Guard Your Mind 7:24

Q - What could have protected the young man who is taken in by the allure of an adulteress from the high price to be paid? Careful attention to the words of warning spoken by his father (more than once earlier in Proverbs) could have protected the young man who is taken in by the allure of the adulteress.

2. Guard Your Steps 7:25

Q - What simple but important difference could have kept the young man who gets involved with an adulteress from the dangers involved? The young man could have avoided the dangers involved in an immoral relationship with an adulteress by staying away from her presence and her ways.

B. The Warning Justified 7:26-27

Q - What is ultimately the danger which the enticements of the adulteress introduces into the experience of her victims?
The ultimate danger which the adulteress introduces into the experience of her victims is the defeat of fallenness and the experience of death in its many forms.

Think About It: The adulteress, for all of her careful efforts to be appealing, is nothing more or less than a death trap. Sinful practices of every kind, however appealing they may seem, always lead to death in any number of ways.

Apply It: Unless we want to be among the walking wounded as we make our way through life, we need to make the commitment Solomon is challenging his sons to make. We need to determine that we will, to the best of our ability and with the help of God's Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16), avoid every form of sin - including the sin of immorality, in whatever pretty packaging it may present itself along the path of life.

“The Call of Wisdom”

Proverbs 8:1-11

Q - What have been some of the most valuable sources of wisdom in your experience?

We are probably all familiar with the parable Jesus told about the wise man and the foolish man and the houses they each built. The wise man started with a solid foundation on a bed of rock. The foolish man may have built an equally solid foundation (the parable doesn't say), but he built the entire structure on sand. So when the weather turned bad with rain and flooding and strong winds, the house on the sand lost its footing and collapsed, while the house on the rock remained standing and secure. Solomon's call to wisdom would have brought far better results for the failed house builder!

I. The Location of Wisdom's Call 8:1-3

A. The Fact of Her Call 8:1

Q - What is sad about the person who makes his way through life without the benefit of wisdom? It is sad that the person who makes his way through life without the benefit of wisdom has done so by ignoring wisdom's call and ignoring the voice of understanding.

B. The Places of Her Call 8:2-3

1. Visible Places 8:2

Q - What are some of the “heights beside the way” where wisdom can be found taking her stand in human experience? Some of the “heights” where wisdom can be found in human experience include the wisdom of parents, quality education,

healthy church life, and good books - especially the Bible.

2. Public Places 8:3

Q - What was the significance of “the gates, at the opening of the city, at the entrance of the doors” in ancient Jewish culture where wisdom could be heard? The gates, at the opening of the city and the entrance of the doors” was where Jewish elders assembled to discuss important matters and care for important business.

II. The Content of Wisdom’s Call 8:4-11

A. Her Addressees 8:4

Q - Who is it that stands to benefit from the call of wisdom? The call of wisdom offers its benefits to all “men” (humans) and their descendants.

B. Her Challenge 8:5

Q - What is it that makes it unlikely that many who are exposed to the call of wisdom will benefit by it? Many people who are exposed to the call of wisdom will not benefit by it because of the naivety and folly which dominates their lives.

C. Her Concerns 8:6-9

1. Concern for Nobility 8:6

Q - What are some of the benefits which are going to be bypassed by those who are insensitive to the call of wisdom? Those who are insensitive to the call of wisdom are going to be bypassed by the nobility and rightness with which it speaks.

2. Concern for Truth 8:7

Q - What are two assurances of the benefits which wisdom offers to all who will respond? All who respond to the offer of wisdom in their lives will benefit by the solidity of truth and the avoidance of wickedness which characterize the utterances of wisdom.

3. Concern for Righteousness 8:8

Q - What are some of the spiritual benefits which enter the lives of people who respond positively to wisdom's call for their attention? Those who respond positively to the call of wisdom in their lives will benefit by the righteousness which wisdom promotes and the absence of crooked and perverted things which wisdom rejects and avoids.

4. Concern for Straightforwardness 8:9

Q - What companion qualities team up with wisdom for the benefit of people who wish to avoid the twists and turns which trouble the lives of many people? People who wish to avoid the twists and turns which trouble the lives of many others will find their lives enriched by straightforwardness (common sense) and understanding and knowledge when they embrace the call of wisdom.

D. Her Importance 8:10-11

1. Compared with Silver and Gold 8:10

Q - What is it which makes the possession of wisdom more valuable than the possession of silver and pure gold? While silver and gold are valuable materially, they are only of temporal value, while the instruction which wisdom provides is of value for both time and eternity.

2. Compared with All Desirable Things 8:11

Q - What does wisdom's superiority to jewels and all desirable things reveal about its importance and value to those who acquire it? Wisdom's superiority to jewels and all desirable things reveals that it is more valuable than the things which are pursued by many people whose values are passing values rather than more important eternal values.

Think About It: Wisdom, which is more valuable than any other thing for those who want to live well, is available to all who want it and who are willing to live their lives consistent with reality so they can have it.

Apply It: Are we taking the steps necessary to respond to wisdom's call? Are we setting aside fantasy in order to embrace reality in our pursuit of godly wisdom and all the benefits which come with it? What Solomon wanted for his sons is what the Lord wants for us all!

“The Way of Wisdom”

Proverbs 8:12-21

Q - Where have you most often been challenged to pursue the way of wisdom?

The book of Proverbs has often contained the words of a father (Solomon) for his sons (or, by extended application, for his children).

Proverbs 4:1 “Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father . . .”

Proverbs 4:10 “Hear, my sons, and accept my sayings . . .”

Proverbs 4:20 “My son, give attention to my words . . .”

In Proverbs 4:7 Solomon is even more explicit: “The beginning of wisdom is: acquire wisdom.” Parents cannot do anything better for their children than to encourage them to pursue the way of wisdom (which begins, 9:10, with the “fear of the Lord”).

I. Wisdom’s Preferences 8:12-13

A. What Wisdom Likes 8:12

Q - What preferences of wisdom are available to those who possess it? Wisdom, for those who possess it, prefers prudence, knowledge, and discretion.

B. What Wisdom Dislikes 8:13

Q - What dislikes of wisdom are to be avoided by those who pursue it? Those who pursue wisdom will avoid such dislikes of wisdom as evil, pride, arrogance, the evil way - including the perverted mouth.

II. Wisdom's Companions 8:14-18

A. Its Possessions 8:14

Q - What benefits does wisdom have to offer to people who become wise? Wisdom has counsel, sound wisdom (tu-shiyya - sound, efficient wisdom, abiding success), understanding, and power to offer to people who become wise.

B. It's Customers 8:15-16

Q - Why does Solomon list those specified in verses 15 and 16 as those who are particularly in need of wisdom? Those listed in verses 15 and 16 are people in places of power and influence over others which makes them especially in need of wisdom.

C. Its Lovers 8:17

Q - What must the person who wants to be loved by wisdom need to do in order to obtain it? The person who wants to be loved by wisdom has to love wisdom and diligently seek it.

D. Its Company 8:18

Q - What benefits does wisdom have to offer to those who love it? Wisdom has riches and honor and enduring wealth and righteousness to offer to those who love it.

III. Wisdom's Produce 8:19-21

A. Its Fruitfulness 8:19

Q - How does wisdom describe the fruitfulness which it has to offer to those who love it? Wisdom describes its fruitfulness as better fruit than gold, even pure gold, and better than

choicest silver.

B. Its Ways 8:20

Q - What does a walk which is characterized by wisdom provide? A walk which is characterized by wisdom provides righteousness and justice.

C. Its Intention 8:21

Q - With what does wisdom hope to endow those who love her? Wisdom hopes to endow those who love her with wealth and filled treasures.

Think About It: People who want to live lives characterized by quality need to seriously pursue wisdom.

Apply It: We should each be asking ourselves whether our pursuit of wisdom has been aggressive enough to take us into the center of God's will. Are we enjoying the benefits which come to those who commit their lives to God's wisdom? And, if we are living wisely and are enjoying the benefits which come to those who do, are we seeking to pass along the wisdom and the benefits wisdom brings into our lives to those who are within our sphere of influence - especially to our children and their children?

“Doing Things Well”

Proverbs 8:22-31

Q - What is something you have accomplished which has brought you a sense of significant satisfaction?

Years ago there was an old fellowship hall standing in disrepair at the southwest corner of the church building which belonged to the congregation which I was serving in Tucson, Arizona. That structure had outlived its usefulness and had been replaced by building expansion on other parts of the property. A neighbor offered to take down the old structure if he could have the materials involved. When we offered to help him take down some heavy ceiling beams, he declined with the explanation that there are two ways to do things - the right way and his way. As it turned out, his way worked, even if it was not the right way. Most often, it is best to choose the right way - as the Lord Himself has done!

I. Wisdom's Antiquity 8:22-23

Q - How long does this passage explain that wisdom has been possessed by the Lord? This passage explains that wisdom has been possessed by the Lord from before the beginning of creation - from everlasting (i.e. forever).

II. Wisdom's Appearance 8:24-26

Q - How do verses 24-26 help the reader understand the practical importance of the wisdom which the Lord possessed from ancient times? These verses inform the reader that God's creation of springs, mountains and hills - in fact, the earth and all that it contains - was enabled because of His wisdom.

III. Wisdom's Activity 8:27-29

A. Establishing the Heavens 8:27a

Q - How is the Lord's possession of wisdom evident in His establishment of the heavens? The vastness, variety, beauty and predictability of the heavens are evidences of God's possession of wisdom.

B. Specifying the Horizon 8:27b

Q - How was the Lord's wisdom evident in His ability to inscribe a circle on the face of the deep - and what does the result suggest about earth's appearance? Because water is difficult to restrain, the Lord's ability to "inscribe a circle on the face of the deep" (creating a globe) clearly reveals His wisdom in restraining the waters which cover much of our earth - and the fact that God inscribed a circle on the face of the deep reveals the fact that the earth is spherical.

C. Making the Skies Firm 8:28a

Q - How do we see evidence that the Lord made firm the skies above us? We see evidence of the firmness of the skies above us in that fact that heavenly bodies we see in the skies are predictable in their motions.

D. Fixing the Springs of the Deep 8:28b

Q - What is the practical significance to mankind of the Lord's ability to have fixed the springs of the deep? The fixed positions of the springs of the deep make life-giving water available in most places on the face of the earth.

E. Setting the Boundary of the Sea 8:29a

Q - Why would the availability of wisdom be important to the Lord in His work of setting boundaries for the sea? The

boundaries assigned to earth's oceans clearly reveal wisdom on the Lord's part in view of the challenge of controlling water and the dangers it presents when it gets "out of control" from human perspective.

F. Marking Out the Foundations of the Earth 8:29b

Q - What would be the importance of the Lord's possession of wisdom in marking out the foundations of the earth? The fact that earth, suspended in space as it is, keeps its place with respect to other heavenly bodies demonstrates that the Lord possesses the wisdom to control the placement of the earth as if it had foundations.

IV. Wisdom's Assistance 8:30-31

A. Serving Beside the Lord 8:30a

Q - How did wisdom's presence beside the Lord make itself evident? Wisdom made its presence beside the Lord clearly evident by its application in creating all that He has made as skillfully as He did.

B. Delighting the Lord 8:30b

Q - What would the Lord's daily delight in the presence of wisdom reveal to the people He created? The Lord's daily delight in the presence of wisdom makes it clear that His people would be well served to take delight in wisdom on a daily basis themselves.

C. Rejoicing with the Lord 8:31

Q - What does wisdom's rejoicing over the earth and the sons of men who live on it reveal about the outcome of the Lord's creative works? Wisdom's rejoicing over the earth and

the sons of men who live on the earth reveals that the Lord's application of wisdom in all that He created has resulted in a very positive outcome.

Think About It: Wisdom is the instrument the Lord Himself used to create all of the things which He has made in such beauty and order and complexity.

Apply It: Do we see and appreciate - even if we don't fully understand it - the wisdom which is so evident in all that the Lord has done? And if we do see and appreciate the wisdom with which the Lord has done what He has done, are we seeking to put God's wisdom to work in our own lives? As the Apostle James has assured us (James 1:5), God's wisdom is available to any person who wants to do things well and who asks Him to provide it!

“Wisdom’s Challenges”

Proverbs 8:32-36

Q - Who stands out in your thinking as someone who has left a legacy characterized by wisdom for the benefit of those who followed them in life?

The story which has often been told about the contrast between two noteworthy American families, those of Jonathan Edwards and Max Jukes, bears repeating because of the way in which it so clearly illustrates the pay-offs of wisdom and folly. The descendants of Jonathan Edwards were characterized by significant achievements and honors because of their godly heritage, while the descendants of Max Jukes were largely characterized by profligacy, criminality and immorality because of their indifference toward spiritual realities. So wisdom challenges us all, in Proverbs 8:32-36, to pay careful attention to her calling in our lives.

I. Wisdom’s Exhortation 8:32-33

A. The Challenge to Listen to Wisdom 8:32

Q - What is the promised outcome for every son who pays heed to wisdom’s call in their lives? Every son who pays heed to wisdom’s call in his life is promised blessing as a result.

