

Bible Study # 83
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The Writings Series—Proverbs 22:17—31:31

This evening we **are going to conclude the book of Proverbs. We are going to survey the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh sections of Proverbs.** We've been going through this series of Proverbs. One of the things that we noted early in the book of Proverbs was the fact that the book divides itself into seven sections.

The first section is just the first few verses—verses 1-6; that's the introduction. Verse 7 through the first nine chapters makes up the second section, which is basically a discourse on wisdom. In chapter 10, we get into the third section of Proverbs and into the part that are proverbs as we normally think of them.

When we think of a proverb, we usually think of a short, pithy, concise statement that sums up a point of truth that uses comparison or contrast. It's sort of a one-sentence summation. Beginning in chapter 10, we get into that sort of proverb. Most of the first nine chapters were a discourse on wisdom. It dealt with the subject of wisdom. It developed the subject in a little different way. Then you notice an abrupt change once you get into Proverbs 10. The subject matter seems to change, in many cases, from verse to verse. It is sort of a random sampling of principles that are given and tailor-made to be thought about and considered. We have that beginning in chapter 10 down through chapter 22:16, which is really the first body of Proverbs—the proverbs of Solomon that were included.

Beginning in chapter 22:17, which we are going to begin this evening, is the fourth section of Proverbs and the second body of actual Proverbs. There are three bodies of Proverbs. Beginning in chapter 10:1 down through chapter 22:16 is the first body of Proverbs. It is a collection of proverbs of Solomon. The second body begins in chapter 22:17 and runs through the end of chapter 24.

Proverbs 22:17, it starts out, "Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge." Or, "...hear the words of the wise ones and apply your heart to my knowledge." This fourth section consists of what is termed "the words of the wise ones." That runs for several chapters.

Then, chapter 25 is a third body or collection of Proverbs.

Proverbs 25:1, we are told, "These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied." So here's a third component or third body of Proverbs that were added considerably later. They were added at the time of King Hezekiah in the end of the eighth century B.C. (Solomon had made his compilation toward the close of the tenth century B.C.) It was about 200 years later when these proverbs were copied out by the men of Hezekiah and added. They, again, are proverbs pretty much in the manner of the others. We would make each of these a section. This would be our fifth section.

The sixth and seventh sections of the book are the final two chapters.

Proverbs 30:1 tells us, "The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, his utterance [KJV, "the prophecy"]...."

Proverbs 31:1, "The words of King Lemuel, the utterance which his mother taught him." It contains the account of the virtuous woman. Each of those would be other components. So we have seven sections.

We are going to begin our study this evening with chapter 22:17, with this second body of Proverbs and the fourth section of the book—the section that is "the words of the wise ones."

Proverbs 22:17-21, as we pick up the story, we are told, "Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge; for it is a pleasant thing if you keep them within you; let them all be fixed upon your lips, so that your trust may be in the Lord; I have instructed you today, even you. Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, that they may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may answer words of truth to those who send to you?" These things are to provide us the words of truth.

Verses 22-23, "Do not rob the poor because he is poor, nor oppress the afflicted at the gate; for the Lord will plead their cause, and plunder the soul of those who plunder them." As we begin to focus in on God's law, here's a point about the fact that you don't take advantage of those who are unable to defend themselves because God will take note of it.

Verses 24-25, "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul." We are admonished that if we hang around and make associations with those who are quick-tempered, it is going to lead us into trouble. If you get entangled with somebody who is very hotheaded and quick to lose his temper, you are

going to wind up in trouble. If you keep company with somebody like that, they are going to get into some bad situations, and if you are there with them, that's where you'll be, too.

We will note some of the specific proverbs that stand out. There is a warning about becoming surety for someone else's debts. This is a warning that is given throughout the book of Proverbs.

Verses 26-27, "Do not be one of those who shakes hands in a pledge, one of those who is surety for debts; if you have nothing with which to pay, why should he take away your bed from under you?"

There's an interesting contrast that is given. Over and over, Proverbs admonishes in two areas, and there is a balance. It's hard for human beings to get the balance. Proverbs admonishes us to be kind, generous and not to take advantage of someone who is poor, but, on the other hand, it admonishes us to be wise in our business dealings and not to set ourselves up for a lot of trouble by co-signing notes and "going out on a limb" financially, obligating ourselves in this way. The admonition, on the one hand, is to help those who are needy and, on the other hand, to be wise in your own affairs and to not make foolish decisions.

Specifically, the example it uses several times has to do with co-signing notes for someone. We get a balance out of it. We need to see that there is a balance. God wants us to be kind and considerate. He certainly doesn't want us to take advantage of someone and He wants us to have an attitude of giving, sharing and trying to help those who are needy. But He, along with that, wants us to use wisdom and not to be foolish. Sometimes people have meant well, but they have done things that were not wise business decisions. Sometimes they have obligated themselves for things that wound up really costing them money they couldn't afford. So there's a balance and Proverbs brings out the balance. That's why it deals with both of these subjects.

