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Wisdom Literature (Part 4)



Wisdom Literature - Steve Gregg

Exploring the book of Proverbs, Steve Gregg emphasizes the importance of wisdom from God, rather than knowledge or physical attractiveness. He discusses the value of a faithful, virtuous woman and warns against gossip and causing division. Using personification and anthropomorphisms, the book of Proverbs presents wisdom as a guide to living a fulfilling life.

Transcript

For the past several times we've been together, we've been going through or looking at Proverbs. We're not just going through chapter by chapter. We're more interested in taking thought by thought.

Proverbs has a lot of repeated thoughts throughout, and we're trying to appreciate what wisdom literature in the Bible is and what it provides for us. In future times, not today, but in our future times, we're going to be taking specific subjects like family, marriage, finances, things like that that Proverbs has a lot to say about. And we'll be talking about those.

Right now I'm continuing on with the notes we handed out to you on the previous times, which probably you don't have with you, but you can live without them. I just want to take two of the features of Proverbs, what it tells us, or how it conveys wisdom. Remember, wisdom literature is intended to convey wisdom to those who don't have it.

That's how the book begins, to give wisdom to the simple-minded people and so forth. Which I guess we would all be if we didn't have any biblical revelation about what's true and what's right and what's smart. And some of what we'll look at today will show us why that is.

But there's two major categories from the Proverbs I want to talk about today. I don't know that they'll take as long. They might, as usual, but I just want to cover them.

We're going to look at quite a few Proverbs that are examples of these two categories. First of all, one way that truth is observed is by similes. Metaphors and similes, I'm sure

you know what those are.

A metaphor is when Jesus would say, I am the door of the sheepfold. He's not literally a door. He says he's a door, but that's a metaphor.

A simile is when one says, this is like that. Like when Jesus said, I want you to be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves. He doesn't say be serpents and doves, although that would be metaphorical.

It would be hard to understand. But to be like doves, to be like serpents, is a simile. The word simile, obviously, is like our word similar.

So, you have a simile that says this is similar to that. Now, in Proverbs, there's a lot of similes that draw attention to realities that we're all familiar with and likens them to things that we would perhaps not immediately have thought they are like. And when you find that, it's not just peculiar.

It's intended to evoke thought. If someone says, well, he's like that, he's like one of those, you immediately try to make connections. Okay, in what sense is that person and that other thing that you're talking about, what do they have in common? And sometimes in Proverbs, it's very perplexing, because you can't immediately see.

Sometimes you can, but you can't immediately see how two things are similar, but they are. And the fact that you can't immediately see it is what makes it useful. It gets the juices going in your head.

You think, okay, I can't just pass over that. I've got to think about that. There's something being observed here.

Some principle in both cases that I probably have never noticed myself before. And maybe I should. Maybe it'll get me thinking at another level about this.

For example, a simile would be Proverbs 10.26. Now, there's lots of them. I've got quite a few examples. I've just picked some out at random, really.

It says in Proverbs 10.26, As vinegar to the teeth and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him. Now, a sluggard, then, to the person who sent him is like vinegar to that person's teeth, that is the sender's teeth, and like smoke to the eyes. Now, in what way is that true? Well, what is a sluggard? A sluggard is someone who takes shortcuts.

If he does the job at all, he does it lazily, half-heartedly, maybe incompletely. If you send him on an errand, and I think that's what the imagery is here, a sluggard to those who send him. Okay, you're sending someone on a mission with an assignment to do, but he's lazy and he doesn't half-heartedly at all.

Now, you send a sluggard on his assignment. Might as well put vinegar in your mouth and slosh around in your teeth. It's going to make your teeth great.

Most people do not like the taste of vinegar by itself. Vinegar as salad dressing with other things is not bad, but just put vinegar in your mouth, it's pretty bracing. And it's annoying, okay? I mean, that's the point.

It's very annoying when you send someone on a mission who you, you know, the mission is important enough, you want it to be done right, and the person's a sluggard and does it right. Now, this is, of course, a correction both to sluggards who ought not to be such an annoyance to the people who they answer to, on the one hand, and to the person who would, say, hire a sluggard or trust a sluggard. It's like vinegar to your teeth.

It's like smoke in your eyes that burns. So, the idea is it's something that makes you recoil. It's something that makes you wince.

It's something that is annoying in a, you know, in a big way. That's all he's saying. He's trying to think of things that are very unpleasant, and if you trust a sluggard with some assignment, you know, you're probably going to be annoyed as with these kinds of things.

Now, that's a rather easy one to understand, actually. Some of them not as easy, like this. Proverbs 11, 22.

As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, so is a lovely woman who lacks discretion. Now, discretion means prudence or wisdom. A woman who is foolish and unwise if she's beautiful.