B. The Challenge to Heed Instruction 8:33

Q - What does wisdom announce as the path to be traveled by all who wish to be wise? Wisdom announces that the path to be traveled by all who wish to be wise is the path of heeding instruction - not neglecting it.

II. Wisdom's Explanation 8:34-36

A. Happiness Comes from Wisdom 8:34

Q - What does wisdom say is the path to be pursued by all who wish to experience the blessing she has to offer? Wisdom says that the path to be pursued by all who wish to experience the blessing she has to offer is the path of listening to her voice on a daily basis - watching at her gates and waiting at her door-posts.

B. Life and Favor Come by Wisdom 8:35

Q - What predictable benefits are available to those who make the effort to find wisdom? Those who make the effort to find wisdom are promised life and favor as a result.

Q - What does it mean, in response to wisdom's call, to "find life"? To "find life" in response to wisdom's call means not only to stay alive physically but to experience the quality of life which Jesus described (John 10:10) as life "abundantly" as a result of the Lord's favor.

C. Injury and Death Come by Avoiding Wisdom 8:36

Q - What outcome is to be expected in the lives of those who hate wisdom? Those who hate wisdom can expect to injure themselves as a result because of their apparent love of death.

Q - What does it mean, for the person who hates wisdom, to "love death"? The person who hates wisdom loves death in the sense that he chooses to experience complications which inevitably come into a person's life as a result of sinful behavior (cf. Romans 6:23).

Think About It: There are rich benefits for those who receive wisdom, and there are serious consequences for those who reject her. People who hear and heed wisdom find happiness, quality of life, and favor from God, while those who reject wisdom find injury and death.

Apply It: What you and I will experience is largely up to us. We embrace wisdom when we embrace a saving relationship with the One who personifies wisdom - the Lord Jesus Christ! And we embrace wisdom when we embrace, by our practical commitment to it, the revelation of God's wisdom in the pages of His word!

“Feasting with Wisdom”

Proverbs 9:1-6

Q - What is the most memorable meal you have ever experienced?

If you weren't privileged to be born and raised in a wealthy family, enjoying all the benefits of a large and comfortable residence, you may at least have had the opportunity from time to time to visit in such a house which belonged to others - perhaps some distant relatives. Proverbs 9 begins with an invitation of “lady wisdom” to enjoy a significant meal at her fancy residence - an invitation anyone who is thinking clearly ought to happily accept!

I. The Preparation of Wisdom's House 9:1

Q - What does Solomon's brief description of the house wisdom has built bring to your mind? Solomon's description of the house wisdom has built brings to my mind a palatial residence in a southern U.S. state with its pillared porches and nicely landscaped surroundings.

II. The Preparation of Wisdom's Feast 9:2

Q - What would you expect to experience as a result of the invitation to a meal prepared by wisdom? I would expect to experience a healthy, tasty and well-balanced meal as a result of the invitation of wisdom to eat what she has prepared.

Q - How would you envision the table which wisdom would set for the benefit of the person invited to eat and drink at her house? I would envision a table formally and attractively set because of the skill which lady wisdom possesses.

III. The Invitation to Wisdom's Feast 9:3-6

A. The Sending of the Invitation 9:3

Q - In what practical ways might the maidens of the lady wisdom be expected to communicate her invitation to the meal she has prepared to offer at her residence? The maidens of the lady wisdom might communicate her invitation to the meal she has prepared to offer at her residence through the pages of God's word and through the people who value His word in a person's life - such as godly parents and churches and teachers.

Q - What would be the significance of the presence of lady wisdom's maidens at the tops of the heights of the city? The presence of lady wisdom's maidens at the tops of the heights of the city would reveal their intention to make her invitation heard as widely as possible.

B. The Wording of Her Invitation 9:4-5

Q - Why would lady wisdom's maidens specifically address her invitation to those who are naive and lacking in understanding? Lady wisdom's maidens would specifically address her invitation to those who are naive and lacking in understanding because the wisdom they are promoting is exactly what those who are naive and lacking understanding are most in need of.

C. The Warning in Her Invitation 9:6

Q - What do lady wisdom's maidens reveal about the danger for those who fail to forsake their folly? Lady wisdom's maidens reveal that those who fail to forsake their folly are in danger of death in its many forms.

Q - What are the promised benefits for those who choose

to forsake their folly and proceed in the way of understanding?
The promised benefits for those who choose to forsake their folly and to proceed in the way of understanding are the benefits of “life” - in all of its dimensions, physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and eternally.

Think About It: Wisdom invites all who will do it to come to her big, luxurious house for a generous meal - resulting in life at its best.

Apply It: In New Testament terminology, life at its best comes to all who turn from their sin to give their lives to the wisdom which is personified in Jesus Christ - “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). So we each and always need to make the decision to head for wisdom’s house for the feast she offers to all who want it. The best of life comes to those who live their lives with wisdom!

“Wise Man or Wise Guy?”

Proverbs 9:7-12

Q - How would you describe the difference between a “wise man” and a “wise guy”?

The prophets who spoke for the Lord to the people of Israel were frequently rejected by the people to whom they delivered God’s word. II Chronicles 36:15-17 records the sad results of years of rejection, on the part of Israel (both north and south) because “they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against His people.” Those who were guilty of rejecting prophetic messengers probably thought that they were wise men, but it turned out that they were only “wise guys”!

I. Contrasting Attitudes of the Scoffer and the Wise 9:7-10

A. The Unreceptive Attitude of the Scoffer 9:7-8a

1. Correcting Him Brings Dishonor 9:7a

Q - What were some of the dishonors experienced by the Old Testament prophets for their attempts to correct those who scoffed at their messages? Jeremiah was apprehended and placed in a cistern (Jeremiah 38:6), and tradition states that Isaiah was placed in a hollow log and sawed in two (cf. Hebrews 11:37).

2. Reproving Him Brings Insults 9:7b

Q - How did the experience of John the Baptist demonstrate Solomon’s observation in verse 7b as a result of his criticism of King Herod for taking his brother’s wife (Matthew

14:10)? John the Baptist was beheaded as a result of his criticism of King Herod.

3. Reproving Him Brings Hatred 9:8a

Q - Is Solomon actually suggesting that it is not a good idea to reprove a scoffer? Why or why not? He is not suggesting that scoffers not be reprovved because scoffing deserves to be reprovved. He is just suggesting that reproof is likely to be resisted by a scoffer.

B. The Receptive Attitude of the Wise 9:8b-10

1. His Attitude Toward Mankind 9:8b-9

a. Reproving Him Results in Love 9:8b

Q - What is it that causes a wise man to love the person who reproves him? The wise man loves even the person who reproves him because his wisdom causes him to welcome an honest assessment of his behavior and the possibility of any change which he needs to make.

b. Instructing Him Results in Wisdom 9:9a

Q - What is the benefit to the wise man who actually feels love (8b) toward the person who reproves him? The wise man who feels love toward the person who reproves him will grow in his wisdom as a result of his healthy response to reproof.

c. Teaching Him Results in Knowledge 9:9b

Q - What is it that enables a righteous man to increase in his understanding? The righteous man's awareness that he can always increase his righteous standing by additional knowledge is the thing which enables him to increase in his understanding.

2. His Attitude Toward the Lord 9:10

Q - What is it that makes the “fear of the LORD” an important qualifier for the person who desires to be wise? Because “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (9:10) it is an important qualifier for the person who desires to be wise.

Q - What is an important qualifier for the person who sincerely wishes to grow in the level of his understanding? The person who sincerely wishes to grow in the level of his understanding needs to begin his quest with a personal relationship with and knowledge of the Holy One (the Lord).

II. Contrasting Consequences for the Scoffer and the Wise 9:11-12

A. The Consequences of Wisdom 9:11-12a

1. Wisdom Lengthens Life 9:11

Q - What is it that makes the acquisition of wisdom a predictable pathway to length of life? Because wisdom is the skill to do all things well, it enables those who possess it to pursue healthy practices which tend to increase longevity and quality in life.

2. Wisdom Enriches Life 9:12a

Q - Who is it that benefits the most from a person's possession of wisdom? The person who benefits most from his possession of wisdom is the person who is wise.

B. The Consequences of Scoffing 9:12b

Q - Who does the scoffer do the most harm to as a result

of his scoffing? The person who is a scoffer does the greatest harm to himself because of his perspective as a scoffer.

Think About It: The person who fears the Lord and receives instruction and correction is wise - and he will benefit by his wisdom. But the one who scoffs at instruction and correction will have to bear the consequences of his folly.

Apply It: Scoffers and the wise have both very different outlooks and very different outcomes in life. So it is Solomon's challenge to each and every person who reads this passage to ponder whether he or she will be blessed because of a life characterized by wisdom and righteousness, or whether he or she will be cursed because of a life characterized by folly and scoffing.

“Folly’s Feast”

Proverbs 9:13-19

Q - What stands out in your thinking as a clear example of foolishness which you have witnessed?

It never ceases to amaze me that advertisers can make things look so attractive which are actually destructive. Beer commercials do it all the time. Have you ever seen a beer commercial picturing a battered wife and frightened children? Or do they picture the broken lives and filthy conditions on the “skid row” of any city in the world? No, beer commercials always picture beautiful people (often women - who actually do less drinking than men do) and beautiful places (often places where little or no drinking is ever done because they are places where very few people ever go)!

I. The Foolish Woman’s Description 9:13

Q - When have you been shocked by a bold and public display of ignorance on the part of someone who should have known better than to do what they did? I have been shocked by Public officials (e.g. California Congresswoman Maxine Waters) who loudly and publicly rant and rave about things they disagree with.

II. The Foolish Woman’s Placement 9:14

Q - What is the significance of Solomon’s description of the woman of folly’s placement? The woman of folly places herself in very visible locations in order to maximize her influence for ill in the lives of all who pass her by.

III. The Foolish Woman’s Pursuit 9:15

Q - Who is the person who is most in danger of serious harm if they should respond to the call of the woman of folly? The person passing by the woman of folly who has been pursuing a straight path is the person most in danger of serious harm should they turn aside in response to her call

IV. The Foolish Woman's Invitation 9:16-17

A. Her Call 9:1

Q - What are the characteristics of those most likely to actually respond to the influence of the woman of folly? Those who are most likely to actually respond to the influence of the woman of folly are those who are naive, lacking in understanding.

B. Her Meal 9:17

Q - What is deceptive about the "meal" which the woman of folly offers to those she seeks to influence? There is actually nothing sweet about water, much less stolen water; and there is nothing particularly pleasant about eating bread in secret - and especially so if it too happens to have been stolen.

V. The Foolish Woman's Victims 9:18

Q - What is the sad outcome for all who respond to what the woman of folly has to offer? The sad outcome for all who respond to what the woman of folly has to offer is that they place themselves in the company of the dead, and end up in the depths of Sheol (the place of the dead).

Think About It: The real tragedy for those who yield to the appeal of the "woman of folly" is that those who live in the shadow of death which darkens her path end up in "the depths of Sheol" - the place of the departed dead from which there is

no escape for those who have wasted their lives on the paths of folly.

Apply It: Because it is death in all of its dimensions which awaits people who get pulled off the straight path of life into the grip of folly, every form of foolishness should be avoided at all costs by those who are alert to its danger.

PROVERBS 10-29

The beginning of Proverbs chapter 10 brings us to our consideration of proverbs as we are most familiar with them - brief statements of wisdom (in this case, the wisdom of the Lord Himself) as they were formulated by Solomon and (apparently) some other unknown authors.

As we observed in the introduction, Hebrew proverbs are poetic statements based on parallelism. Parallelism compares or contrasts two or more thoughts which are comparative or progressive or adversative or illustrative or parabolic (see Introduction - The Poetry of Proverbs for more on the subject). Most of the proverbs between 10:1 and 29:27 of the book are composed a proverb of two lines (occasionally more), though some will combine several verses on a specific topic (cf. 22:17-21). And proverbs deal in the realm of general truth. Because they are proverbs, not promises, there may be exceptions to some of the statements they make, but they speak to the issues of life as we experience it in most instances.

As we have also observed earlier, most of the proverbs stand on their own. Though the context of most Biblical passages is critical to a correct interpretation of their content, immediate context is generally not an important consideration in the interpretation of the proverbs. There will be occasional groupings of proverbs which treat the same subject, but most of the proverbs are not dependent on what precedes or follows them. Because the study of Proverbs, made up as it is of mostly single verses which are each a study of their own, we will not launch into a verse-by-verse study of Proverbs 10-29, but will study many of the themes addressed in Proverbs as topical studies. The verses which are underlined under each topic are the verses which are addressed in the notes which follow. For a verse-by-verse study of all of the book of Proverbs you are encouraged to consult the two-volume work entitled *Those*

Practical Proverbs - A Pastoral Exposition of the Book of Proverbs which I have written.

Because the book of Proverbs is an important part of the “wisdom literature” of the Bible, the careful student of the book will find a wealth of practical and spiritual truth which will greatly enrich the life of every person who gives them the careful consideration they so richly deserve.