Proverbs 23 has a warning in the first few verses.

Proverbs 23:1-3, "When you sit down to eat with a ruler, consider carefully what is before you; and put a knife to your throat if you are a man given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food." In other words, be careful of the favors of the ruler, knowing there may be more to it than meets the eye.

Verses 4-5, "Do not overwork to be rich; because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set

your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven."

The point is that if you set your eyes on getting rich, it will lead you into entanglements that are a source of trouble. It describes this in these first five verses. If you are with someone who is a ruler, someone who is powerful and influential, "put a knife to your throat." Don't get greedy. If you are in someone's company who is like that, if you are there with someone who is powerful and rich, don't get greedy and start thinking about what you are going to be able to get out of this situation. Don't start out being anxious of what he has and "butter him up" to get some of it. You might end up getting entangled in things that you don't have any intention of doing. So the warning is that if you set your eyes on being rich, riches sometimes have ways of making themselves wings and flying away.

There are principles in Proverbs that deal with prosperity. God is not against prosperity. He wants people to prosper and tells us how to do it in a right and balanced way—in a way that focuses on righteousness and a spirit of kindness, generosity, justice and mercy. The spiritual principles are emphasized. Honor God with the first fruits of our substance; those things are emphasized (Proverbs 3:9). Also emphasized is the importance of diligence, working hard, being productive, not being lazy, not having to have somebody constantly stand over us and supervise, but to be a self starter, to seize the initiative and opportunity. There are many principles. There are principles of being a careful manager and not wasting.

There are many principles that deal with how to get ahead financially. God is not against that. He doesn't desire to see us in terrible straits. He gives us many practical admonitions. But He warns us not to set that as our priorities to where our life revolves around the acquisition of material things. Those warnings are particularly needed in Proverbs because there are so many admonitions in Proverbs on practical ways to get ahead. Proverbs is filled with principles and terms of handling day-to-day practical life situations. But it also contains many admonitions about having our priorities straight because that's a big part of it. When our priorities get mixed up, then everything else has ways of going down the drain. If you keep your priorities straight and you follow what it says in Proverbs, there are some very, very positive things we can have.

Verses 6-7, "Do not eat the bread of a miser [KJV, "him that has an evil eye"], nor desire his

delicacies; for as he thinks in his heart, so is he. 'Eat and drink!' he says to you, but his heart is not with you." It's a warning about somebody who is out to entangle you. He is putting forward a "front," but he is entangling you in things that are going to really mess you up. He has bad intentions. 'As a person thinks in his heart, so is he.' That's the thing to realize.

Verse 9, "Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words." One of the characteristics of a fool is that he is not open to correction. You can't tell him anything. He has a "know-it-all" attitude.

A really good source of study in Proverbs is to go through the book and just look up the word "fool." Go through and find everything it says about a fool; find all the characteristics of a fool. Or look up "wise man" and go through and find all the characteristics of a wise man. It would make an excellent Bible study because it gives us quite a contrast—some things to sort of lay out and see what kind of contrast it is.

Verses 13-14, "Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell." What is this talking about? Obviously, it is talking about punishment or correction. The term "rod" is something that needs to be understood. It is not talking about some kind of big stick that is capable of giving some sort of permanent damage. The very term means "something that is flexible," like a switch. The rod is like a small switch or something of that sort. Something that, by definition, is flexible. We are not talking about a club. "Do not withhold correction...."

The point of it is you don't just put off and "drag your feet" in giving correction to your child. Spanking is not going to kill him. If you use a switch on him, that's not going to kill him, but it can deliver him from destruction. In other words, if you give a child the correction, teaching and the upbringing that he needs when he is young, then you can save him from a lot of trouble and destruction by doing that.

Verse 17, "Do not let your heart envy sinners, but in the fear of the Lord continue all day long." Sometimes there is a tendency to look at people who are "getting by with it." If we are not careful, we can sort of think that it seems like they get by with all this stuff. We can think, 'If we weren't in the Church, look at all the money we could make over here. Look at all the things that we could do.'

God says don't let your heart envy sinners. Don't look at that sort of thing, but stand in awe of God

all day long. We can get into a delusion that there would be advantages if we were not a part of the household of faith—that somehow there's an advantage to that. God says, 'Get your priorities straight. Really stand in awe of God.' "The fear of the Lord" means "being in deep awe of and reverence for God."

Verse 18, "For surely there is a hereafter [latter end] [KJV, "an end"], and your hope [expectation] will not be cut off."