Now, he's not talking about women in general. He's talking about a particular kind of woman, one who has certain qualities and lacks another. Not all women are beautiful, and not all of them lack discretion.

But if you find a beautiful woman who does lack discretion, what is that like? Well, it's like a ring of gold in a pig's nose. And you might say, how in the world is that similar? Well, obviously, a ring of gold is a thing of beauty, a desirable thing, like the woman's physical beauty itself. People honor beauty in men and women, especially in women.

A beautiful woman actually has tremendous influence, not only over men, but even over women. And I'm not talking about women who have the same kind of attraction to them that a man has, but billboards and advertisements for makeup that are trying to sell stuff to women always feature beautiful women. Because not only are men attracted to beautiful women, any woman, probably, at some level, would like to be beautiful.

Because it is value. Beauty is something the world values. But wisdom, Solomon says, is of greater value.

How much greater? Well, the beauty of a woman, if she has it, is like a ring of gold, something that people will value, something beautiful. But many people would not wish for a gold ring if it had to come with a pig attached. A pig with a ring of gold in the nose.

Now, what does the pig then represent? It represents the woman's character, the woman's lack of wisdom. It's overbearing. I mean, you might say, well, she's not too smart, but she's pretty.

Yeah, well, maybe. But that's a big concession to make. Not too smart.

Not too wise. Now, intelligence is not what wisdom is. Wisdom is not talking about IQ or, you know, brilliance in certain fields.

It's talking about what Solomon's always talking about when he talks about wisdom. He's talking about someone who sees things in their proper perspective, who values things that are valuable, and pursues them intelligently, who pursues them in a disciplined manner. That's what wisdom always is in Proverbs.

It's being able to pick the goal, a goal that's worthy to be picked, and then to pursue it in a way that's likely to achieve it. That's what wisdom is. It's different than knowledge.

Knowledge would tell you, if you see a little animal in the woods on the trail that's black with a white stripe down its back, that you recognize that as a skunk. That's knowledge. That could be just your biological knowledge tells you that.

Wisdom, then, tells you how to react to it. The knowledge is not good enough in itself. You need to know, OK, now that I've encountered a skunk, what am I supposed to do about that? What's the wisest course of action? I try to put distance between myself and it.

I mean, that's wisdom. Wisdom is the application of knowledge. So, it's not to a man or a woman's discredit if they're not educated or if they're not real sharp, I mean, in any particular field, not good at math, don't have a good memory, whatever.

Those are not the things that we're complaining about here. Wisdom is a moral aptitude in Solomon's writings. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

So, obviously, it's a spiritual state. A wise person is one who puts God's priorities first and recognizes that that's a smart thing to do and then pursues them with discipline and diligence because that's also smart. If you want to achieve God's ends, there are ways that you can more likely do that.

I say more likely because the Proverbs and wisdom itself does not guarantee, it doesn't predict future outcomes, not with certainty. It tells you how you would pursue certain outcomes if you're smart and that doing anything else and hoping to achieve those

outcomes would not be smart. Many people have said, and you hear it all the time, the definition of insanity is continuing to do the same thing and expecting different results.

That's really the definition of foolishness. Thinking you want a certain result and you're pursuing a way that never reaches it and you don't change. Basically, a wise person will be corrected.

That's why Solomon talks so much about the wise person loves correction. They want a result, they haven't gotten it yet. And someone says, hey, the reason you haven't gotten it is because of this.

The reason you're poor is you don't go out and get a job. You stay home and play video games and smoke weed. Wisdom would tell you if you want financial success, you should actually change your behavior.

So, wisdom chooses an end, hopefully a wise one, because there are foolish ends to pursue. And then pursues it in a way that makes sense, that would logically tend toward reaching that goal, as opposed to some behavior that doesn't in any way predict for that. So, this has to do with a person being wise enough, and this is throughout Proverbs.

The word wisdom, discretion, prudence, these are interchangeable words in Proverbs. It means somebody who is smart enough to choose godliness and God's favor. As a goal, and then is smart enough to do the kinds of things that are likely to make them more godly, or make them have God's favor.

Now, the woman who lacks that, and Solomon, by the way, does describe a foolish woman in the earlier chapters. Usually he's describing a woman who's a prostitute, but obviously not every foolish woman is a prostitute, but every prostitute is a foolish woman. She's foolish, she's loud, she's boisterous, she's seductive.

That's not the behavior of a wise woman. Now, a beautiful woman may be people getting away with those things, because people will, you know, a beautiful face covers a multitude of sins. I mean, I'll tell you, in a certain company, people will make provision for defects in a woman if she's also beautiful.

But, he said, but if she is beautiful, and she has these kinds of defects, character faults, she's not wise. She's not pursuing the things of God. She's doing things that are morally foolish.