ATTITUDES IN PROVERBS
15:13; 15:15; 15:30; 17:22; 18:14

Q - What is communicated when it is said of someone that they have “an attitude”?

The book of Proverbs addresses many different topics in its pages. Some are addressed at some length in the “wisdom poems” found in the book - especially in the first nine chapters. Other topics are addressed in single verses - often in several places scattered throughout the book. Though the word itself is not found in Proverbs, the topic of “attitudes” is addressed in several places.

15:13 “A joyful heart makes a cheerful face,
But when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken.”

Q - What does Solomon say is an early clue regarding the attitude of anyone we might encounter in life? A person’s attitude is often initially communicated by the look on their face.

Q - How is sadness of heart likely to express itself in a person’s life? Sadness of heart is likely to express itself first in a person’s life by the sad expression which is evident by their facial appearance, then it is likely to result in a broken spirit.

15:15 “All the days of the afflicted are bad,
But a cheerful heart has a continual feast.”

Q - What is it that makes all the days of the afflicted bad days? People who are “afflicted” often view all that takes place in their lives in a negative manner.

Q - What would make it possible for anyone to view their life as a continual feast? People who have a positive outlook in life because of a cheerful heart are able to see the good in many

situations whether people around them are able to see any good at all.

15:30 “Bright eyes gladden the heart;
Good news puts fat on the bones.”

Q - What is the impression you get when you see someone with “bright eyes”? Bright eyes communicate the impression that things are going very well for the one who displays them.

Q - What does the thought of putting “fat on the bones” communicate? Because “fat on the bones” is most likely a result of sufficiency in someone’s diet, it is a visible indicator that the person under consideration is blessed with a life where good news is being experienced.

17:22 “A joyful heart is good medicine,
But a broken spirit dries up the bones.”

Q - What medicinal value could arise out of a joyful heart? People who have a positive outlook in life, evidenced by a joyful heart, are most likely to be free of stressful feelings which contribute to depression and physical complications such as elevated blood pressure.

Q - In what sense might a broken spirit dry up a person’s bones? Understanding a broken spirit to be evidenced by discouragement and depression, such a spirit can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems, including aches and pains which can result from bones which are not as healthy as they should be.

18:14 “The spirit of a man can endure his sickness,
But as for a broken spirit who can bear it?”

Q - What is it about the spirit of a man which can enable him to endure physical illness? Because the spirit of a man is controlled by the perspective of his heart - the control center of his being - the fact that he may not be physically well does not have to determine the response of his spirit. As long as a person is only sick in body his chances of recovery are very good because the body has an amazing capacity to mend itself. And when the body is aided in its recovery from sickness by a positive spirit, an ailing body's prospects for improvement are greatly enhanced.

Q - Why would Solomon observe that a broken spirit is likely to be unbearable? When someone is physically ill and is characterized by a spirit which is negative and depressed, he is doubly handicapped - physically and mentally (or emotionally), which makes the likelihood that he will quickly and fully recover from his physical problems for less likely.

Think About It: A person's attitude can have a very powerful impact on the condition and the outcome of his life. So it is as important that we pay attention to and seek to nourish the welfare of our spirit as it is that we pay attention to the welfare of and seek to nourish our bodies - both for our own benefit and for the benefit of the people who surround us in life.

BUSINESS IN PROVERBS
11:1; 11:26; 13:23; 14:4; 20:4

Q - When have you been disadvantaged by someone's business practices which were not aligned with the teaching of God's word regarding business?

Though the book of Proverbs is not a book about business, it contains many verses which are applicable to the business practices of God's people - truths which should be applied by any business person seeking to be successful in business and to please the Lord!

11:1 "A false balance is an abomination to the LORD,
But a just weight is His delight."

Q - What would make a balance a "false balance"? A balance which is used as a counterbalance on the kind of scale which was used in ancient times (and still today in some settings) can be turned into a "false balance" by making it weigh either more or less than it is supposed to weigh.

Q - What would make the use of a "false balance" a problematic business practice? A "false balance" is problematic because it most likely causes the merchant to receive more than he should receive and the customer to receive less.

Q - What can we learn about business life from the two lines of this verse? The two lines of this verse reveal that the Lord is aware of and opposed to business practices which are not conducted with honesty and accuracy.

11:26 "He who withholds grain, the people will curse him,
But blessing will be on the head of him who sells it.

Q - What might motivate someone who possesses grain to withhold it from people who are interested in buying it? The person who possesses grain might choose to withhold it from those who need it in the hope that fluctuating market prices will increase in his favor, causing his customers to pay more for the product he has to sell.

Q - Why is it not a good idea to deny the sale of available grain to people who are in need of grain? Refraining from selling grain to people who need to have it causes people to curse the one who refrains from selling, and the fact that blessing is on the head of the person who sells his grain to people who need it suggests that failing to sell grain which people need will prevent blessings which could have been experienced - both from the people and from the Lord.

13:23 "Abundant food is in the fallow ground of the poor,
But it is swept away by injustice."

Q - What would make the "fallow ground of the poor" the likely source of "abundant food"? Ground which has been plowed and harrowed is ground which is ready to be planted with seed which could result in an abundant crop - even if the ground belongs to someone who is poor. But if the ground has not been planted, the food it is capable of producing is only unrealized potential.

Q - What kinds of "injustice" might sweep away the prospect of abundant food in the field of someone who is poor? The inability of a poor farmer whose ground is ready to be planted could be "swept away" by someone's refusal to make available the seed needed to make it productive - or by some other unjust act which would prevent the poor farmer from making good use of his ground.

14:4 "Where no oxen are the manger is clean,

But much increase comes by the strength of the ox.”

Q - What might be the cause of “no oxen” and the resulting clean manger which their absence causes? The cause of “no oxen” to eat from a clean manger might result from the inability of a poor farmer to purchase oxen (for one reason or another) or from his inability to purchase the grain which would be needed to feed oxen if he had any.

Q - What are some examples of the “increase” which could result from the presence of oxen in a farmer’s barn? The ability of oxen to pull farm implements used in preparing the soil on any farmer’s farm, or the ability of oxen to provide the strength to perform other useful farm tasks would be examples of the “increase” which possessing oxen could provide.

20:4 “The sluggard does not plow after the autumn,
So he begs during the harvest and has nothing.”

Q - Why is it important that anyone tending crops, including sluggards, plow after the autumn? Plowing after the autumn begins the process of preparing soil for productivity during the spring growing season by softening the soil and plowing after-harvest waste into the soil to enrich it for any future harvest.

Q - What is the consequence for the sluggard who fails to plow after the autumn? The failure of the sluggard to plow after the autumn results in poorer soil quality which would be beneficial for any future crops.

Think About It: Among other things we can learn concerning business at its best from the Proverbs are the lessons we have seen in the verses we have considered:

11:1 - honesty

11:26 - compassion and generosity

13:23 - justice toward the poor

14:4 - wise investment

20:4 - diligent effort

PROVERBS ON DEBT

3:27-28; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:7; 22:26-27; 27:13

Q - When have you found your life more complicated than it needed to be because of debts which you incurred?

There are probably very few people who ever get through life without learning some significant lessons on the subject of debt. So what the book of Proverbs has to say on the subject is very important because we can all benefit from some wisdom when it comes to the subject of debt.

3:27-28 “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due,
When it is in your power to do it.
(28) Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Go, and come back,
And tomorrow I will give it,’
When you have it with you.”

Q - What is the problem when we withhold good from someone to whom it is due? Withholding good from someone to whom it is due keeps them from making good use of the resources which they have somehow earned the right to have.

Q - Because both verse 27 and 28 assume we are able to pay our debts, what is our responsibility when we are NOT able to pay what we owe? When we are NOT able to pay what we owe it is our responsibility to communicate with the person to whom debt is owed so they are aware of the challenge, and to make every reasonable effort we can to get caught up on the payment of debts which we owe.

17:18 “A man lacking in sense pledges
And becomes guarantor in the presence of his neighbor.”

Q - What is it about making a “pledge” and becoming a “guarantor” which is senseless? Because none of us can pre-

dict with certainty what the future will bring, making a pledge to pay our own debt, or becoming a “guarantor” for someone else’s debt, is (in either case) a senseless act if it can possibly be avoided (by saving up to pay for our own needs or giving, rather than guaranteeing, to meet the needs of someone else.

Q - What might be the distinction between senseless “pledging” and becoming a “guarantor in the presence of [one’s] neighbor”? Pledging is promising to fulfill your obligation in paying for a debt of your own, while becoming a guarantor in the presence of a neighbor is promising to fulfill his obligation for a debt he is incurring if he is not able to fulfill it himself.

22:7 “The rich rules over the poor,
And the borrower becomes the lender’s slave.”

Q - In what sense is it true that “the rich rules over the poor”? The rich rules over the poor in the sense that the rich are in a position to meet their own needs with their own wealth, while the poor frequently need to borrow from or otherwise obligate themselves to the rich for the provision of their needs.

Q - What is it that makes a borrower the slave to the lender? The borrower becomes a slave to the lender because he obligates himself to pay back to the lender what he has borrowed, whether it is convenient or even possible or not.

22:26-27 “Do not be among those who give pledges,
Among those who become guarantors for debt.
(27) If you have nothing with which to pay,
Why should he take your bed from under you?”

Q - What are the alternatives to being among those who give pledges and become guarantors for debt? The alternatives to being among those who give pledges or become guarantors

for someone else's debt are (1) saving up enough to purchase what you are in need of, rather than to borrow for what you are not able to afford, and (2) giving to meet the needs of someone who is unable to obtain what is needed, rather than promising to pay for what he needs if he is unable to pay his own debt.

Q - What is the problem with making a pledge in a situation which makes it possible to possess something we want and may even feel we need? Because we don't know what the future holds, making a pledge so we can purchase something we may think we need may result in our inability to fulfill the pledge we have entered into, resulting in the loss of the thing for which we pledged, or in legal problems with the person to whom we have indebted ourselves.

Q - What is the difference between making a "pledge" (v. 26a) and becoming "surety" for debt (v. 26b)? Making a pledge is promising to pay a debt we have incurred, while becoming surety is promising to pay a debt someone else has incurred if it turns out that he is unable to pay what he owes.

Think About It: Are we making it a practice to avoid unnecessary obligations - living contentedly with what the Lord has enabled us to afford, and encouraging others to do the same by not assuming responsibility for their obligations (unless we are willing and able to pay them - with the understanding that our action may turn into a gift rather than a loan)?

PROVERBS ON DISCIPLINE

3:11-12; 6:23; 7:22; 12:1; 13:18; 15:5; 19:18; 19:20; 19:27;
23:12

Q - What are some areas in life which can be improved by the exercise of discipline on our part?

The American proverb has it that “the best things in life are free,” and so it often is if we are thinking in terms of monetary cost. But nothing in life comes without some “cost” in terms of effort on our part. And so it is that Solomon challenges his sons and readers to “apply [their] heart to discipline.” While learning to appreciate discipline and the reproof which often accompanies it is not the easiest thing in life, it is important to see them in the right perspective if we are going to experience the best that life has to offer - both now and forever.

23:12 “Apply your heart to discipline
And your ears to words of knowledge.”

Q - What is it about the human heart which calls for discipline on its part? The human heart is “more deceitful than all else, and is desperately sick” (Jeremiah 17:9), so keeping it on a healthy track in life requires discipline.

Q - What is the connection between a person’s ears and understanding which is paired with discipline in this verse? Being disciplined requires careful attention to the words of knowledge which are available from the Lord, so ears which are attentive to God’s truth are important in achieving the understanding which leads to healthy discipline in life.

3:11-12 “My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD,
Or loathe His reproof,
(12) For whom the LORD loves He reproves,
Even as the father corrects the son in whom he delights.”

Q - What are some possible reasons for which the Lord might find it necessary to discipline or reprove one of His spiritual children? The Lord might find it necessary to discipline or reprove one of His children because they have strayed from the path of life into deadly kinds of behavior - thinking, saying, or doing things which are sinful.

Q - What is it that makes the Lord's reproof and discipline a loving thing for Him to do in the lives of His children? Because the Lord's reproof and discipline are intended to result in correction where correction is needed, they are an important evidence of the love, even delight, which He feels toward his children who stray from His ways.

6:23 "For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; And reproofs for discipline are the way of life."

Q - In what sense do commandments and teaching from a human parent or from the Lord serve as a lamp and as light in the lives of His children? The commandments and teaching which a loving human parent or the Lord Himself provide are intended to light the way for people who are seeking to make their way safely through the darkness which is characteristic of the path ahead on a sin-cursed earth.

Q - What does Solomon's reference to the "way of life" suggest about reproofs for discipline? Solomon's reference to the "way of life" places the well-lighted path which leads to life in every dimension (physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and eternally) apart from the darkened path which leads to death in all of the same dimensions.

12:1 "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge,
But he who hates reproof is stupid."

Q - What is it about discipline which could motivate

someone to love it? Because discipline is beneficial for the person who makes good use of it, the person benefitting by it should be motivated to love it.

Q - What is it that causes many people to hate reproof? When someone is reproved, they are faced with failings of which they are guilty, and no one enjoys being faced with their failings.