Verses 20-21, he continues and says, "Do not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags." Don't run with the people that are out really boozing it up, the real "party animals." Don't run with that crowd because they are headed for trouble. If you run with that crowd, you're going to do that, too.

Verse 23, there's an interesting point, "Buy the truth, and do not sell it...."

This is the explanation as to why the magazine goes out free of charge. Mr. Herbert Armstrong read that Proverb back in 1927 and came to that conclusion as he was aspiring to publish a magazine on the basis of this verse. Whenever he started publishing a magazine (which he wanted to do), it must be given free. That's why the magazine has never been sold. That was a conclusion that Mr. Herbert Armstrong came to based on Proverbs 23:23. This is for your information as to why that is the case. Many groups, then and now, have traditionally sold various religious literatures, but he felt, based on that verse, that the truth was not something that should be sold.

There are warnings about immorality.

Verses 27-28, "For a harlot is a deep pit, and a seductress is a narrow well. She also lies in wait as for a victim, and increases the unfaithful among men." This is a warning of immorality. If you get tangled up in immorality, it's like getting caught in something that is hard to get out of.

Verses 29-35, "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things. Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: 'They have struck me, but I

was not hurt; they have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?”

If you want a poetic description of alcoholism, I don't know of any better one than this one. Who has trouble? What are the consequences? He has woe, sorrow, contentions and complaints. He has trouble. He has strife, problems and grief. He has things wrong with him that he doesn't even know where it came from. Those who tarry long at the wine have wounds without cause, and they have redness of eyes.

Some prohibitionist groups quote this section and say alcohol is a terrible sin. The misuse of alcohol is being dealt with here—those who tarry long at the wine. The scriptures show various proper uses of alcohol. There are legitimate uses. But what it's talking about here is tarrying long. In other words, it is talking about over indulgence. It's talking about misuse—they start early and go late. They are looking for it.

Verse 31 describes longingly looking at and desiring this. It's describing someone who is preoccupied with alcohol. The warning is that if you are obsessed and preoccupied with alcohol, you are dealing with something that will turn around and bite you like a snake. It will lead you into all kinds of things. It will get you tangled up in all sorts of situations.

“Your heart will utter perverse things.” Anybody who has ever been around an alcoholic knows, “Your heart will utter perverse things.” All kinds of things come out. They say just horrible things. It describes a hangover, “You'll be as he that lies down in the midst of the sea.”

Now some of you went on the fishing trip a little while back, and this is what it's talking about. What they felt out there is what you are going to feel like the morning after. You might as well be seasick. It's like you were trying to take a nap on top of the mast of the boat because you are going to be dizzy.

It's describing a hangover. You'll wake up and you'll realize they have beaten you and felt it not. You wake up, look at yourself and say, ‘Someone must have beaten me with a stick,’ but you don't remember a thing.

Then the final thing and that proves the insanity of alcoholism. What's the conclusion that he comes to at the end of it?

Verse 35, “...When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?” He says, ‘I think I need another drink. I may seek it yet again (KJV).’ That's the insanity aspect of the obsession and the addiction. Here is something you go through. It does all these things to you, and the conclusion

you come to is, ‘I think I better go get a drink.’ And here it goes again. I think it is one of the most succinct summaries of the consequences of alcoholism. It focuses in on the insanity of the addiction part. After all of these things, a person is drawn back to get some more. That tells you that something is wrong because that is not a logical thing to do if you go through something like this. I have known people who have gone on some of these fishing trips, and they have come off of them saying they are never going to get on a boat again. Here it describes this, and I think it is a very interesting description.

Proverbs 24:1-2, “Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them; for their heart devises violence, and their lips talk of troublemaking.”

Verse 10, “If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.”

Let's look at this. It's a way of saying the statement, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” This is the general thought that's coming through. I think the admonition here can certainly be applied to people in any time of extremity and any time of difficulty. That is when it really comes to what we are made out of and what our intentions are. This is certainly an important focus for God's Church and God's work in this end time.

It increasingly seems that just as Satan has attempted to fracture the world around us (we have seen in Eastern Europe and around the world the fracturing and the sub-dividing that is going on), we have encountered some of that even in the Church in recent years. There are various ones who have become discouraged about various things; they get preoccupied and sort of pull off to themselves. It says here, “If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.”

Verses 11-12, “Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, ‘Surely we did not know this,’ does not He who weighs the heart consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?”

You know, we have a job to do. “Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter.” If we divert our energies and our efforts from doing the work that God has set before us and get entangled in strife among and between ourselves, God is going to hold us responsible. We have a job to do. We have the job of carrying God's message to the world. If we let ourselves get sidetracked, it dissipates our energies on internal strife and

arguments, as some have, making mountains out of molehills. They have allowed their energies to be dissipated into areas of internal strife instead of focusing in on the work that we have to do. You know, God is going to take note of that.