Well, that's like, her beauty is a very small part of it. Like a pig with a gold ring and stuff, that's a whole unit. You get the whole thing or nothing.

Do you want that gold ring in your house? You know, comes with a pig. And, what he's arguing here is that many people say, yeah, I want a gold ring. But, when they don't realize that the woman who's beautiful, but has no discretion, has no prudence, is giving

more of a trouble in the house than the pig.

The piggishness, the pigginess, definitely eclipses the attractiveness of a gold ring. And, that's what Solomon is saying here. In chapter 25, some more examples of similes.

Here's several of them in one chapter. In verse 13, chapter 25, verse 13. Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest is a faithful messenger to those who send him, for he refreshes the soul of his masters.

Now, this one is like the flip side of the first one we looked at, which was 1026. The first one said, you know, it's like vinegar to your teeth, like smoke in your eyes to send a man who's a slugger. In other words, you're going to be disappointed by his performance.

He's going to let you down. But, it's the opposite if you have a faithful man. A faithful messenger to those who send him is like cold snow in time of harvest.

Now, time of harvest is the hottest part of summer. And, therefore, right now as I speak, it's winter. It's been pretty cold here, colder than usual in Southern California.

But, most of the time where we're sitting right now, it's pretty hot. And, in the heat of summer, it's very uncomfortably hot. So, you wake up one morning in the middle of summer and find snow on the ground, and it's cool.

We say, wow, that's refreshing. That's unusual. Didn't expect that.

And, that's the thing. When you give someone an assignment and they faithfully carry it out without being supervised, and without being pressured or threatened, and they just do it because they are faithful, that's surprising. Who ever saw that before? No, in the summertime it's like, you know, it's refreshingly surprising.

Now, this particular one has a third line which simply explains the simile, which we could have gone without it. And, most of the Proverbs or similes don't have this. He says, for, the reason it's like that is because that person refreshes the soul of his master.

So, in case you missed the point, which I don't think many people would. But, a faithful messenger to those who send him is like the cold of snow in time of harvest. You know, I've talked to many employers, I've never been one, but I've talked to many employers who told me it's really, really hard to get good health.

In fact, this was decades ago. I'm sure you'd hear far more reports of this today than then, because actually, decades ago when this was said, many people wanted to work and make a living. You know, now it's hard to find anyone who even wants to work, who even wants a job.

But, when you do, of course, so many people are sluggards. They're just conditioned to be sluggards. They haven't been disciplined from their youth by their parents, and

society has required little of them.

School hasn't required much of them. They pass whether they do the work or not. And, they're just sluggards by nature.

And, I'm not just trying to blast the younger generation. There's many people in my generation who are sluggards. It's just that when it comes to finding someone to work and do a job for you, someone who will show up when they say they'll show up, who won't extend their coffee breaks longer than they're planned, who actually works on the job until closing time, pretty rare.

Very commonly, people feel like they should be able to come in when they want to come in. They should leave when they want to leave. They should take as long a lunch as they want.

They can take long bathroom breaks three or four times a shift. And, all they're doing is really avoiding work because they're sluggards. They're not faithful.

A faithful person is a person who says they'll do something or agrees to them, and then you can count them. They'll do it. You don't have to supervise them.

You don't have to make them do it. And, I'll tell you, I've told many young people just based on what I've heard from employers, is that if you get a job and you just diligently do that job for the whole shift and don't take more breaks than you're supposed to have or whatever, you'll be the favorite employee. You'll be the favorite.

You'll be like cold snow in the heat of summer to that employer. He'll be surprised, too, because it's not easy to find that kind of thing. Hard to find snow in the summertime, too.

But, it's refreshing. And, so it is with a faithful messenger, the one who is assigned a task. In the same chapter, Proverbs 25, 19 says, Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth and a foot out of joint.

A bad tooth and a foot out of joint. Now, this is putting confidence in somebody who's unfaithful, which means is not worthy of confidence. If a person is faithful, they're worthy of confidence.

A person who's faithful, by definition, is trustworthy. You can put your confidence in them and they'll do it because of their character. They would rather be honest, faithful, diligent, and keep their commitments, than take an easy way out because their character matters more than convenience to them.

Not as many people as we like of that type, but there are some. Elsewhere in Proverbs, and we won't look at this verse, but Solomon says, Every man will proclaim his own

goodness, but a faithful man, who can find? You know, who can find one? By the way, he doesn't think very highly of the women either. He says, who can find a faithful woman, a virtuous woman? They're as rare as rubies.

That doesn't mean there's very many of them. It means they're rare. The point is that human beings who are faithful are rare.