Q - What is Solomon's unflattering assessment of the person who hates reproof? Solomon assesses the person who hates reproof as a stupid person.

Think About It: While it can be quite unpleasant to experience discipline, - even self-discipline - and the reproofs which frequently precede and accompany discipline, there is wisdom in learning to submit to reproofs and discipline and even to come to appreciate their important potential in our lives.

PROVERBS ON FOOLS

10:23; 12:15; 13:19; 14:7; 15:21; 17:10; 17:12; 18:2; 19:10;
19:29; 26:4-5; 27:3; 27:22

Q - When have you seen someone's life complicated by foolish behavior on their part?

The book of Proverbs translates three different Hebrew words by the English word "fool." The most common word (*kesil*) describes someone who, though he may be intelligent enough, chooses bad behavior which demonstrates his rejection of the "fear of the LORD." The second word (*evil*) describes a man who is morally depraved (though the fact that the *kesil* is characterized by *ewwilet* - "foolishness" - places both fools in similar territory). The word *nabal* occurs only three times in Proverbs - but a man by the name of Nabal is found in the account of the life of David, and his behavior clearly illustrates the meaning of his name. This is the fool described in Psalm 14:1 and 53:1: "The fool has said in his heart 'there is no God.'"

10:23 "Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool,
And so is wisdom to a man of understanding."

Q - How might Solomon's observation about the fool of this verse (*kesil*) be paraphrased to clarify his meaning? It might be observed that the person who is a fool finds satisfaction in his folly similar to the way many people find satisfaction in the sports activities they participate in.

Q - What sets the understanding person of the second line apart from the fool of the first line? While fools frequently find satisfaction in foolish acts which are destructive to their own wellbeing, wise people find their satisfaction in pursuing wisdom - skillful performance in the affairs of their lives which improve their prospects for success and satisfaction in life.

18:2 “A fool does not delight in understanding,
But only in revealing his own mind.”

Q - What is the likely outcome for the person who does not value understanding? The likely outcome for the person who does not value understanding is the inability to pursue enlightened ends, and the complications which result from such enlightened pursuits.

Q - Because he is disinterested in understanding, what is the likely outcome when the fool reveals his own mind? The person who is disinterested in understanding is very likely to spout uninformed opinions arising out of a mind characterized by ignorance and arrogance.

26:4-5 “Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
Or you will also be like him.
(5) Answer a fool as his folly deserves,
That he not be wise in his own eyes.”

Q - What does Solomon’s combination of seemingly contradictory messages in Proverbs 26:4-5 reveal about the challenge of responding to a fool? Solomon’s seemingly contradictory messages in Proverbs 26:4-5 regarding the challenge of properly answering a fool is the thought that any person attempting it will probably not be successful, no matter how he tries.

Q - What is it that the folly of the fool deserves from any person attempting to respond properly to such a person? The folly of a fool deserves a strong and informed response because fools are not easily challenged with respect to their foolish ways.

27:22 “Though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along
with crushed grain,

Yet his foolishness will not depart from him.”

Q - What would the idea of pounding a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain suggest? Pounding a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain suggests a response which is as forceful as the processing of grain which reduces it to powder (flour).

Q - What does the impossibility of removing folly from a fool even by pounding him in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain leave as an alternative to dealing with a fool? The impossibility of removing folly from a fool even by means of forceful measures leaves only the alternative of restraining the fool from foolish behavior by means of restraints such as imprisonment.

Think About It: It is important to recognize the fact that there will be times when a person is so foolish in his perspective in life that we should obey the instruction Jesus gave His disciples when He said “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces” (Matthew 7:6).

PROVERBS ON FRIENDS

17:17; 18:24; 19:4; 19:6; 22:11; 27:6; 27:9; 27:10; 27:14

Q - When have you found your life significantly blessed by the benefit of a good friendship?

It is not at all surprising to find that a book which is so practical as the book of Proverbs would have some important things to say about friends. Friendships are an important part of every person's life, so it is important for each of us to be alert to some of the ups and downs of the issue of friendships.

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

Q - What should we be looking for in the friendships we establish in our lives? We should be looking for someone who is pleasant company, who shares common interests, displaying a caring attitude which makes it seem likely that they might be capable of being helpful (and helped) as a friend.

Q - How is the relationships between siblings likely to compare with the relationship between friends who love one another? The relationships between siblings, because it is a relationship created as a result of birth into the same family, is not always as supportive as a relationship based the common interests of friends - though family ties are often particularly helpful in times of difficulty.

18:24 "A man of *too many* friends *comes* to ruin,
But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

Q - How would many friends become too many friends and lead someone to ruin? Because friends often share time and resources with one another, "too many friends" can place a strain on the available time and resources which can result in

shortages which, in extreme cases, can be harmful in one way or another.

Q - How should a person draw the line between the right number of friends and too many friends? Because not all friendships are of equal value and importance, it makes sense to focus most on those which are most genuine and enriching - like the friendship of the Lord Himself, whose friendship is more important than even a healthy friendship between close brothers.

19:6 “Many will seek the favor of a generous man,
And every man is a friend to him who gives gifts.”

Q - What is it that qualifies someone for the description “a generous man”? The Hebrew word translated “generous” (*nadib* > *nadab* - to incite, impel) could also be translated “inclined” or “noble.” The word is used in Exodus 35:5 of Jewish people who gave to the construction of the Tabernacle out of “a willing heart,” so the “generous man” is not begrudging in his generosity, causing “many” to seek his favor (lit. - his face) because he is seen as someone who is “inclined” to share what he possesses.

Q - What level of friendship is seen in the second line of this synonymous parallelism? The level of friendship seen in the second line of the verse is the level of friendship which is pursued because of the benefit which seems likely to result when the potential friend is known as a giver of gifts.

27:6 “Faithful are the wounds of a friend,
But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.”

Q - Why would someone who is a genuine friend wound someone who is dear to him? The person who is a genuine friend might wound someone who is dear to him because he

sees a problematic characteristic or behavior which could become harmful to his friend.

Q - What would be the most likely reason for anyone to experience kisses from an enemy? Kisses from an enemy would most likely result from the enemy's deceitful intention to convey affection when he actually intends to do harm. The classic example in Scripture of the deceitful kiss of an enemy was the kiss Judas Iscariot gave to Jesus as his previously announced sign to Roman soldiers in the Garden of Gethsemane that Jesus was the man they were there to arrest!

27:14 "He who blesses his friend with a loud voice early in the morning,
It will be reckoned a curse to him."

Q - What is the problem with voicing a blessing to your friend in the morning? Many people, who are not "early risers," are hoping not be to awakened early in the morning, so the problem with a load voice coming from someone who is supposedly a friend in early morning hours is the fact that it interrupts sleep.

Q - Why might the loud voice of a friendly neighbor in early morning hours be reckoned as a curse? Early morning interruptions to someone's sleep are sometimes an unwelcome interruption of the most restful hours of sleep the sleeping neighbor was likely to get, so they seem more like a curse than the cheery blessing they were intended to be by an insensitive "friend."

Think About It: True friends are people who love and are loved because of common interests between them. They care enough for each other to share things which may cause pain for each other, when necessary. And their love is genuine - never pretended in order to try to gain something unhealthy out of the

relationship. Do we enjoy healthy friendships - and are our friendships true friendships or sometimes “fair weather” or even bothersome friendships?

PROVERBS ON GOSSIP
11:9; 16:28; 17:4; 18:8; 19:5; 20:19

Q - Can you cite a classic example of the destructive potential of gossip?

The Apostle James tells us (James 3:1-10) that the tongue is the most difficult member of our bodies to control. Who of us have not said things we would have liked to retract - if only we could! And, regrettably, our tongues are not only likely to cause trouble for each one of us - they are also likely to cause trouble for those around us if we don't exercise some godly caution! So it is not surprising that a book like Proverbs would have something to say about the problem of gossip.

11:9 "With *his* mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor, But through knowledge the righteous will be delivered."

Q - What are some of the many reasons it is not good to live next door to a godless man? A godless neighbor might engage in illegal behavior toward an innocent neighbor; godless people are often inconsiderate of the safety and comfort of those around them; they are often the instigators of immoral behaviors which might harm their neighbors; and godless people are often loose with their tongues, spreading falsehood and destructive gossip about people around them.

Q - How might knowledge provide deliverance for a righteous man living next to a godless man? Accurate understanding of the actual facts in any situation can often deliver those who have been falsely accused of improprieties by godless individuals who live near them.

16:28 "A perverse man spreads strife,
And a slanderer separates intimate friends."

Q - What are some behaviors which would make a person a “perverse man” who, as a result, spreads strife? Perversion in a person’s life might lead to dishonesty or depravity in speech (as in 2:12 and 10:32) or to evil scheming (as in 16:30) or to immorality - behaviors which lead to division and damaged relationships.

Q - What specific kind of perversity does Solomon zero in on in the second line of this verse? Solomon zeros in on the perversity of slander in the second line of the verse, noting the divisions which can result as friends become separated because of the damage caused by slander.

17:4 “An evildoer listens to wicked lips;
A liar pays attention of a destructive tongue.”

Q - What is Solomon’s designation for the person who listens to wicked lips? Solomon describes the person who listens to wicked lips as an evildoer, because it is his advice that a good person should listen to the wise (22:17).

Q - What could be the liar’s fascination with a destructive tongue? Destructive tongues traffic heavily in deception to achieve their evil ends, so people who are dishonest will naturally prefer speech which is destructive above speech which is honest - as the “father of lies” himself (Satan) used his destructive tongue to set Eve, then Adam, and finally all of the human race on the destructive path toward death in all of its manifestations.

18:8 “The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels,
And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.”

Q - What is likely to be problematic about the words of a whisperer? People who resort to whispering, rather than speaking in audible tones, frequently do so in order to conceal what

they are saying from others who would be in earshot of their secretive and often harmful messages.

Q - What is it that makes the words of a whisperer comparable to “dainty morsels”? Whispered words often communicate gossip which depraved souls can hardly restrain themselves from passing on to others, because words of gossip seem like “dainty morsels” to those who are “in” on messages which are passed along in secret by those who whisper them.

20:19 “He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip.”

Q - What would motivate a slanderer to reveal the secrets he or she reveals? Because Solomon’s word for “slanderer” can also be translated “talebearer” (from the Hebrew word *rakal* - to go about) it is likely that the slanderer Solomon has in mind is someone who goes from person to person bearing some juicy tidbit of gossip he is only too happy to pass along (cf. 11:13 - “He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets . . .”).

Q - What is a God-honoring way to deal with someone who is inclined to gossip? The God-honoring way to deal with someone who is inclined to gossip is to avoid their companionship so as not to be influenced by their gossip.

Think About It: God wants His people to avoid gossip and anyone who engages in gossip. In fact, God wants His people to avoid every sinful behavior. Because “bad company corrupts good morals” (I Corinthians 15:33), it is the wise thing to avoid “bad company” - unless there is some redemptive aim in connecting with them. Because we are called to refrain from the sin of gossip, avoiding associations with those who are engaged in slander and gossip will help us live as the Lord wants us to live.

PROVERBS ON HUMILITY

11:2; 12:9; 15:25; 15:33; 16:19; 18:12; 22:4; 29:23

Q - Who stands out in your thinking as the most genuinely humble person who has ever lived on the earth?

In an age when emphasis is frequently being placed on our self-esteem, humility is more difficult to find than it should be. Public school students in America are frequently taught that they are worthy of respect because of who they are, whether they are well-behaved and able to perform acceptably in the academic realm or not. As a result, for decades our nation has been raising a generation of young people puffed up with the assurance of their worth and determined to see that they receive the respect they have been taught they are due. But the self-esteem agenda of our age is not in harmony with the wisdom of the Proverbs.

11:2 “When pride comes, then comes dishonor,
But with the humble is wisdom.”

Q - What is it about pride which leads to dishonor? Pride leads to dishonor because it causes a person to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, setting him up for a painful encounter with reality when his pride causes him to fall.

Q - Why is it that humility is to be equated with wisdom? Humility is to be equated with wisdom because it is an attitude which conforms to the reality that human beings are naturally inclined to give themselves more credit than they are actually due, and the person who is wise sees things as they really are.

12:9 “Better is he who is lightly esteemed and has a servant
Than he who honors himself and lacks bread.”

Q - Why would a person’s possession of a servant (or, in

our day, labor-saving devices) take some of the dishonor out of being lightly esteemed? The person who possesses a servant (or, in our culture, labor-saving equipment) has the advantage of assistance in seeking to accomplish whatever he is trying to accomplish, even though others may not be impressed with what he is able to accomplish.

Q - What might cause someone who lacks bread to honor himself? The person who honors himself even though he does not have bread (or other necessities of life) is thinking of himself in terms which are not in accord with the reality that he is actually seriously deficient.

15:33 “The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom,
And before honor comes humility.”

Q - Why would Solomon equate the fear of the LORD with instruction for wisdom? The fear of the Lord is a person's recognition that he is accountable to the Lord for all that he thinks and says and does, so the fear of the Lord positions a person to live his life wisely - in a skillful manner.