“If you say, ‘Surely we did not know this,’ does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? [Isn’t God, who’s taking note, going to notice that?] He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render each man according to his deeds?” It’s very important to keep our focus like it should be. It’s very sad; many of us know people who have sort of gotten sidetracked and off track—some of these various ones or self-appointed leaders.

I think this is a section of Scripture that should have particular meaning for us. God does not want us to lose sight of the big picture and to dissipate our energy into all sorts of internal bickering and strife. We have to keep our focus on the things that are important and on the work God has called us to do.

Realize, that whatever problems may be, that’s where our faith that Jesus Christ is the living head of the Church comes in. We either believe that Christ is in charge or we don’t. If we don’t, then why are we here? And if we do, why are we worried? I think that’s sort of the way we go through it. We don’t want to allow our energies to be dissipated and lost in various internal strife and struggles and miss the point. This is an important area.

Verse 16, “For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity.” If at first you don’t succeed, try and try again. God didn’t say that if you’re righteous, everything you try will succeed the first time off. “A righteous man falls seven times....” You just have to keep trying.

There is an interesting story in Scottish and English history. It’s almost an exact parallel of this. There is the story of King Robert the Bruce of Scotland who was leading a war of Scottish independence back in the early Middle Ages. The English armies had defeated him on six different occasions. He really came to the “end of his rope.”

He was in hiding in a little abandoned cottage that he had in the remote area of Scotland. Much of his army was scattered. He was discouraged and considered giving up and going into exile. As he was lying there feeling like “throwing in the towel,” he looked up and there was a spider building its web. The spider was trying to jump across to catch a beam to affix her web. He noticed the spider jump and miss the beam. It

worked its way back up and then tried it again. He noticed that. It really began to get his attention because the spider kept trying. Finally, it got all the way up to six times, which kind of struck him because the spider had tried and struck out six times—and he had, too.

He was watching and wondering when the spider was going to quit. The spider kept trying and the seventh time the spider made it. He took heart from that and considered that might be some sort of sign. Anyway, he figured that he should at least put forth as much effort as a spider. He went out and re-gathered his troops. In that final time, he was successful in his endeavor. The point is that many times we don’t always succeed when we first try, but you just have to keep going and keep at it.

Verses 17-18, “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles. Lest the Lord see it, and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him.” You’re standing there gloating because somebody else is “getting it.” God may look down at you and figure that maybe that isn’t what He wants to do after all. You let God deal with him. We shouldn’t have this sort of gloating.

Verse 19, “Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the wicked.” It’s a matter of putting some of these things in God’s hands and trusting Him.

Verse 27, “Prepare your outside work, make it fit for yourself in the field; and afterward build your house.” This simply stresses the importance of being economically sound before marriage—the need of getting things ready and being ready to provide before you build your house and before you establish yourself that way.

Verses 30-34 are a description of the lazy person who doesn’t take care of what they have and allows it to get all overgrown and falling apart. It’s a consequence of this lazy, slothful attitude. In Proverbs 25, we go into the third body of Proverbs.

Proverbs 25:1-2, “These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied: It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.”

God reveals in the Bible a foundation of knowledge, but there are many things that God doesn’t reveal. There are many things that God has hidden in the creation. It’s the glory of God to conceal a matter and the glory of kings to search out a matter. It’s an honor to seek out the secrets of creation—the laws of physics, things

of astronomy and all of the things that God has designed. God doesn't reveal all of that information. God reveals essential knowledge in the Bible and gives man a mind and the ability to pursue, discover and to gain insight into the way He works and the way He designed and put things together.

Verse 3, "As the heavens for height and the earth for depth, so the heart of kings is unsearchable." Whether we're talking about the depths of the earth and oceans (the studies of geology), all the way up to the heavens for heights (astronomy) or the hearts of kings (the studying into people, human nature and psychology, what makes people tick, why are people the way they are), there's an awful lot that is waiting to be discovered. It's the honor of kings to search out a matter.

Verses 9-10, "Debate your case with your neighbor himself, and do not disclose the secret to another; lest he who hears it expose your shame, and your reputation be ruined." If you have a problem with somebody or an issue comes up, deal with it with the person who is involved.

Verse 11, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." A word fitly spoken is a very beautiful and precious thing—the right word at the right time.

Verse 17, "Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house, lest he become weary of you and hate you." It's just a matter of practical common sense. Don't wear out your welcome. You need moderation in all things. You can wear out your welcome by just always being somewhere until you become a pest with it. It's a matter that we want to be careful and not overdo a good thing.