People you can put your confidence in, and they just say, we'll do it. And, they go and do the thing they said they'd do. And, it's not very common, but is it ever good when it happens? Now, when somebody is not faithful, and they give off the impression that they can be trusted, and they know what they're doing, and they'll do it, and you put confidence in them, but they are, by definition in the Proverbs, unfaithful.

You can't really trust them. Putting confidence in a person like that is like having a bad tooth or a foot out of joint. When I think of this, I think of times when you bite down on something, not knowing that one of your teeth is rotten.

You have to find out at some point. You know, I mean, if you've got a rotten tooth, sometimes you discover it simply by putting confidence in it that it doesn't deserve, that it won't bear. It's not ready to be bit down on.

It should. That's what teeth are for. You should be able to do that, but it's a bad tooth.

And, it hurts. You think you're just going to chew your food as normal, but, ah, you know, suddenly it's like, wow, that's horrible. That's putting confidence in a tooth that's not worthy of that confidence in its present condition.

Or a foot out of joint. Again, when I think of this particular line, I always think of a story. When I was in Boulder Creek, which is up in the Santa Cruz Mountains, living up there, we used to have to hitchhike down to town.

Well, I had to. Not everyone didn't have a car, but I didn't. At least not a good one.

So, I and two other guys, all of us full-sized adults, were hitchhiking the 20-minute ride down to Santa Cruz from Boulder Creek, and the guy who picked us up had a Porsche. It didn't have any back seats. It had a little luggage space behind the seats, but his girlfriend was in one of the seats and he was in the other one.

So, three of us said, well, we'll take it. And so we crowded, three of us, into this little luggage space. I'll tell you, I think my knees were around my ears.

And it was only a 20-minute ride, but when we got out and said, thank you, I set my foot down on the ground and I went right to the ground. There was absolutely no strength in my feet. Of course, it had gone to sleep, but I didn't know that.

Didn't know it until you tried it, you know. Usually, that's what works. Usually, I can just

step out of my car, put my foot on the ground, and it sustains my weight.

And I was putting confidence in it, but it was an unfaithful foot at that moment. In other words, your teeth and your feet, these are things you can usually count on. When you've got a bad tooth or a foot out of joint, and you find out the hard way, in an embarrassing way, then that's very annoying.

And that's what Solomon says, it's like putting your confidence in a man who isn't going to be reliable, too. In the same chapter, verse 20, the next verse, Proverbs 25, 20, it says, like one who takes away a garment in cold weather, or like vinegar on soda, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart. Now, this is one of the several Proverbs that simply talk about being more or less insensitive, or being inept at cheering somebody else up.

We saw a Proverb, I think last time it came up, where it said that he that blesses his neighbor, rising early in the morning with a loud voice, it'll be counted a curse to him. I mean, if you share a house with somebody, and you wake up, you're barely awake in the morning, and they're talking loudly, Hey, praise the Lord! This is the day the Lord has made! God bless you! Have a great day! You know, and they're being loud and stuff, and you're really kind of preferring to sleep. Rising early in the morning, blessing your neighbor with a loud voice, it will not be a blessing.

You can't have a saying, why not? Why aren't they blessed? I just said very positive things to them. Yeah, but you didn't say it in a way that really ministered to them. You didn't say it in a way that they could appreciate.

It's more like a curse to them to have that happen. And that's kind of the business too. Singing songs to a person with a heavy heart.

Now, of course there are songs that are fitting to a heavy heart. I remember I heard once, in an interview many, many years ago, Barbra Streisand said either she can't sing well or she only sings well when she's sad and depressed or whatever like that. She can't sing well when she is depressed.

Which means, as a professional, she better stay unhappy a lot. But the truth is, there are some songs that work well when you're sad, but this is not assuming that. In Israel, people danced and sang when they were jubilant, when they were happy.

And if there's someone in the room who's got a broken heart, you don't know what they're going through. But you're intensively happy and, hey, cheer up! And singing songs, inviting them to join, hey, dance with me here. It's obviously just, you're just all about yourself.

You're not paying attention to what would be a blessing to them. So, it's just talking about the intensity of it. If you're like that, then to that person who's got the heavy heart, you're like someone taking away a garment when they're already cold.

Hey, you're already cold, let me just make it worse for you. It's not comforting, in other words. It's less comforting than doing nothing at all, apparently.

It's like vinegar on soda. Now, most of you have probably poured vinegar on soda at some point in your life. It makes it effervesce.

It makes it volatile. It's hard to know exactly how he means it, but that person who's got the heavy heart might not just have a heavy heart. They might get angry.

They might become volatile. You never know. At least as long as they shut you up.

Just stop singing. In the same chapter, verse 25, Proverbs 25, 25, it says, As cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a far country. Everything okay there? This needs no explanation since everyone knows it's... Everyone has had that.