Q - What makes humility a logical prerequisite to honor? Honor is only deserved by the person who sees himself in a realistic way, so those who see themselves more highly than the facts warrant are not deserving of the honor of which they think they are worthy.

18:12 “Before destruction the heart of man is haughty,
But humility goes before honor.”

Q - What is it about the haughty heart which leads a person to destruction? The person whose heart is filled with pride is heading for an encounter with the reality that he is not as accomplished as he thinks he is - a reality which will lead to his humiliation.

Q - Who is likely to honor the person who demonstrates humility in his demeanor? Because a humble spirit is appealing to all who become aware of it, the person who demonstrates humility in his demeanor is likely to be honored by everyone who values what is real, but especially by the Lord, because the Lord highly values humility in the lives of His people.

22:4 “The reward of humility and the fear of the LORD
Are riches, honor and life.”

Q - How would you rate riches, honor and life in terms of their importance among the things worthy of pursuit in human experience? Because the Lord Himself rewards people who are characterized by humility and the fear of the Lord with riches and honor and life, they are worthy to be valued, but they are not worthy of elevation to the highest place of honor because they are temporal rewards for things which are actually more important.

Think About It: What can we expect to encounter on the path ahead in our lives in view of our self-evaluation? Should we expect to be brought low because of a lofty self-evaluation, or might we expect to obtain honor (now and forever) because we see ourselves as we really are - sinners, saved by the grace of the Lord through our faith in Jesus Christ?

PROVERBS ON JUSTICE

17:15; 17:23; 18:17; 19:28; 20:8; 21:3; 21:15; 28:21; 29:4;
29:26; 31:8-9

Q - When have you experienced frustration awaiting a just decision from the judicial system in our country?

As President Donald Trump began to carry out the agenda he had announced as he sought election to his second term as America's president in 2025, he encountered opposition from numerous district judges who sought to apply their judicial decisions to the entire nation, rather than to only the districts which they represented - until the Supreme Court stepped in to block their judicial activism. Justice is one of the many topics Solomon addresses in the book of Proverbs because of its practical value in the life of the person who pursues it, and because it is one of the values which the Lord, who is just, desires to see in the lives of His obedient people.

17:15 "He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous,
Both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD."

Q - What could motivate someone to justify the wicked or condemn the righteous? Someone who is a supporter of wicked behavior, or someone who is opposed to righteous behavior, would be motivated to ignore justice in support of their preferences.

Q - Why should the Lord feel as strongly about both justifying the wicked and about condemning the righteous as Solomon tells us He does? Because the Lord is the personification of righteousness and the antithesis of wickedness He feels very strongly about matters of justice.

18:17 "The first to plead his case seems right,

Until another comes and examines him.”

Q - What is the advantage in any disagreement of being the first to plead your case? The advantage of being the first to plead your case in any disagreement is the advantage of creating first impressions which are not always easy to negate by the whole truth.

Q - What does hearing the other side of the story do for those who are in a position to make a decision regarding which side of the story is correct? Hearing the other side of a story, for those who are in a position to make a decision regarding right and wrong, presents an alternative to what, at first, may have seemed like a good argument when only one side of the story had been told.

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

Q - What makes righteousness and justice more important than sacrifice in the eyes of the Lord? Sacrifice, especially if it is a sacrifice due because of sinful behavior, seeks to remedy a problem, where righteousness and justice eliminate the need for such a sacrifice because there is no sinful behavior which needs to be remedied.

21:15 “The exercise of justice is joy for the righteous,
But is terror to the workers of iniquity.”

Q - What is it about the exercise of justice which causes joy for the righteous? Those who are righteous are seeking to pursue justice in all of their ways, so they have reason to rejoice when their righteous outlook is vindicated by justice.

Q - What kinds of “terror” is the exercise of justice likely to bring into the life of the workers of iniquity? The workers of

iniquity are likely to be terrorized by the exercise of justice because justice exposes their sinful behavior and calls for an appropriate response of punishment for their behavior.

29:26 “Many seek the ruler’s favor,
But justice for man comes from the LORD.”

Q - Why is the ruler’s favor so important that it is sought by so many people? The ruler’s favor will almost always bring benefit into the lives of those he favors, and everybody prefers to be benefitted because of their favored status.

Q - What does Solomon imply by his placement of the LORD, who is always just, in parallel with the ruler who has favors at his disposal? Solomon implies that the ruler who has favors at his disposal will not always be just in the favors he provides, while the Lord will never dispense His favors (at least in the long run) on those who are not justly deserving of His favors.

Think About It: Justice is righteousness applied to legal matters, so it is not surprising that the Lord, who is always righteous, strongly favors justice over injustice - which is an abomination to Him. How successful are we at making just decisions when it comes to the many alternatives which face us in life?

PROVERBS ON LIFE AND DEATH

4:23; 8:35; 9:11; 10:11; 10:16; 10:27; 11:19; 12:28; 13:14;
14:12; 14:27; 18:21

Q - What is meant when it is said that someone is experiencing a “living death”?

When the Lord told Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden, he warned against disobedience with the words “for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:17). So **did** Adam die in the day he ate from the tree? We know, of course, that he did not die physically that day (though he eventually **did** die physically as a result of his sin), but there is clear evidence that he began collecting the “wages of sin” (Romans 6:23) on that very day! When the Bible speaks of life and death it is often looking far beyond merely physical life and death!

10:16 “The wages of the righteous is life,
The income of the wicked, punishment.”

Q - What kind of life results for the person who can be described as a “righteous” person? The righteous person is the person whose life is characterized by behavior which is right in the sight of the Lord, so he will be rewarded by the Lord with life in every dimension - physically, emotionally, mentally, socially, spiritually and, ultimately, eternally.

Q - What kinds of “punishment” should a wicked person expect to experience? Because “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), the person who engages in behaviors which can be accurately described as wicked can expect some form of death to complicate his life - whether emotional or mental or physical or spiritual or eternal, or even by all forms of death!

11:19 “He who is steadfast in righteousness *will attain* to life,

And he who pursues evil *will bring about* his own death.”

Q - What does it mean for a person to be “steadfast in righteousness”? To be “steadfast in righteousness” means to be committed and consistent in doing what is right according to the word and will of God.

Q - Why would anyone choose to “pursue evil”? Some people choose to pursue evil because they believe that there is some form of gain to be realized by evil behavior - as, for example, Eve apparently believed that eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden was going to cause her to be like God!

12:28 “In the way of righteousness is life,
And in *its* pathway there is no death.”

Q - Who stands out in your thinking as people who have most successfully walked in the “way of righteousness”? Three men who are identified by God Himself as righteous men were Noah and Job and Daniel (cf. Ezekiel 14:14, 20) - with Jesus Himself as the supreme example of righteousness.

Q - How would you defend Solomon’s statement that “in its pathway [i.e. the way of righteousness] there is NO death”? Though it is common knowledge that there are times when the righteous suffer in ways they should never have to suffer, the Lord assures us in many places and many ways that, in the final analysis, there will be no death at the end of the road for those who love God - in the sense that they are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28, 30).

13:14 “The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life,
To turn aside from the snares of death.”

Q - What does Solomon’s reference to a “fountain of life”

picture with regard to the teaching of the wise? A “fountain of life” refers to an experience in life which, like fountain which consistently bubbles up with water, continually produces a life-giving spring of good experiences.

Q - What would be some examples of the “snares of death”? “Snares of death” might refer to the complications which arise out of sinful behavior which compromise a person’s experience of health - physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, eternally, etc.

Think About It: When the Bible speaks generally, and the Proverbs speak specifically, of life and death they speak of far more than the physical experiences of life and death which humans experience in the flesh. Living in obedience to the wisdom which is found in the word and will of God enriches human experience in every possible dimension! No one ever regrets having done what the Lord has instructed him to do. But rejecting the wisdom of God’s word produces “the wages of death” by complicating life in every possible dimension. So we are choosing either life or death by every thought, word and deed in our lives every moment of every day.

PROVERBS ON RICHES

10:15; 11:14; 11:16; 11:28; 13:8; 13:11; 13:22; 14:24; 15:6;
16:16; 18:11; 19:4; 22:1; 23:4-5; 27:23-27

Q - Who stands out in your thinking as someone who, though possessing significant material wealth, was not experiencing the satisfaction it would seem material wealth should provide?

Perhaps you have seen the bumper sticker which was circulating some years back which stated that “He who dies with the most toys wins.” Someone else created a response with the sobering reminder that “He who dies with the most toys still dies!” For many people in our world the prospect of riches is about as worthy a prospect as any person can have. But, while the Bible does not disparage the benefits which can come by riches, it wisely warns that there are things of far greater value than riches when all is said and done!

11:28 “He who trusts in his riches will fall,
But the righteous will flourish like the green leaf.”

Q - What is likely to cause the fall of the person who trusts in riches? The person who trusts in riches is trusting in something which can easily lose its value, causing distress and, sometimes, even death - as it did during the stock market crash in the 1920s when many people committed suicide.

Q - What makes righteousness so much more valuable than riches - and so comparable to the “green leaf” of the second part of this verse? Unlike riches, righteousness never loses its value. Doing what is right, as God sees the right, will cause a person to flourish - pictured by the plant which is producing healthy green leaves.

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

Q - What makes a man’s wealth his “strong city”? A rich man’s wealth enables him to enjoy life’s necessities (e.g. food and clothing and housing) and to provide for himself and his family the things in life which he needs to acquire in order to accomplish the things he wants to accomplish in his life.

Q - What is the problem with the “high wall” of wealth referenced in the second line of this verse? The “high wall” of wealth is often only a high wall in a person’s imagination because it is perishable and sometimes undependable.

22:1 “A good name is to be more desired than great wealth,
Favor is better than silver and gold.”

Q - What is it that makes a “good name” so valuable? A “good name” belongs to the person whose performance in life has resulted in a good reputation - a valuable thing which even people who are very wealthy often do not possess.

Q - What makes it obvious that Solomon places very high value on a good name? The fact that Solomon considers a good name and the favor which accompanies it to be more valuable than silver and gold makes it obvious that he places very high value on a good name.

27:23-26 “Know well the condition of your flocks,
And pay attention to your herds;
(24) For riches are not forever,
Nor does a crown endure to all generations.
(25) When the grass disappears, the new growth is seen,
And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in,
(26) The lambs will be for your clothing,
And the goats will bring the price of a field,

(27) And there will be goats' milk enough for your food,
For the food of your household,
And sustenance for your maidens."

Q - What would be a modern equivalent of "the condition of your flocks" and "your herds"? A modern equivalent of "the condition of your flocks" and "your herds" would be the things for which you are responsible as a manager, including family and the material possessions over which you are responsible for exercising wise stewardship.

Q - Why does Solomon challenge his reader to know well the condition of his flocks and pay attention to his herds? Solomon challenges his reader to know well the condition of his flocks and pay attention to his herds because his failure to exercise wise stewardship will likely result in the deterioration of things of value which supply his needs and which make him successful in life.

Think About It: While riches are not to be disparaged because of the many benefits they can bring and the many good things they can make it possible to accomplish, riches are not the ultimate good in life. As Proverbs 11:4 puts it, "Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, But righteousness delivers from death."

PROVERBS ON RIGHTEOUSNESS

4:18-19; 10:11; 10:31; 11:8; 11:23; 12:5; 12:10; 12:26; 12:28;
13:5; 13:6; 14:34; 20:7; 21:3; 29:7

Q - What are some of the benefits a person can expect to experience when he/she makes a serious effort to do what is the right thing to do in every situation?

One of the most prominent and most important themes of the book of Proverbs, and of the Bible generally, is the theme of righteousness. Because God is a righteous God (in the sense that He always and only does what is right - conforming to the standard set by His own perfect nature), He seeks and even requires righteousness in the lives of His creatures. As Jesus stated it in His "Sermon on the Mount" (Matt. 5:48): "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." How blessed our lives could be if we could do it!

4:18-19 "But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,
That shines brighter and brighter until the full day.
(19) The way of the wicked is like darkness;
They do not know over what they stumble."

Q - What is it about the path of the righteous that makes it comparable to the light of dawn which grows more intense as the sun rises to its greatest intensity in midday? The "path of the righteous" is the way of life which conforms to the revealed will of God in every way possible. Like the growing intensity of the light of the sun as it rises above the horizon from dawn to mid-day brightness, behavior which conforms to the word and will of God improves the quality of a person's life as it is more and more fully realized in his life.

Q - What makes darkness a fitting illustration of the effects of wickedness in a person's life? Just as darkness makes it difficult for a person to make his way successfully along the

path he is seeking to travel, so wickedness diminishes a person's success along the path of life he is seeking to travel.

10:11 "The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,
But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence."

Q - What is Solomon describing by his reference to "the mouth of the righteous"? By his reference to "the mouth of the righteous" Solomon is describing the words spoken by the person whose speech is characterized by the truth which is also spoken by the Lord Himself in His revealed word.

Q - In what sense and what way does the mouth of the wicked conceal violence? Because the mouth of the wicked refers to the speech of a person who is characterized by ungodly behavior, the things which the wicked says are often intended to conceal his actual intentions which are often harmful and even violent intentions.