Sometimes people begin to be a nuisance. Some contact is good, but even with friends or with neighbors you can get to where you monopolize someone's time. After a while, they begin to resent it, even though originally they enjoyed your company and friendship. But if you're calling them up every day and talking for three or four hours a day, it's not going to be long before that begins to get old. If you do that on a regular basis, you begin to wear out your welcome.

Verse 28, "Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls." It is simply saying that a lack of self-control in an individual is compared to a city that's broken into. The walls are breached. You're opening yourself up to serious trouble. A wall is there as a protection. It's saying that someone who has

lost his self-control is defenseless. He's just wide open to attack and to trouble.

Proverbs 26:1, "As snow in summer and rain in harvest, so honor is not fitting for a fool." It's not appropriate. It is sort of out of place.

Verse 2, "Like a flitting sparrow, like a flying swallow, so a curse without cause shall not alight." This is simply saying that things are a matter of cause and effect. There are, generally, reasons if there are problems.

I think this is one area that is an important principle in our childrearing. It is an important principle in teaching children because the immature mind does not really connect cause and effect. They see effects and they see causes. But they lack the life experiences to always see how the two connect. In working with our children, point out certain things that they see and that they obviously don't want in their future. Point out how this came about.

Some people go through life feeling like everything that happened to them is just some sort of big cosmic accident or as though there is a roll of the dice. Some people are happy and successful and other people are miserable and go through eight marriages like Liz Taylor.

"Like a flitting sparrow..." There is a reason for it. If you see a bird, how did it get there? Well, it flew. It followed a certain path and it brought it here. If there are problems or consequences in life, there are reasons. There are things that brought them here. If we don't understand what they are, then we are doomed to keep repeating certain things because we never recognize them for what they are. It's something for all of us to learn, and I think it is also an important principle to stress to our children to help them to understand.

Verse 4, "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him."

Verse 5, "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes." That is making a contrast. It shows that there are times to speak and there are times to keep silent. You don't answer and get into an argument with someone and wind up looking just like him because you're sounding like him. On the other hand, there is a time to speak. You feel like somebody has made the ultimate comment. There are times that you need to say something, but you want the wisdom to distinguish when it is inappropriate and when it is appropriate.

In the Gospels, we find the way that Christ dealt with situations. There were things He simply didn't address and other times when things were brought out. It shows the way He dealt with the

Pharisees and those who came to him; many were not asking their questions sincerely.

Verse 8, “Like one who binds a stone in a sling is he who gives honor to a fool.” Now what do you think is going to happen if you tie the stone in a sling shot, pull it back and shoot it? What do you think happens? It shoots forward; then it comes back. And guess who it hits? Now the slings they used were generally slung around. But if you tie it in and sling it around, then when you turn it loose, instead of the rock flying out, the weight of the rock brings it back around and hits you in the head.

“...he who gives honor to a fool.” If you’re dealing with somebody who is really a fool and you are trying to exalt this person, it is going to backfire on you. It’s going to come back and hit you in the face. That’s just the way it is.

Verse 9, “Like a thorn that goes into the hand of a drunkard is a proverb in the mouth of fools.” I guess you could say he just doesn’t get the point. This is talking about someone who is so out of it that he doesn’t ever notice the thorn until after he sobers up. This is sort of the principle; he just doesn’t get the point.

Verse 11, another characteristic of a fool is, “As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly.” He keeps making the same mistakes over and over again. He doesn’t learn from experience.

Verse 12, “Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.” There is not a whole lot of hope for a fool. Here is a guy who is wise in his own eyes—a “know-it-all,” the kind of person that you can’t tell him anything. He knows it all. God says a fool is going to learn quicker than this fellow. When you see all the things it says about a fool, the odds are the fool is not going to learn very quickly.

We are looking at a poetic description of another set of characteristics that we don’t want to have.

Verse 13, “The slothful man says, ‘There is a lion in the road! A fierce lion is in the streets!’” We are looking at excuses. If someone is lazy and doesn’t want to do something, he will find a thousand excuses.

Verse 14, “As a door turns on its hinges, so does the slothful turn on his bed.” You can just see this old creaky door going back and forth, back and forth. You can just sort of imagine this old lazy fellow lying over there in bed and can just hear the bed creak. All he’s doing is pulling the cover up over his head when the daylight comes. He’s just turning back and forth.

Verse 15, “The slothful man buries his hand in the bowl; it wearies him to bring it back to his mouth.” He’s just so lazy he hardly wants to go to the trouble to lift his food from his plate—a poetic, humorous description to make a point. Humor serves to exaggerate certain points. It’s for the purpose of illustrating some foible. This is what it is describing. Have you ever known someone who was so lazy and trifling, it was like he almost begrudged the work that it took him to have to lift the food all the way from the plate to his mouth? He really didn’t want to do anything.