You get a letter from somebody that you love, they haven't heard from for a long time, they're far away. Just getting a letter from them and getting good news, basically, about them. We're talking not just about information, but good news.

Good news from a far country. It's like cold water to a weary soul. Of course, the good news of the gospel is good news from a far country, as it were.

And for some, those who are thirsty, it is like water to a thirsty soul. But I don't think that's the point solve of the thing. He's talking more generically.

But obviously, to the woman at the well, the good news that Jesus brought to her was like water, like living water to her thirst. A few more of these, and then I'm going to take our second point. In chapter 26, there's quite a few examples of this.

Chapter 26, verse 9 says, Like a thorn that goes into the hand of a drunkard is a proverb in the house of fools. Now, a proverb is a philosophical observation, obviously. That's what the Book of Proverbs is, essentially philosophical observations about life.

A fool does not make a good philosopher. A proverb in the mouth of a fool, a proverb is supposed to have a point to it. But a fool, if he's foolish enough, he might repeat a proverb he's heard, but he doesn't get the point.

It doesn't make any impact on him. It's like a thorn going into the hand of a drunkard. Presumably, the drunkard in question is feeling no pain, and he's had a lot to drink, and therefore, he gets poked with it, but it's like he's clueless.

He doesn't get the point. He may have heard a wise statement, and he repeats it, but he's a fool. It doesn't reflect his own wisdom at all.

It's like the point is totally lost on him. That reminds me a little bit of one of the closing verses of Ecclesiastes, by the same author. Chapter 12 and verse 11 says, The words of

the wise are like goads.

Now, a goad is a cattle prod. Something goads somebody on. A cattle prod makes a reluctant cow move as you poke it in its hindquarters with a sharp object.

That's what a goad is. Now they have electronic ones. They don't need sharp points anymore.

The point is that it induces action. It makes an animal start moving, making progress. Some people need something like that to get them off the dime and get them to act.

Wise words, or the words of the wise, are like goads. And the words of scholars are like well-driven nails given by one shepherd. It's an interesting statement.

It's hard to know exactly how Solomon is thinking. You'll notice your English translation is capitalized shepherd, because obviously we think, oh, all the good words come from God, from Jesus, the good shepherd. And that probably is what he means, that they all have one source.

Wisdom all comes from God. And a wise person, or the words of a wise person, goad people on to more godly action. And they're like nails, wisely driven.

Now, I'm not sure what they're driven into. Something is being built, obviously, or repaired. The idea, however, is they're stabilizing something.

When you nail something up, you're making it so it doesn't move. And so, the words of the wise are unlike proverbs in the mouth of a fool. They're not just something he doesn't get the point, but they hammer, they hit the nail on the head.

As we say. Ecclesiastes 12.11. Okay, also in chapter 26, how about this one? He who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a dog by the ears. I like that one.

That's chapter 26, verse 17. Back, apparently, President Lyndon Johnson used to raise beagles. And there was a famous picture of him holding one of his beagles up by the ears.

And this verse was printed under it by someone. I don't know where. This was before there was internet, but I remember seeing it when I was in school.

A picture of Lyndon Johnson holding his dog by the ears. And this statement, you know, one who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own. I don't know if that was meant to be a statement about Vietnam or something.

I'm not sure, but here was this man taking his dog by the ears. In any case, what is it like to take a dog by the ears? I've never done it, frankly. We do have a nasty pit bull, our

neighbor has, that gets out sometimes.

It's very ferocious. I don't know if I could get a chance to grab it by the ears, but I'd rather grab it by the ears than have it grab me by any other part of my body. And it has acted like it's going sometimes.

I'd rather shoot it with a taser. But I suppose grabbing a dog by the ears is bringing it under your control. You know, if you're holding it by the ears, it can't bite you.

But on the other hand, how are you ever going to let it go? It's only getting angrier as you hold it. How do you get out of that situation? You know, you've got an angry dog and you've got it for the moment under control, but how are you going to get out of that? And I suspect that's what it means. You're passing by two people, they've got a quarrel going, and you decide to insert yourself into that quarrel.

It's not your own quarrel, it's someone else's quarrel, but you get involved. Now you're embroiled, and getting out of that is not going to be the easiest thing in the world. That's an interesting visual there.

In the same chapter, chapter 26, verse 18, it says, Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death, is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, I was only joking. Oh boy. Someone is caught in a lie, and they say, oh you took me seriously? I didn't mean that, that was just a joke.

They never let you know it was a joke until after they got caught in the lie. Like what? Oh yeah, yeah, it's like that senator who on YouTube was caught saying he was afraid that too much military buildup on Guam might topple the island and turn it over. Did you see that? Oh, it's viral.