12:28 "In the way of righteousness is life,
And in its pathway there is no death."

Q - In what sense does righteousness in a person's life result in life? Because doing what is right results in good results in a person's life, the quality of such a person's life is intensified by his righteous behavior.

Q - In what sense does the pathway of the righteous not end in death? As the first line of Proverbs 12:28 assures us that righteous behavior improves the quality of a person's life, it is axiomatic that righteous behavior steers him away from every kind of death which would complicate his experience physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and eternally.

14:34 "Righteousness exalts a nation,
But sin is a disgrace to any people."

Q - Can you cite any examples from human history of the truth that “righteousness exalts a nation”? The godly characteristics and intentions of the founding fathers and documents of the United States of America resulted in strength and wealth and influence which has set the nation apart from many other nations on planet earth.

Q - What would be some examples which come to mind of the degrading influence of sin in the life of our own nation? The harmful pursuits and policies of the “woke” leaders who served during the presidency of Joseph Biden stand out in the minds of many Americans as an example of the negative influence of such sinful ways.

Think About It: Though practical righteousness is a challenging calling for sinful creatures, the closer we get to achieving it the better our lives will go. And, of course, as Christians we are blessed to have help from heaven in the person and power of the Holy Spirit. So let’s be sure to take advantage of the challenge of Galatians 5:16: “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”
Remember - righteousness exalts!

PROVERBS ON SPEECH

10:19; 12:18; 13:3; 14:3; 14:23; 15:2; 15:4; 15:28; 16:21;
16:24; 18:4; 18:6; 21:23; 25:11; 25:15; 26:20

Q - When have the words you have spoken gotten you into trouble of one kind or another?

One of the greatest challenges any person ever deals with in life is the challenge of controlling his speech in such a way that it is always true and constructive. The Apostle James warned of the dangers posed by the tongue in the colorful and informative passage in James 3:1-12. As he points out in his warning in James 3:6, “the tongue is a fire, the *very* world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of *our* life, and is set on fire by hell.” So it is no surprise that the book of Proverbs has some important things to say about the challenges presented by our speech!

Proverbs 10:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise.”

Q - Why is it that transgression is unavoidable where there are many words? The more words a person speaks the greater likelihood there will be that some of those many words were unwise or even outright sinful in their content.

Q - Why is it wise for someone to restrain the words of his mouth? As the first line of the verse indicates, unrestrained speech is likely to be more problematic than restrained speech. Because avoiding sinful behavior is the wise thing for any person to do, it is wise to speak fewer words so as to avoid the danger of unwise or even sinful words.

Proverbs 13:3 (NASB)

³“The one who guards his mouth preserves his life;
The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.”

Q - In what sense does someone preserve his life if he is able to guard the words of his mouth? Solomon’s word for “life” in this verse is *nephesh*, more commonly translated “soul.” The soul of man is best served by fewer problems, so the person who guards the words he speaks is avoiding problems because words can so easily stray into unproductive territory.

Q - What is it that leads to ruin in the life of the person who opens his mouth wide? Because the person who opens his lips wide is speaking too many words, he is far less likely to avoid the ruin which can result when words, which are so often problematic, are more numerous than they ought to be.

Proverbs 15:4 (NASB)

⁴“A soothing tongue is a tree of life,
But perversion in it crushes the spirit.”

Q - What does it mean for a soothing tongue to result in a tree of life? A tree of life is symbolic language for life which is healthy and productive, so the person who speaks words which are soothing is speaking words which will promote health and wellbeing.

Q - What is it about perversion in speech which results in the crushing of someone’s spirit? Perversion (crookedness) in speech is destructive in its intent and impact, so it inflicts harm in the lives of those who are victimized by it.

Proverbs 18:4 (NASB)

⁴“The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters;
The fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook.”

Q - In what sense are the words of a man's mouth comparable to deep waters? The words of a man's mouth are deep waters in the sense that they are many and frequently in need of explanation or interpretation.

Q - What is it about the fountain of wisdom which is comparable to a bubbling brook? Like a bubbling brook which is constantly producing more life-giving water, wise words are always enriching the lives of those who are exposed to them.

Proverbs 21:23 (NASB)

²³ "He who guards his mouth and his tongue,
Guards his soul from troubles."

Q - What is the challenge a person faces in guarding his mouth and his tongue? The challenge of guarding the mouth and the tongue is that people tend to speak many words, not all of which are healthy and helpful.

Q - What are some of the troubles from which a person's soul is guarded when he guards his mouth and his tongue? The person who guards his mouth and his tongue minimizes the problems which can result when words are not well chosen - problems like dishonesty and damaged relationships and destructive influences.

Proverbs 26:20 (NASB)

²⁰ "For lack of wood the fire goes out,
And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down."

Q - Why do firefighters sometimes "fight fire with fire"

by starting “backfires”? Firefighters sometimes “fight fire with fire” in order to diminish the amount of fuel in the path of the flame in the hope that they can keep the fire from spreading.

Q - What should be the response of a wise person who hears a report of contention, and what does such a response bring about? The wise person who hears a report of contention spoken by a “whisperer” (gossip) should stop its spread by refusing to repeat it, bringing contention to an end by his silence.

Think About It: Because the human tongue is capable of speech which is either very beneficial or very destructive it is extremely important for every person to carefully consider, and hopefully, carefully control what it is permitted to say. The more a person speaks, the greater the danger he will say things which are unwise and destructive. On the other hand, carefully considered and constructed speech has great potential for enriching life for both the speaker and those to whom he speaks. Because the Lord is aware of every word ever spoken, those who are wise will carefully guard the words of their mouths.

PROVERBS ON SUCCESS

12:1; 15:22; 16:3; 17:2; 17:20; 19:21; 21:5; 22:16; 28:19

Q - What are some steps any person ought to take in order to assure “success” in his life?

It would seem that every person who ever lives would be interested in living successfully, but success does not happen in any person’s life without some careful thought and diligent effort. People who map out a good plan for their lives are far more likely to be successful than those who give little or no thought to the direction in which they are headed. And even good plans are not enough to assure success for those who do not invest the effort to accomplish what is planned. Because of the limitations which are a part of human existence, the best plans are likely to be made by those who are open to good advice from parents and teachers and wise counselors and, most importantly the direction available from the Lord!

Proverbs 15:22 (NASB)

²² “Without consultation, plans are frustrated,
But with many counselors they succeed.”

Q - What is it that frustrates the plans which are made without consultation? Plans which are made without consultation are plans devised and carried out with less input from people who understand the issues than only one person is able to provide on his own. As a result, they are more likely to fail than they would have done if additional input has been considered.

Q - What is the advantage which comes to those who seek the advice of many counselors? Those who seek the advice of many counselors have more options to consider than the person who acts only on the basis of his own understanding.

Proverbs 16:3 (NASB)

³“Commit your works to the LORD
And your plans will be established.”

Q - What are some steps a person can take to commit his works to the LORD? A person can commit his works to the Lord by studying His word for direction, seeking His help in prayer, and seeking helpful advice from people who know the Lord and value His direction.

Q - What are some of the ways in which people who commit their plans to the Lord will see their works established? People who commit their plans to the Lord will see their works established in the sense that their plans will be well-informed and successful in accomplishing their desired end.

Proverbs 19:21 (NASB)

²¹ Many plans are in a man's heart, But the counsel of the LORD will stand.

Q - What is the challenge of many of the plans which are typically found in a man's heart? Many of the plans which are typically found in a man's heart are ill-conceived for lack of adequate information and understanding and are based on unhealthy and even destructive motives.

Q - Which of the “many plans” which are typically found in a man's heart are the plans which are worthy of turning into action? The “many plans” which are typically found in a man's heart are worthy of turning into action when they are made in light of God's word and His leading.

Proverbs 21:5 (NASB)

⁵ The plans of the diligent *lead* surely to advantage,
But everyone who is hasty *comes* surely to poverty.

Q - What is it which turns the plans of the diligent person into advantageous results? The plans of the diligent person turn into advantageous results because the diligent person makes his plans with careful thought and adequate counsel and divine guidance.

Q - What can a person do to make sure that the plans he makes do not lead to poverty? A person can make sure that the plans he makes do not lead to poverty by basing his plans on carefully studied information of the issues involved, seeking advice from people who understand the matter, and trusting in the Lord for divine guidance in the decisions being made.

Proverbs 28:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ He who tills his land will have plenty of food,
But he who follows empty *pursuits* will have poverty in plenty

Q - What does a person need to do in order to assure himself that his land will produce a good supply of food? The person who wants his land to produce a good supply of food needs to (1) prepare the land by clearing and tilling the soil; (2) plant good seed in the prepared soil; and (3) provide enough water to make the seed germinate and keep the plants healthy.

Q - What would cause someone who has farmable land in sufficient supply to end up in poverty? Ignoring the normal steps for a healthy harvest and doing other things which do not prepare for a good harvest (e.g. resting, as in 24:30-34, or pursuing other interests, such as socializing or gambling or

drinking intoxicating drinks when he should be working) will lead to a poor yield and to poverty for the foolish farmer.

Think About It: Success in life is most likely to be experienced by people who give some careful thought to the direction in which they are headed in life - alert to their personal capacities and interests and to the input they receive from their parents and others who have good advice arising out of their own experiences and successes and failures in life. The best advice, of course, comes from the Lord Himself, so people who hope to be successful in life need to pay attention to the principles He has spelled out for successful living in the pages of God's word.

PROVERBS ON TEMPER

12:16; 14:17; 14:29; 15:18; 16:32; 19:19; 22:24-25; 29:11;
29:22

Q - What stands out in your thinking as a memorable display of someone's out of control temper?

An important element in the process of growing from infancy to maturity is that of learning to deal successfully with human emotions. Some people seem to be born with emotions which are easily managed, while others appear to be born with emotions which frequently vacillate between ups and downs which are very visible to those who are around them. The Old Testament judge Samson was a man whose anger flared from time to time and resulted in great harm to those who angered him - as when Samson's new wife from Timnah pestered him to explain a riddle he had told to guests at his wedding party and she passed the information on to his enemies. Thirty Philistines died as a result of Samson's anger, and his new marriage ended as well (Judges 14:19-20 and context). Not surprisingly, then, Solomon has important things to say about temper in the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 12:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ "A fool's anger is known at once,

But a prudent man conceals dishonor."

Q - What is it about a person's display of anger which show him to be a fool? A common characteristic of the person who is a fool is a quick and unexamined response to circumstances which arise in his life.

Q - How can someone who has reason to be angry show himself to be a prudent person? A person can show himself to

be a prudent person when he has reason to be angry if he takes the time to evaluate the situation and to carefully and calmly respond to the circumstances which he faces.

Proverbs 14:29 (NASB)

²⁹ “He who is slow to anger has great understanding,
But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.”

Q - What is it about anger which enables the person who restrains it to demonstrate that he is someone of great understanding? Because anger is such a strong emotion, and because angry responses often occur quickly, the person who is slow to anger is providing evidence that he understands the danger.

Q - How does the person who is quick-tempered exalt folly by his response of anger? The person who is quick-tempered, failing to keep his emotions under control, often engages in a foolish loss of control over his emotions, exalting folly in the process.

Proverbs 16:32 (NASB)

³² “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,
And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.”

Q - What makes the person who is slow to anger better than the person who is mighty? Many people who are considered mighty in the eyes of the world do not exercise very good control over their temper, so they show themselves to be weak and foolish by the ways in which they respond to challenging situations. They may be able to capture a city because of their strong emotions, but they are not in good control of their emotions.

Q - In what sense is the person who rules his spirit better than the person who is able to capture a city? Because the human spirit is often difficult to keep under control, the person who can control his spirit demonstrates more strength than the person who is able to capture a city - often because his anger drives him to victory over his enemies.

Proverbs 19:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ “*A man of great anger will bear the penalty,*
For if you rescue *him*, you will only have to do it again.”

Q - How might a person who is very angry find it necessary to bear the penalty for his anger? Because great anger often leads to conflict and even violence, there is likely to be a penalty ahead for the person who is angry.

Q - What is it that could make the noble attempt to rescue someone who is very angry about something an exercise in futility? The person who is afflicted with great anger is often not open to someone’s attempt to calm him down, so there is the likelihood that anyone who tries to remedy the problem will not be successful in his effort.

Proverbs 22:24-25 (NASB)

²⁴ “Do not associate with a man *given* to anger;
Or go with a hot-tempered man,
²⁵ Or you will learn his ways
And find a snare for yourself.”

Q - How did the Apostle Paul’s comment in I Corinthians 15:33 substantiate Solomon’s challenge in Proverbs 22:24? The Apostle Paul’s observation that “bad company corrupts

good morals” explains why it is likely that the person who associates with a man given to anger is a problematic association.

Q - What two dangers does Solomon identify on the part of the person who chooses to associate with an angry person? Solomon observes that the person who chooses to associate with an angry person is likely to learn to respond as the angry man responds, and to find himself ensnared in the same ways that the angry man will find himself ensnared.