Verse 16, “The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly.” He has more excuses as to why he can’t do something than seven people who can come up with good solid reasons. I mean, whatever you have, he has excuses you have never thought about as to why he can’t do this and why he can’t do that. Some people go through life looking for excuses as to why they can’t do something. I have always found that if you really want to do something, you usually find a way to do it; if you don’t want to do it, you can find a thousand reasons as to why you can’t. It’s too hard; I can’t go; it’s too difficult. It’s amazing how that works.

Verses 18-19, “Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death, is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, ‘I was only joking.’” It’s a joke! It’s a joke! What happens when somebody casts firebrands? Well, they start a fire don’t they? They can catch the house on fire or the city on fire. It says, ‘So is the man that deceives his neighbor and then says, ‘Oh, it is a joke. I’m just kidding. Can’t you take a joke?’”

A lot of times people use that as a cover-up when they have said or done things that they didn’t have any business saying or doing. They get something started and then they try to get out of it by saying, ‘I was just kidding.’ It’s sort of like the fellow who casts a firebrand. He started a fire and now there’s trouble going. We have to think those things through.

There are several things here about what gossip will do and how it keeps trouble stirred up.

Verse 20, “Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases.” It’s amazing how the gossip quits and trouble settles down. It says, “Where there is no wood the fire goes out.” One way to get the fire to stop is to quit feeding it. The fire goes out; it burns itself out. The way strife and trouble is stopped in a community or group of people is

when gossip quits. But as long as people are gossiping and saying things, you have trouble.

Verse 21, “As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife.” It feeds the flames.

Proverbs 27:1, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.”

Verse 2, “Let another man praise you and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.”

Verse 5, “Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed.”

Verse 6, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” This is saying that it is not a mark of true friendship to withhold the truth. Sometimes a real friend is someone who will tell you the truth.

Moffat translates it as, “Better a frank word of reproof than the love that will not speak.” It’s not a mark of true friendship to withhold reproof. It doesn’t mean we go around trying to fix everybody, straighten out all our friends and give them a long list of what’s wrong with them. It just means that there is a time to speak. There’s a time when it is appropriate to say something. What a real friend tells you is faithful. He tells you because he cares. He tells you the truth.

“...but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”

Someone who does not have your best interest at heart will tell you all kinds of nice things. He’s just up to something. Someone who’s really your friend may tell you something and it may hurt a little bit, but he has your best interest at heart. It’s a lot more valuable than somebody who really doesn’t care about you and is just saying what they think you want to hear.

Verse 12, “A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; the simple pass on and are punished.” This is simply saying that a prudent man—somebody who is wise—is going to look and think ahead. We don’t just rush on through life. Some people, in handling their affairs, don’t think ahead.

Look at some of the economic problems we’ve had. One of the difficulties that hit this area of the country, the areas (Louisiana and Texas) that were very heavily tied in with the oil and gas industry, was that they overextended themselves. Back when the oil and gas prices were going up, up, up, there were a lot of companies and individuals that dangerously overextended themselves. They operated on the premise that it’s going to get bigger and better forever. There were a lot of companies that went bankrupt when the price came down because they operated on a

very foolish assumption that what goes up, will just keep going up forever. I have always noticed that if I throw something up in the air, sooner or later it comes back down.

“A prudent man foresees the evil and he hides himself...” He looks ahead to problems. He doesn’t just leave himself wide open. “The simple pass on and they are punished.” They are oblivious to the fact of difficulties coming around the corner, and they get hit square in the face with it. A prudent man thinks ahead and realizes difficulties and adversities that are potentially coming and makes provision. He looks ahead and he’s not going to overextend himself. He’s not going to get way out on the end of the limb. It’s an important principle.

Verse 17, “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.” It’s talking about the fact that we can learn from one another. There is a sharpening quality that can take place in a good friendly discussion. We can learn from one another.

Verse 20, “Hell and Destruction are never full [The grave and destruction are never full; there are always continuing cycles.]; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.” Aspirations continue to rise. If someone was out on a cold rainy night and didn’t have a place to live or stay, he’d be sitting out there wishing he had some place that was warm and dry—some place out of the way. He’d just give anything for a place out of the way. If he got a place, how long would it be before he started looking around, noticing what a dump it was and thinking he wished he had a little nicer place? A guy who’s been hungry and hasn’t had anything to eat for two days is thinking he wished he could get some food. After he’s been eating for a while, he begins to notice the soup surely is bland. There’s no salt or pepper in it and they’ve watered it down. He wished he had a decent meal. Perspectives change. When we meet one level of need, we begin to look around and notice what we don’t have. “The eyes of man are never satisfied.” People are always looking for more.

Proverbs 28:1, “The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.” The real key to freedom from fear is obedience to God.