This is an actual senator, Hank Johnson, and being interviewed on camera by, oh no, he's actually interviewing a general. And they're talking about the size of Guam. The senator keeps asking, so Guam is what size? The general says, I don't have the exact dimensions I can get them for you.

He says, well it's only really a narrow island, right? And he says, yes. He says, now aren't we concerned about adding too much military equipment there? And the general can't figure out why. And he says, well, we're he says, isn't there a possibility that it might capsize if we have too many? And the general says, we're not really.

That's not one of our concerns. He but no, he wasn't home schooled. He was not home schooled.

But but later on, he said, oh, he's just joking. But he said it was a totally straight face. And he didn't know he was joking until it was pointed out that islands actually don't capsize when you put things on.

I was joking. Oh, you took me seriously. Come on.

You think I'm that stupid? Yeah, I think so. Now, but the thing is, though, that was a more or less harmless stupidity. There are people who defeat and lie.

That's what's being spoken of here. He who deceives his neighbor and says, I was only joking. It's like you pass on a false rumor about someone and eventually they find out you've ruined their reputation.

And they took me seriously. I was just kidding. I don't know why they took me so seriously.

A person who does that is like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows and death. You know, you deceive people and then don't even take responsibility for your lie. You're just like, you're like dangerous.

You're dangerous. A madman who's throwing arrows and death and firebrands. That's somebody you don't want to get anywhere near.

And so you find a person who does that, keep your distance. In the same chapter, verse 21 says, As charcoal is to burning coals and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife. Strife, Solomon talks about a great deal.

And gossip, he kind of says the same thing about gossip or tailbears. But causing strife is something that God hates. God hates the one who causes division among brethren.

It says in Proverbs chapter 6, verses 16 through 19, I believe it is. Or 6 through 9, one or the other, but it's in chapter 6. But the point is that if somebody causes strife, that means they're dividing the family of God. They're causing fights and division, which are presumably unnecessary, but they're making it happen.

They may be based on something real, but that real thing might not be causing a problem until somebody stirs it up. There are people who've spoken unkindly to you or done things unjustly to you, and you've just kind of, you've just forgave them and just moved on. But somebody comes along and tries to get you angry at that person and get you stirred up and point out how unthoughtful that person was or how unjust that was or how much you've suffered at their hands and makes you angry, and then there's a strife that rises that wasn't intended or wasn't necessary.

The person who does that is like the wood or the fire. The fire is the strife. The person who stirs it up is like wood or coals, keeping the fire burning.

And that's also said of a gossip later on in Proverbs, but that's the contentious man who kindles strife is like charcoal is to burning coals and wood to fire. The next verse after that says, The words of a tale-bearer, which is a gossip, are like tasty trifles, and they go

down into the inmost body. We all find a gossip annoying if they're gossiping about us.

But there is a great attraction to gossip about other people that we know or know of. I mean, that's why there are tabloid newspapers at the checkstands. They're all about gossip.

What is gossip? Gossip is taking a purulent interest in somebody else's behavior, let's just say behavior they wouldn't be proud about, and passing that along to an audience that doesn't have anything to do with the situation. In other words, sometimes you have to point out that something's been wrong if you're talking to somebody who's part of the problem, and you can't help discussing the problem, or someone who presumably could be part of the solution. Maybe a counselor.

Maybe a judge in court. I mean, talking about what someone has done, if it's going to be productive, if it's going to be helpful. If you're talking to somebody who really needs to know or should know this, they're part of the problem, they need to stop being it, or they're part of the solution, they need to step up.

The point is, there are times when saying bad things about other people simply are the loving and good thing to do, but gossip is not that. Gossip is when you're talking negatively about a person who is not present, but who is also, they don't need to know. Some translations say whisperer.

And the old King James says tail-bearer, and many translations say gossip. And it is cowardly. I remember someone saying that he and another man were walking together, and man B began to say something negative about man C, who was not present, and man A said, well that's a terrible thing, let's go talk to him right now about this.

And suddenly man B didn't want to talk about it anymore. That's a good way to cut the tail off the tail-bearer, is to say, oh wow, is that true? Let's go talk to them right now. Let's go confront them about that.

Let's go correct them about that. And, you know, usually gossip is not the least bit interested in confronting the person, because, of course, maybe they don't even know if their story is true. They're passing on something they heard from someone else, but they're not afraid to besmirch the reputation of somebody else on information that may or may not be true.

Gossip is just really a bad thing. And yet, there's something about gossip that we like to hear. I know I've been sitting in a restaurant in a small town cafe, and someone I hear at another booth or at the counter, I hear them mention the name of somebody I know.

I start listening in. I go, what is it about them they know? And I don't know if it's gossip until I listen for a while, but once I know, I don't say, I don't want to hear this. Something about us likes to hear, likes to gather information about people.