Think About It: Because a person’s temper, out of control, can do so much damage, Solomon cautions his readers to demonstrate wisdom and understanding by being slow to anger - avoiding the problems which result for those who do not keep their temper under control.

PROVERBS ON TRUTH

8:8; 12:6; 12:13; 12:17; 12:19; 12:22; 18:17

Q - When have you experienced harm in your life because someone spoke things concerning you which were not true?

The Hebrew words which Solomon uses for “truth” are words which speak of firmness, reliability, and fidelity. Words of truth are words which are firm in the sense that they reflect what is real. Because the Lord Himself is the personification of truth (John 1:14 and 14:6), things which diverge from truth are an “abomination” to Him (Proverbs 12:22). Solomon shows how truth is an elevating quality in human experience and how its opposite is destructive.

Proverbs 12:13 (NASB)

¹³ “An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips,
But the righteous will escape from trouble.”

Q - What are some transgressions of the lips which are common among people who are evil? Transgressions of the lips include dishonesty, angry outbursts, hurtful words, etc.

Q - How does righteous behavior enable someone to escape from trouble? When a person engages in righteous behavior there is nothing in the things he says to cause trouble.

Proverbs 12:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ “He who speaks truth tells what is right,
But a false witness, deceit.”

Q - Why does Solomon say it important for a person to speak truth? Because truth is that which is right and consistent with the Lord Himself, it is always worthy of speaking, eliminating many problems in the process.

Q - What is the practical problem with the person featured in the second line of Proverbs 12:17? A false witness is performing badly because a witness is always supposed to witness to what is true, and deceit does not qualify.

Proverbs 12:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ “Truthful lips will be established forever,
But a lying tongue is only for a moment.”

Q - In what sense will truthful lips be established forever? Because the Lord is characterized by truth and is the eternal God, truthful lips state that which, like God Himself, is eternal.

Q - What assures the momentary impact of a lying tongue? Because the lying tongue is out of sync with reality, what it says will fade into obscurity under the light of truth.

Proverbs 12:22 (NASB)

²² “Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD,
But those who deal faithfully are His delight.”

Q - What does the use of the word “abomination” reveal about the Lord’s view of the action of lying lips? The word “abomination” is one of the strongest words which can be used to describe the Lord’s negative response to any action in a person’s life, so it reveals the Lord’s opposition to lying lips in

the strongest of terms.

Q - How would you explain the delight the Lord feels toward those who “deal faithfully”? Because those who “deal faithfully” are conforming their dealings to the character of the faithful Lord God himself, He is delighted when His people conform their behavior to His own character.

Proverbs 18:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ “The first to plead his case *seems* right,
Until another comes and examines him.”

Q - What is it that enables the first person to plead his case to seemingly have the advantage of being right? The first person to plead his case has offered the only plea at the moment, so there is no other viewpoint with which to compare it until other pleas are heard.

Q - What is the benefit of the cross examination of a witness in a court of law? The benefit of cross examination in a court of law is the opportunity to compare one person’s claims about the issue under consideration with the claims of someone else.

Think About It: It is important for God’s people to focus their communications on what is true because what is true is real while what is not true is unreliable and destructive and abominable in the eyes of the Lord.

PROVERBS ON WICKEDNESS
10:23; 11:15; 12:12; 13:6; 14:32; 21:7; 28:1

Q - What is it that makes “the man who does not walk in the way of the wicked” (Psalm 1:1) a blessed man?

The mind which is informed by the values which are presented in the word of God is often shocked by the wickedness which is so evident in the world in which we live. October 7, 2023 will always live in infamy in view of the inhumane behavior practiced by the Islamists of Gaza who invaded the southern border communities of Israel, and the atrocities which took place on that day. But the sad reality is that such atrocities are occurring regularly in many places around the world in places and ways which are not as well known as those which took place on October 7, 2023 in Israel. Wickedness is a very sad revelation of the sinful condition of the human heart - as the Proverbs which speak to such behavior clearly reveal.

Proverbs 10:23 (NASB)

²³ “Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool,
And *so is* wisdom to a man of understanding.”

Q - What does Solomon say it is which accounts for the actions of the person for whom wickedness is like a sport?
Solomon says that it is his status as a fool (*kesil*) which accounts for the actions of the person for whom wickedness is like a sport.

Q - What is it that makes wisdom like a sport to the person who views it that way? It is the wise person’s understanding which accounts for the actions in the life of the man who views wisdom as a sport.

Proverbs 11:5 (NASB)

⁵“The righteousness of the blameless will smooth his way,
But the wicked will fall by his own wickedness.”

Q - What is it about righteousness which causes the person who is characterized by it to enjoy smooth ways? It is the fact that righteousness is doing what is right in the view of God and His blessing upon righteous behavior which causes the person who is characterized by it to enjoy smooth ways.

Q - What will be the predictable end of the way of wickedness? The predictable end of the way of wickedness will be the fall of the wicked person because falling is what wickedness produces in the lives of those who engage in it.

Proverbs 13:6 (NASB)

⁶“Righteousness guards the one whose way is blameless,
But wickedness subverts the sinner.”

Q - How is righteousness able to serve as a guardian for the person who is on its path? Righteousness is able to serve as a guardian for the person who is on its path because righteousness causes him to do what is right in the sight of the Lord, protecting him from the wages of sin which is death.

Q - What is it which makes a person's sinful behavior so subversive? Sinful behavior makes a person's behavior subversive because it is not aligned with the way which the Lord has promised to bless - the way of righteousness.

Proverbs 14:32 (NASB)

³²“The wicked is thrust down by his wrongdoing,

But the righteous has a refuge when he dies.”

Q - What is it which results in the thrusting down of a wicked person in his wrongdoing? Wrongdoing, because it is sinful, thrusts down the person who engages in it because (as the Apostle Paul observed in Romans 6:23), “the wages of sin is death.”

Q - What is it that assures refuge in the experience of the righteous person even when he has died? The righteous person is assured of refuge even when he has died because the reward of true righteousness is eternal life.

Proverbs 21:7 (NASB)

⁷ “The violence of the wicked will drag them away,
Because they refuse to act with justice.”

Q - In what sense does the violence of the wicked result in their being dragged away? Because violence leads to a response of violence in return, the wicked person will be dragged away when his violent act is rewarded with violence - a reward from the Lord Himself even if it does not come from the person who has been treated with violence.

Q - How would a person’s choice of justice instead of violence improve their prospects in life? A person’s choice of justice instead of violence improves a person’s perspective in life because, unlike violence, justice is the righteous response in any situation which the Lord will reward.

Proverbs 28:21 (NASB)

²¹ “To show partiality is not good,
Because for a piece of bread a man will transgress.”

Q - What is it that makes partiality in a person's perspective "not good"? Partiality is "not good" in a person's perspective because it is not aligned with the will of the Lord in the lives of human beings, so it will result in complications.

Q - What does the "piece of bread" which results in transgression represent in the life of the person pictured in this verse? The "piece of bread" which results in transgression in a person's life represents any form of "reward" (such as bribery) which leads a person to do what is wrong.

Think About It: Wickedness is the word the Bible uses to describe the behavior of people who reject the leadership of the Lord and the instruction which He has provided in His word as His guide for human behavior. Wickedness is degrading to all who practice it, and it is harmful to those who are unfortunate to be affected by it.

PROVERBS ON WOMEN

11:16; 11:22; 12:4; 18:22; 19:13; 19:14; 21:19; 27:15-16;
31:10-31

Q - What are some of the many ways you have been blessed by the presence of the women who have influenced your life?

The relationships which have existed since the beginning of time between men and women have powerfully influenced the history of planet earth. Though the Lord created an earth which was good in almost every respect, it was He who made the observation when He had nearly finished His work that “It [was] not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). So He declared that He would “make him a helper suitable for him.” Though many men have benefitted greatly by the help women have provided for them, the entrance of sin into human experience also brought challenges into the relationships between men and women, so it is fitting that the book of Proverbs has many things to say about the impact women have had and can have by their presence on earth.

Proverbs 11:22 (NASB)

²² “*As a ring of gold in a swine's snout*

So is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion.”

Q - What are some words which accurately describe the picture Solomon provides in the opening line of this verse? Some words which might be used to describe the picture which Solomon provides in the opening line of 11:22 are “ridiculous, wasteful, inappropriate” and others along a similar line.

Q - What is it that makes the beautiful woman who lacks discretion so problematic? A beautiful woman who lacks dis-

cretion is problematic because her beauty will draw attention to her which only physical beauty does not deserve, and it will often lead to various forms of abuse - like the abuse of sexual predators who will use her and leave her dealing with various forms of pain which are not in her best interests.

Proverbs 12:4 (NASB)

⁴“An excellent wife is the crown of her husband,
But she who shames *him* is like rottenness in his bones.”

Q - In what sense does an excellent wife serve as a “crown” to her husband? An excellent wife serves as a “crown” to her husband in the sense that she provides him with the help the Lord had in mind when He created a woman to serve as a “suitable helper” in the life of her husband.

Q - What is the seriousness of the action of the wife who shames her husband? The wife who shames her husband is not helping him, as the Lord intended her to do, and she is bringing shame into her own life as a result of her dishonorable behavior.

Proverbs 18:22 (NASB)

²²“He who finds a wife finds a good thing
And obtains favor from the LORD.”

Q - What are some of the good things which the man who finds a wife can be expected to experience? The man who finds a wife can be expected to experience helpfulness in achieving the things he wishes to accomplish in life as she provides her services as a cook and homemaker and child-care provider, along with the companionship and physical pleasure she is created to provide in the process.

Q - How did the Lord's intention in creating Eve as a wife for Adam (Genesis 2:18) display His favor? In creating Eve as a wife for Adam He displayed his favor by creating a partner, equal in nature to Adam, providing beauty and companionship and helpfulness, along with the capacity to help fulfill God's intention for the multiplication of the human race on the face of the planet.

Proverbs 19:13 (NASB)

¹³ "A foolish son is destruction to his father,
And the contentions of a wife are a constant dripping."

Q - What makes a foolish son so destructive in the life of his father? Because a foolish son engages in sinful and harmful behavior, he complicates his father's life as a result of actions which are unhelpful and problematic.

Q - How is a contentious wife comparable in her impact in her husband's life to the impact of a foolish son? Like a foolish son, a contentious wife complicates her husband's life by irritating and opposing him rather than assisting him in accomplishing the things he would like to accomplish - as God intended.

Proverbs 21:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ "It is better to live in a desert land
Than with a contentious and vexing woman."

Q - What are some of the challenges of living in a desert land? Living in a desert land exposes the person who does it to extremes in weather (both hot and cold), to a challenging environment for raising crops, and to animals, reptiles, and insects

which can be problematic to human well-being.

Q - In what sense might a contentious and vexing woman be comparable for her husband to the challenges of living in a desert land? Just as living in a desert land can be challenging in numerous ways, living with a contentious and vexing woman results in challenges most men would prefer not to experience.

Think About It: Women play a very important role in the life of humanity in general and the men who are influenced powerfully by them as mothers and wives and by the many other roles which they play in earthly life. At their best they can be great blessings by their presence and their influence; at their worst they can bring grief and harm into the lives of those who are adversely affected by them. The Proverbs treat the presence of women in human society for both good and for evil.

PROVERBS 30-31

THE WORDS OF AGUR THE SON OF JAKEH 30:1-6

With the end of Proverbs 29 and the beginning of the 30th chapter the book takes a noticeable turn as it reverts to the format of the longer wisdom poems which were characteristic of the opening nine chapters. It also introduces some interesting names which are unique to this portion of the book, suggesting that Solomon is no longer the author (or the primary author, at least) of at least portions of the final two chapters of the book which is so often associated with his name.

I. Agur's Introduction 30:1-4

A. His Identity and Addressees 30:1

“The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle.
The man declares to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal.”

Q - Do the names of Agur, Jakeh, Ithiel and Ucal ring any bells from other portions of Scripture you are familiar with?
None of the names found in this verse are found in any other portion of the Bible.

Q - What does Agur's use of the word “oracle” to describe his words suggest about his view of them? Agur's use of the word “oracle” suggests that he views his message as a weighty or uplifting message. The Hebrew word *massa* is translated as a “burden” three times, and as an “oracle” twenty five times in the New American Standard Bible. As a root from the verb *nasa*, to lift or to carry, it is used in other passages of a message which God's messenger carried to God's people.

B. His Self-Assessment 30:2-3

“Surely I am more stupid than any man,

And I do not have the understanding of a man.
(3) Neither have I learned wisdom,
Nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One.”

Q - What would you expect to learn from someone whose self-assessment is “more stupid than any man”? I would expect to learn little from someone who can be described as “more stupid than any man,” but I suspect that Agur was adopting an attitude of humility by his self-assessment, because he clearly did have some worthy thoughts to communicate.

C. His Awareness of God’s Greatness 30:4

“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!”

Q - What does Agur’s awareness of God (who is obviously being described in verse 4) reveal about his understanding of the Lord? Agur’s awareness of God as present in heaven and beneath it, as exercising control over the wind, as controlling the waters, and as having established the ends of the earth reveals some clarity in his understanding of the greatness of God.