Proverbs 14:26, we are told, “In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence....” So the real key to freedom from fear is obedience to God.

Proverbs 28:13, “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.” That’s certainly the case in our dealings with God. And frankly, that

usually works much better with people, too. If you try to cover it up, sooner or later it's going to come out, and then you are really going to be in trouble. If you face up to it, admit it and you've turned around and gone the other way, you will far more likely have mercy than to just lie, cover it up and let it come out later.

Verse 19, "He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows frivolity [KJV, "vain persons"] [or, "vain pursuits"] will have poverty enough." If you have a worthwhile occupation and stick to it, persevere and be diligent with it, you can gradually get ahead. If you are always chasing the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, you are just going to have poverty.

Verse 20, "A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished." Someone who is in a hurry to get rich quick is going to cut corners and do things that are not going to leave them unpunished.

Verse 21, "To show partiality is not good, because for a piece of bread a man will transgress." –To treat people unfairly or mistreat someone. Someone who is unfair and unscrupulous in his dealings with people will take advantage of people for just a little bit. He will transgress; he will cheat anybody when it is to his advantage. It's a character flaw. When you see someone who deals with other people that way in business, just realize he will do it to you, too, if it is ever to his advantage and he gets the chance. It is an important principle.

Verse 22, "A man with an evil eye hastens after riches, and does not consider that poverty will come upon him." In other words, honest labor and hard work is the way to success—not some get-rich-quick scheme.

There are many admonitions in Proverbs about working hard and being diligent.

Proverbs 12:24, "The hand of the diligent will rule...." But there are also warnings about becoming materialistic. God wants us to get ahead, but He doesn't want us to become so materialistic that our life sort of revolves around material things; it leads to trouble.

Proverbs 28:26, "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered." "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool...."

Jeremiah 17:9, what does God tell us, "The heart is deceitful above all things...." We kid ourselves.

Jeremiah 10:23, we are told, "...it's not in man who walks to direct his own steps." To whom

should we look? We look to God. People just follow their own feelings and whims, rather than looking to God and what He says.

Proverbs 28:27, "He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses." Someone who has kindness, a willingness to share and is generous will be provided for. God will take care of them. God takes note of that.

Proverbs 29:1, "He who is often reprov'd, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." –An important principle. If we continually resent and resist correction, one of these days destruction is going to come like a "bolt out of the blue" and there won't be any more opportunities. It's a very important principle if we won't learn our lesson the easy way.

Another Proverb, Proverbs 17:10, talks about how a word of reproof enters more into the heart of a wise man than a hundred stripes into the back of a fool. A wise person is going to learn more from a few words than a fool is going to learn from a beating. This is one of the real keys to learning lessons—whether or not we learn from life's experiences. If someone won't learn the easy way, sooner or later it's going to come on him, and then there won't be any way out. That's sad, but there comes a time where you can get into some things you can't get out of. Life can come crashing down around you. There are people who have lost businesses, fortunes, marriages, families and children. There are people who have lost all sorts of things.

In verse 1, they are basically told and they are warned. Various things came up and all the signs were there. People told them you had better do this or that. They wouldn't listen. One day it all came down on top of them, and there wasn't any getting out of it.

Proverbs 29:2, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules the people groan." The way of God produces positive results.

Verse 15, "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother."

Verse 18, "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law." KJV, "Where there is no vision the people perish...."

Verse 25, "The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe."

Proverbs 30, the sixth section of the book, is the prophecy of Agur. Agur goes through all of these comparisons, these categories of four.

Proverbs 30:11, for instance, “There is a generation [there is a kind of person] that curses its father, and does not bless its mother.” There are people who are negative, critical and faultfinding.

Verse 12, there are others, “There is a generation [there is a kind of people] that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness.” They have this attitude of a self-righteous approach. Here they are going along and they don’t see where they are doing anything wrong. They don’t get the point.

Verse 13, there are others, “There is a generation [there is a kind of people]—oh, how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up.” There’s a kind of person that is just very self-centered and sort of arrogant. They always have to be the center of attention. Sometimes someone like that is entertaining for a while, but there’s shallowness there because they always have to be the center of things.

Verse 14, there’s another kind of person, “There is a generation whose teeth are like swords, and whose fangs are like knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.” Boy, they just go plowing through like a bulldozer, totally oblivious of the feelings of others. They may get things done, but, man, the human debris they leave in their wake.

So there are all kinds of people. It’s sort of an interesting one-sentence summation of some of these. It goes through many different things.

Verses 24-28, “There are four things which are little on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise. The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their food in the summer, the rock badger [KJV, “conies”] are a feeble folk, yet they make their homes in the crags. The locusts have no king, yet they all advance in ranks; the spider skillfully grasps with its hands, and it is in kings’ palaces.”