Like we're the CIA or something. Anything they say can be used. We can use it against that person, or at least... It makes our thoughts of that person less charitable, and therefore it's not something to have.

But once you take away the charcoal and the wood, the fire will go out. But the words of the teller are said to be like tasty trifles, something that we, for some reason, find appealing to hear. And they go down deep inside.

They go down into the innermost part of the body, just like things you eat do. But of course, what goes down into the innermost part of your body is gossip. It is a negative report about somebody.

One that you perhaps cannot confirm or disconfirm, but it becomes part of the way you think about them, the part of the way you view them. Yeah, I mean... Next time you see that person, you don't say it out loud, you say, I heard something about this person. I don't trust this person.

This person's got something wrong that I heard about them. That would be the time to ask them. Jesus said, if your brother sins against you, go and tell everybody about it.

No, he said, if your brother sins against you, go to him alone. Fix it at that level if possible. You don't let it out to the public until there's nothing else for it.

If they don't hear you alone, you take two or three witnesses. That's still fairly private. And if they repent then, you don't tell anyone else.

You keep the thing. If you know something or suspect something about somebody that's unflattering, talk to them alone. If it turns out the information is correct and unflattering, and they ought to repent of it, then bring a few witnesses, one or two.

And only after they reject that, then Jesus, then tell it to the church. Then the church has to do something about that in the disciplinary sense. Watching the news or just looking at the internet, we're exposed all the time to information about people.

And if it's about people we don't like, we're very much inclined to accept the bad news about them. Well, I'm not so sure that we're not in the category of someone who's part of the problem or part of the solution. As voters, we might be a part of the solution.

If it's exposing some really dishonest things that somebody's doing and they're coming up for re-election, then potential voters are potentially part of the solution and the kind of people who deserve to be in the loop on that. However, if you hear something negative about a person that you know to be somewhat out of character for them, I mean a public person who's been in the public for a long time, you get a sense, a pattern of their behavior. And if you hear something about them from one of their critics that you think, that doesn't sound very much like them to me, then you should probably hold off

on repeating it until you can do more research and vet that information.

On the other hand, almost anything negative about people in power right now is credible. You know, and so we do tend to accept it without vetting. I myself would never repeat that negative information about somebody in public.

I've heard more than one source on it. In the Old Testament, the law was you cannot convict somebody unless it's been the witness of two or three witnesses. And Jesus himself said the witness of two is true.

So that's not always the case. Obviously, he's being very optimistic there. Two witnesses can both lie also.

But if you don't have two witnesses, you've only got one, you've got nothing. You know, you've got nothing. And this is true about church leaders too.

Paul said, don't receive an accusation against an elder but by two or three witnesses. Well, a lot of pastors get, you know, I hear a lot of stuff. People, they get it in their head that some minister is a false teacher because that person doesn't believe the same doctrines they do.

So, you know, whether it's, I hear those things about John MacArthur, about Greg Laurie, about famous preachers like that, who somebody disagrees with them on something, and so they got listed as a false teacher. I'm sure there's plenty of websites that have got me on there too, but then they're right. But anyway, the point is that unless I hear it from them, especially if they're a public figure, I want to hear from them.

I want to hear from at least two or more reliable witnesses, not just somebody who's got something in their craw against them. You just don't want to listen to that. Now, I don't know if we can, I don't think we can take the time to go any further today.

I have another whole half of this to go. But we're under no deadline to finish what we're doing. We can take a year on this if we want to.

But there's more I had intended to give, but not on the same point. We were going to go to a second point, but we might as well break it at this point. Anyone else have any thoughts? Some have been expressed.

Well, the second point is how Proverbs informs us of proper values. For example, there's a ton of Proverbs. This is better than that.

Wisdom is better than great wealth. You know, eating a crust of bread is better than being in a house, a big luxurious house with strife. I mean, there's a lot of things that basically point to, that compare two things very different from each other and say which one is better.

And a lot of times, it's counterintuitive. It's different than what a person actually thinks. A person might think it's better to be wealthy.

But then he said, well, okay, but if you got a house full of strife, you'd be happier even if you were poor and didn't have that going on. So, again, I make that category enlightened values. And part of that is the many Proverbs that talk about, but in the end, if you read the Proverbs, you'll find occasionally, this, this, this, this, but in the end, it's this.

In other words, at this point, this seems like an attractive way to go or an unattractive way to go, but in the end, it's this way. For example, there's a way that seems right to a man, but in the end, the end of it is the way of death. So, that's the kind of statement.

There's a lot of statements in Proverbs like that that compare different things. Of course, you might choose to take if you aren't taking the long view of things. If you're saying, I want immediate gratification, not delayed gratification, I'm going to do it this way.