Q - What does Agur’s question regarding the name of God’s son suggest about him? Agur’s question regarding the name of God’s son suggests an awareness that the Lord’s nature is shared by a son whose name (which Agur uses in verse 9) might also be a significant revelation of himself. The closing statement, “surely you know,” may indicate that Agur was responding, in part at least, to someone who was critical of his understanding.

II. Agur's Commendation of God's Word 30:5-6

“Every word of God is tested;
He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.
(6) Do not add to His words
Or he will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.”

Q - How would you grade Agur's commendation of God's word? I would grade Agur's commendation of God's word with a high grade in view of its accuracy.

Q - What is the problem for those who add anything to God's word? Those who add anything to God's word are presuming to know the mind of the Lord, and are daring to say more than the Lord has chosen to reveal as the author of the Scriptures, which are as complete as the Lord intended them to be - setting themselves up for the reproof of the Lord Himself.

Think About It: Though the little-known wise man Agur described himself in humble, self-effacing terms, he clearly qualified as a wise man in terms of his understanding of the Lord and His word.

THE WORDS OF KING LEMUEL 31:1-9

Q - What are some of the roles of authority you have filled and are filling in your experience in life?

It is important that people who are entrusted with authority over other people exercise their positions of privilege in such a way that those who are under their authority find their lives improved. The book of Proverbs has addressed this issue from the writings of King Solomon in many ways and many places, but the final chapter of the book begins with another challenge for people in positions of authority from someone other than Solomon.

I. The Source of Lemuel's Words 31:1-2

(1) "The words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him."

Q - Who is the actual author of "the words of King Lemuel" who is credited with the first nine verses of Proverbs 31? The actual author of "the words of King Lemuel" is the mother of King Lemuel.

(2) "What, O my son?
And what, O son of my womb?
And what, O son of my vows?"

Q - What might the triple appearance of the word "what" in verse 2 be intended to communicate? The triple appearance of the word "what" may be intended to communicate surprise on the part of King Lemuel's mother in view of the dangers she is warning him about - serving as what the Nelson Study Bible refers to as "an implicit call to listen" (cf. Proverbs 1:8).

II. The Caution Regarding Women 31:3

“Do not give your strength to women,
Or your ways to that which destroys kings.”

Q - What is the practical reality of the advice given to King Lemuel in verse 3? By the fact that Lemuel’s mother warns about “women” (plural) she may be warning against multiple wives or even adulterous relationships, which were common at the time (in even Solomon’s life, though condemned specifically for kings in Deuteronomy 17:17).

III. The Caution Regarding Strong Drink 31:4-7

A. The Avoidance of Strong Drink 31:4-5

“It is not for kings, O Lemuel,
It is not for kings to drink wine,
Or for rulers to desire strong drink.
(5) For they will drink and forget what is decreed,
And pervert the rights of all the afflicted.”

Q - What makes the advice of verses 4-5 particularly relevant for King Lemuel and other national leaders? It is a well-known fact that alcoholic drinks impair clarity of thought, and it is important for kings to think clearly in the leadership they provide for all of their citizens.

B. The Usefulness of Strong Drink 31:6-7

(6) “Give strong drink to him who is perishing,
And wine to him whose life is bitter.
(7) Let him drink and forget his poverty,
And remember his trouble no more.”

Q - How might verses six and seven be justified in view of other Biblical instruction and warnings concerning strong drink (e.g. Proverbs 23:29-35)? Though strong drinks are generally problematic in many ways, in a day when there were fewer medicinal solutions for people in distressing circumstan-

ces, people who were perishing or severely troubled could find a sense of relief by the use of alcoholic drinks.

IV. The Challenge Regarding the Needy 31:8-9

“Open your mouth for the mute,
For the rights of all the unfortunate.
(9) Open your mouth, judge righteously,
And defend the rights of the afflicted and needy.”

Q - What made the advice of King Lemuel’s mother both important and practical advice for a person in his position? It was wise for kings who served their people well to speak up for those who could not speak for themselves, especially in times of misfortune. And it was (and is) required of good leaders that they judge by righteous standards and that they defend the rights of people who were not in a position to defend themselves because of afflictions or needs in their lives.

Think About It: Though we are not kings, we are all in positions of authority in some measure - in the home, in the classroom, on the job, in the community. So the challenges of Lemuel’s mother are intended for us - if we wish (as we certainly should) to be righteous in the roles to which the Lord has assigned us in our lives.

DESCRIPTION OF AN EXCELLENT WIFE 31:10-31

Q - What are some of the qualities a man should be looking for in a wife if he is interested in experiencing help and harmony in his marriage and family relations?

The last portion of the book of Proverbs is very familiar to most students of Scripture as the description of the woman described as “an excellent wife.” The text does not tell us who the author is. Because the passage is an alphabetic acrostic - with each succeeding verse beginning with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet - it is a poem very skillfully written both in view of its style and its content. It could very well (and most likely) have been written by Solomon, the author of most of the book of Proverbs.

I. The Character of an Excellent Wife 31:10-12

A. Her Rareness 31:10

(10) “An excellent wife, who can find?
For her worth is far above jewels.”

Q - How does the author (Solomon?) assess the value of an excellent wife? Solomon assesses the value of an excellent wife as someone whose worth is far above the worth of jewels.

B. Her Benefit 31:11-12

(11) “The heart of her husband trusts in her,

And he will have no lack of gain.

(12) She does him good and not evil

All the days of her life.”

Q - What are the things that make an excellent wife of great value to her husband? An excellent wife is of great value to her husband because he will have no lack of gain in view of the fact that she is worthy of his trust and she does good things for him all the days of her life.

II. The Diligence of an Excellent Wife 31:13-19

A. Her Enjoyment as a Creator 31:13

(13) “She looks for wool and flax

And works with her hands in delight.”

Q - What do the works of the hands of an excellent wife reveal about her value to her family? The hands of an excellent wife are skillful in working with wool and flax in the things she enjoys creating for the benefit of her family.

B. Her Pursuit of Variety 31:14

(14) “She is like merchant ships,

She brings her food from afar.”

Q - What makes the shopping habits of the excellent wife important to her family? The excellent wife does not take the

easy route in providing the things her family needs to have, but she goes out of her way (as merchants ships do) to get the food items which will serve her family's needs to their best advantage.

C. Her Diligence as a Caretaker 31:15

(15) “She rises also while it is still night
And gives food to her household
And portions to her maidens.”

Q - What illustrates the diligence of the excellent wife as a caretaker for her household? The fact that the excellent wife is up early (while it is still dark) to prepare meals for her family, and that she provides for her maidens (servants) as well, demonstrates her diligence.

D. Her Entrepreneurial Spirit 31:16-17

(16) “She considers a field and buys it
From her earnings she plants a vineyard.
(17) She girds herself with strength
And makes her arms strong.”

Q - How do verses 16 & 17 reveal the entrepreneurial spirit of the excellent wife? The excellent wife demonstrates an entrepreneurial spirit in the fact that she makes purchases such as land purchases which she has carefully evaluated for their suitability, putting them to good use by the energy and effort she puts into raising crops which will be of benefit to the members of her household.

E. Her Tireless Labors 31:18

(18) “She senses that her gain is good;
Her lamp does not go out at night.”

Q - What demonstrates the diligent efforts which are characteristic of the excellent wife? The diligent efforts of the excellent wife are demonstrated by the fact that she recognizes good quality in the things she produces by her efforts, working well into the evening hours (after having been up before dawn) to accomplish what she does.

F. Her Creative Inclination 31:19

(19) “She stretches out her hands to the distaff,
And her hands grasp the spindle.”

Q - What does the interest of the excellent wife in the distaff and the spindle reveal about her? The interest of the excellent wife in the distaff and the spindle reveals that she knows how to create clothing and other necessities of the home and family and that she puts her knowledge to practical use.

III. The Dignity of the Excellent Wife 31:20-27

A. Her Concern for the Needy 31:20

(20) “She extends her hand to the poor,
And she stretches out her hands to the needy.”

Q - What do the efforts of the excellent wife on behalf of the poor and the needy reveal about her? The efforts of the excellent wife on behalf of the poor and needy reveal that she has a heart of compassion for people who are in need of the things she can do for them, and that she puts her hands to work in meeting their needs.

B. Her Provision for Her Family 31:21-22

(21) “She is not afraid of the snow for her household,
For all her household are clothed with scarlet.
(22) She makes coverings for herself,
Her clothing is fine linen and purple.”

Q - What is significant about the clothing of the members of the family where the wife is an excellent wife? The clothing which the excellent wife provides for her household is suitable for protection from cold weather and characterized by its visual and even regal appeal and quality.

C. Her Elevation of Her Husband 31:23

(23) “Her husband is known in the gates,
When he sits among the elders of the land.”

Q - What is the husband who has an excellent wife blessed to experience because of her presence in his life? The husband who has an excellent wife is blessed to be able to serve as a leader in the community, recognized as a man of influence because of her presence in his life.

D. Her Work as a Craftswoman 31:24

(24) “She makes linen garments and sells them,
And supplies belts to the tradesmen.”

Q - What benefit does the creativity of the excellent wife provide to her family and her community? The creativity of the excellent wife provides the benefit to her family of the income she derives by her sale of the linen garments she makes and the belts she provides for those who trade in such things.

E. Her Readiness for the Future 31:25

(25) “Strength and dignity are her clothing,
And she smiles at the future.”

Q - How does the “clothing” of the excellent wife benefit her and her family? The noteworthy “clothing” of the excellent wife are the “garments” of the strength and dignity which characterize her in the eyes of others for her own benefit and that of her family.

Q - What enables the excellent wife to smile at the future? The excellent wife is able to smile at the future because she has worked diligently and wisely to anticipate the future by the preparations she has made for it.

F. Her Effectiveness as a Teacher 31:26

(26) “She opens her mouth in wisdom,

And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.”

Q - What important qualities are a part of the speech of the excellent wife? Wisdom and kindness are the important qualities which characterize the speech of the excellent wife.

G. Her Preparedness for the Future 31:27

(27) “She looks well to the ways of her household,
And does not eat the bread of idleness.”

Q - What significant attribute of the excellent wife enables her to look well to the ways of her household? The excellent wife is able to look well to the ways of her household because of her diligence in doing all the things which she does.

IV. The Praise of an Excellent Wife 31:28-31

A. Her Admiration by Her Family 31:28

(28) “Her children rise up and bless her,
Her husband also, and he praises her, saying . . .”

Q - How does the excellent wife’s performance affect the members of her family? The performance of the excellent wife results in the appreciation and praise she receives from her children and her husband.

B. Her Exceptional Acclaim 31:29-30

(29) “Many daughters have done nobly,
But you excel them all.

(30) Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,
But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.”

Q - What is it about the excellent wife which Solomon identifies as the basis of her nobility and excellence? Solomon identifies excellent wife’s fear of the Lord as the basis for the nobility she displays, which places her ahead of others.

C. Her Worthiness of Praise 31:31

(31) “Give her the product of her hands,
And let her works praise her in the gates.”

Q - What does Solomon assure us will result in public recognition of the excellent wife? Solomon assures us that the products which the excellent wife has produced by her diligent efforts on all fronts will result in the public recognition which she will receive.

It is well worth observing that the description of the excellent wife we have just considered demonstrates a very high view of the potential and value of a woman in ancient Jewish society. It presents quite a contrast with the view of women which is commonly held in many parts of the middle east in modern times, and which has often been held in other places down through the centuries. Both Biblical Judaism and Biblical Christianity present an enlightened view of both men and women as created in the image and likeness of God Himself (Genesis 1:26-27), intended to “rule over the fish of the sea

and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

Think About It: The excellent wife will leave behind her a trail of worthwhile products and a life of valuable works which will demonstrate her great worth in and of themselves. Diligent effort and quality workmanship will advance her fame, through her works, to the highest places of authority and activity in the community. But, as verse 30 has just assured us, she will only be truly excellent if her heart is right with the Lord. As we were informed early in the book of Proverbs, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (1:7), and “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (9:10).

POSTSCRIPT

This review of the lessons which are found throughout the book of Proverbs is only a sample of the many practical and spiritual riches contained in the book. A more detailed study of every verse in the book would be a much more extensive study. It was my acquaintance with a young man who attended the first church which I served as a pastor which introduced me to the riches of information and wisdom which Solomon (and others) recorded for our benefit in Proverbs. I started teaching through the book of Proverbs in a ladies' Bible study I was asked to teach in the next church I served, but only succeeded in getting through fewer than ten chapters of the book during the years I continued with that group. Continuing my studies of Proverbs in my next ministry, where I remained for nineteen years, still left most of another ten chapters of the book to be considered. So it was not until I retired from full-time ministry that I was successful in completing my study of the book, and followed through on the suggestion a church member had made many years earlier that I publish my studies. For a complete verse-by-verse study of the book of Proverbs I encourage you to check out my two-volume work, Those Practical Proverbs - A Pastoral Exposition of the Book of Proverbs (available in softback and hardback and in digital formats from Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and Christian Book Distributors).