Take note of four things that are very insignificant and, yet, they epitomize some of the greatest qualities of wisdom.

The ants are pretty insignificant little creatures. They are not all that strong and mighty. What can you learn from the ant? The ants prepare ahead. They practice the principle of being prepared. They take advantage of opportunities when they have them; they are prepared. They are pretty insignificant little insects, but that is a tremendous principle of wisdom—taking advantage of the opportunities you have, seizing the day, seizing the opportunity and being prepared.

“The rock badgers are but feeble folk.” They are little tiny animals that make their houses in the rocks—a strong foundation. What they build on has a rock-solid foundation. They are pretty insignificant little animals, but they dwell in a secure place.

Locusts are pretty insignificant little insects, but they are organized. They all go forth by bands. They exemplify organization and structure. It’s not confusion and strife.

The spider works hard and is diligent. Again, it’s a little insignificant creature, but you’ll find it up in the corner in the kings’ palace. There isn’t any place you’ll look that you won’t find a spider somewhere. It singles out these little things and there’s a lot of food for meditation here. All these little groups of four are enumerated—food for thought.

Proverbs 31 is the seventh section—the words of Lemuel.

Proverbs 31:1, “The words of King Lemuel, the utterance which his mother taught him.” Most of it focuses in on the subject of what is called “the virtuous woman.”

Verse 10, “Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.” We live in a society that measures worth and value by the wrong things. If you want to find out what we value in society, look at the pay scale. It wouldn’t take you too long to look at the pay scale and figure that we value being entertained far more than being taught. Compare what we pay our entertainers to what we pay our teachers and the status that’s given to each. We have certain values that we attach to things in our society, and a lot of these values are distorted.

A lot of women have been made to feel that their value depends on the size of a paycheck they bring home. You can find that Madonna had the highest income of any other woman in the United States last year. Well, does that make her of greater worth and value? God says, “Who can find a virtuous woman? Her worth is far above rubies.” God says virtue is what has value. That’s what God attaches value to. It’s not the size of the paycheck you bring in. It’s not external experience. It’s not all the things that the world attaches value to. God tells us what really has value—a virtuous woman has value that far exceeds rubies.

Verse 11, “The heart of her husband safely trusts her, so he will have no lack of gain.” One of the primary points that is made, one of the things about her, is that her husband safely trusts in her. The physical work that she does has a price, but the character and the attitude she exemplifies is

the real contribution that she makes to the family—that's the one that's above any price. The work she does of cooking, cleaning and all these things is not what's above the price of rubies. You can go out and hire that to be done. That's not the most valuable contribution. The contribution beyond assigning a price tag to is character and the virtuous attitude that is exemplified. That is of far greater value to a family than any price tag that can be given. A virtuous woman makes a great contribution to the family.

Realize that the family is the foundation, the building block of the society. If you want to understand what's happening to our society, you have to look at what's happening to our families. I don't think that the value of a woman's contribution can be over-estimated. God says it can't. It's priceless. It's above rubies. There's a tremendous thing that it goes into here.

"The heart of her husband does safely trust in her." He doesn't have to worry because there's confidence, respect and trust. She's productive and does all these things. She is concerned about taking care of her responsibilities with her family.

Verse 26, "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness."

Verse 27, "She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness."

Verse 28, "Her children rise up and call her blessed [or it could be rendered, "will make her happy"]; her husband also, and he praises her." There is going to come an appreciation. Her children rise up and make her happy. Part of the problem with what a woman does is that during so many of the years she's doing it, as her kids are growing up, it's gets discouraging. A lot of the appreciation and feedback doesn't come until years later.

That gets discouraging sometimes because who appreciates it? Oh, sometimes a "fit" may come upon a kid, and they may say, 'Thank you.' But generally you have to get older in life before you look back and really appreciate what was done. Most of us can see that. This is what it's talking about. Her children will rise up and call her blessed. It's talking about a later time of life.

I think it's important to realize that some things you reap later. It's like seeds that you plant. You won't reap the harvest for a long time, but you will reap it. "Her children will arise up and call her blessed." They will make her happy. They will respond in that way.

Verses 29-31, "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all. Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates."

Let her have credit for what she does. There is ultimately a public recognition of private virtue that is brought out here.

We have obviously just been able to skim the surface on some of these things. I hope this has whet your appetite for Proverbs and for the things that we can go to and study in greater depth and detail at a later time.

We are going to cover the book of Job next Bible study. We will go through a summary of the book of Job at the next Bible study. Obviously, in this series of studies, it is a survey and we are only hitting the high spots. But I hope that we do so in a way that would sort of whet your appetite to go back and really delve into some of the things that we lack the time and the opportunity in this setting to really dwell on in detail.