He says, yeah, but there's an end to that. There's a future. There's an outcome that you need to be aware of, because that should dictate what you value.

The thing that, in the end, is going to make you better off, not what seems at the moment. Anyway, there's a lot of those. We're going to hold off on those until next time.

So, if anyone has any other questions or observations, we can take them. If not, we can close. Yes, Tim? At least the first nine chapters, yeah.

Right, right. The question is, the first nine chapters of Proverbs is not comprised of little sayings, but of an extended discussion of different things. For example, chapter eight depicts wisdom as a wise woman who's making her appeal to the sons of men who need wisdom.

There's several chapters where he's warning his son about, don't go to the strange woman. And there's extended talks about some of these things. Why is that? Well, I think the reason is because Proverbs was not written all at once.

Almost everyone would agree. In fact, some of the Proverbs, it says, were put together by Hezekiah's men. And the last chapters were written by Agur and King Lemuel.

They were not all put together at the same time. The Book of Proverbs is a collection of collections, probably. Now, the ones that are just wise sayings and aphorisms, those probably were collected by those sitting around Solomon.

Oh, that was smart. I'm going to put that down. You know, Solomon actually spoke 3,000 Proverbs.

We're told that in 1 Kings chapter 4, he spoke 3,000 Proverbs. But we only have, I don't

know, maybe perhaps close to 900 of them, if that, in the Book of Proverbs. So there's a lot more of where that came from.

So somebody was writing down the ones they thought were pretty good and they got collected. But then there were other portions, too. Like the first nine chapters, you're right, it's not made up of sayings like that.

It's made up of a father's counsel to his son about avoiding, you know, throwing in his lot with violent criminals and avoid the woman who tries to seduce him, but she's married and there's danger in that as well as evil in it. Certainly there's quite a lot there about wisdom, which is sometimes personified as speaking in chapter 1 and in chapter 8. It's not until you get past chapter 9 that you really get to that portion that has individual sayings. And in a sense, the first nine chapters could easily be seen as an introduction to collection.

You know, some of the things in the collection of sayings are mentioned and discussed preemptively in the first chapters, but especially those chapters are emphasizing the need to get wisdom and to search for wisdom and to give up anything you need to to get wisdom. It's all important. And then, of course, the collections are examples of wisdom.

I think those early chapters probably can be seen by whoever put them all together as a collection, an introduction to the whole collection. Lady wisdom? Well, the term is not used, but you see, wisdom and foolishness are personified as wisdom, just like other things are personified as female. A ship, you know, when you talk about a ship, personified or country.

Well, you might talk about the fatherland, but you're talking about your mother country and so forth. The personification of things that are not really human into human-like anthropomorphisms often likened to men, but more often to women, until, of course, very recently, usually, hurricanes and storms were given female names and someone decided that was sexist, so now they have to alternately give male or female names. But, yeah, they have them.

But the thing is that lots of times concepts, when they're personified, they might be personified as males, but in the case of Solomon's wisdom to his son, I think what Solomon's doing, he's talking to a young man and talking about how desirable wisdom is, as a young man would find a certain kind of woman desirable. Go for a wise one, because wisdom is like that. Wisdom is a very desirable word.

Foolishness is like a seductress. Foolishness makes its appeal, initially, but at the end of it leads to shale, he said. So, actually, he does describe actual seductresses.

He does describe in chapter 5 and in chapter 7 the seduction of a young man by an actual harlot in the red-light district that he describes. But you kind of see that

everything the harlot is saying is the opposite of what he has wisdom saying when she talks. And so it's like, I get the feeling this foolish woman is sort of like the personification of foolishness itself.

I mean, she certainly is a problem as a real woman, too, but a young man usually is attracted to a woman, especially if he's a single man looking for a partner. He's advised, go for wisdom. Let that be the partner you seek.

Let that be the treasure you seek. And so I think, again, because it's largely written to a young man, trying to get him to pursue wisdom, to personify wisdom as a very desirable woman in contrast to the very undesirable foolishness of a woman. I'm pretty sure that's why you find that characteristic.

Can I make a comment on how it strikes me? I just went back and looked at what you were trying to do. To me, it's kind of the difference between... I mean, truth can afford to be quiet because its persuasiveness is inherent in it. You don't have to bark it or shout people down with it.

Lies need to be loud. And in Proverbs, at least twice, if not three times in those early chapters, he talks about the seductress and says, she's loud and boisterous, you know. But then he does describe wisdom as lifting up her voice in the streets and making her appeal, too.

So, I mean, wisdom can be loud and sometimes should be. But the idea, I think, of that statement in the movie was that wisdom doesn't have to force itself on people. It can be gentle and quiet and a wise person can grasp it.

Yeah, the truth is that way.