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Proverbs Introduction (Part 3)



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

In this segment, Steve Gregg teaches about the book of Proverbs, focusing on the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. He highlights the importance of differentiating between various types of scripture and cautions listeners not to violate Proverbs' teachings. Drawing from various verses, Gregg emphasizes the value of seeking counsel and wisdom, being diligent, and avoiding unhealthy behavior. He also discusses the use of similes and metaphors in Proverbs to convey wisdom and understanding.

Transcript

We will be resuming our study of the book of Proverbs and of the wisdom literature in general of the Old Testament, but primarily the book of Proverbs will be our focus. Because it is the largest wisdom book, well, I don't suppose it's as large as Job, but Job is focused on one subject primarily. Proverbs covers the whole gamut of human concerns and practical issues of life, and it is the biggest collection of wisdom sayings that you'll find in the Bible.

And if you've lost track of where we are in our notes, you'll find we're picking up under what's Roman numeral three, and under that, B. There's generalities, not universalities. Not always true, but usually. I made this point in an earlier lecture in this series already, either last time or the previous time.

And that is that we might have a tendency to come to all scripture with the same assumptions, as if it's all the same kind of scripture. And it is not. There's different genres of literature, and you don't and shouldn't interpret, for example, poetry with exactly the same kind of assumptions that you would take to a more literal historical narrative.

When you come to a book like the book of Revelation or Daniel, which we would call apocalyptic literature, that's a genre all its own with different assumptions that we bring to it. And the big mistake many people make is they just make no distinction at all between different kinds of scripture. They just say, well, it's the word of God.

So they look at it and take it however they want to take it or however they think it should

be literally understood. And that's not always a responsible way to study the scripture because the books of scripture were written individually. No one sat down and said, let's write a Bible.

But these were books individually written at different times in for different audiences, sometimes with different assumptions and certainly in different styles and genres. And when we're looking at wisdom literature, it has its own set of criteria for application different than, say, a prophetic word or a promise of God or even the commands or laws of God. There are definitely things that the Proverbs instruct us to do, but they are not like laws.

They are more like advice. And if you're wise, you want good advice and Proverbs provides excellent advice, but it's not as if they're the same thing as a command. Now, having said that, I want to be very clear.

It would probably be the exception that you would ever violate something the Proverbs say without being stupid and maybe simply so. You know, it can be simple to be stupid or to be foolish unnecessarily. I mean, wisdom, as I said, is the way that God reveals his will.

But wisdom is stated out in principles generally rather than specific statutes. And the application of the principle requires some wisdom, requires some spirituality. And therefore, you don't just take a Proverbs and say, OK, that's the law and therefore I will inflexibly always do what it says.

Because if you do that, there will be times when you'll find conflict between the instructions and you won't be able to do both. Because sometimes the wise thing to do in a situation is A and sometimes the wise thing in a situation to do is B. And Proverbs will have both statements. And in some cases A and B can't both be done.

And so the idea is you're getting counsel, you're getting a revelation of observations and generalities made by a wise and observant man. Counseling his son. That's what this is.

This is counsel that Solomon mostly wrote for his son, hoping his son would be wiser than he was. And so these are generalities. Likewise, when they say that if you do such and such a thing, then you'll get such and such a result.

This is not the same thing as a promise. This is an observation. This is what a wise man has observed to be the case.

Generally speaking, when people do this, this is what happens. And so that's what a wisdom saying is. It's not quite the same as a command or a promise or something like that.

They are generalities. For example, Proverbs 15.1. It says, A soft answer turns away

wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. What that means is, of course, in relationship with somebody, especially a relationship that might have the potential to be volatile or perhaps already is volatile.

Perhaps somebody's angry at you already. There is wrath there. That the best way you should respond is to answer softly.

And your soft answer to them will tend to diffuse their anger, will turn away their wrath, will make them happier with you than otherwise. If you respond in a harsh way, you're only going to aggravate the situation. Now, this is common sense, you think, and that's exactly what wisdom is.

Wisdom is common sense. It's just amazing. We who have been raised with some biblical literacy assume a certain amount of common sense.

And then you see a generation come up with no knowledge of the Bible and you're amazed at how the simplest things that you take for granted, they don't even know them. It never crosses their minds. And that's because, you know, as it says in one of the passages in Jeremiah, they have forsaken the word of the Lord.

What wisdom is in them? You know, when you don't have the word of God informing you, all you've got is your own fallen mind. And so, the wisdom of God revealed in Proverbs, in some cases, you say, well, who wouldn't know that? You really have to wonder, who wouldn't? But some people don't, apparently, because you can see they don't behave according to this wisdom. They're not smart.

They don't know God's ways, the ways of peace they have not known, it says in Romans 3. And so, a soft answer is said to tend to turn away anger from someone. In an argument, if someone's getting angry, if you just soften your tone, humble yourself more, maybe even let them have the last word. It's just, you know, you just don't stir up the strife.

Harsh words are going to just make things worse. Now, that's an observation. It's not a promise.

Because almost all of us here, perhaps every one of us, have had situations where somebody was angry at us, and we spoke softly and kindly and conciliatory through the entire conversation or the entire relationship, and they were just determined to be angry, and you didn't turn away their wrath. And there's even cases where you can speak harshly to someone, but because they're a gracious person, strife does not arise. So, the statement is not universally true, but it's certainly almost always true.

If you want to diffuse anger, then give a soft answer. That's what wisdom would say. If you want to diffuse anger, you're stupid, you're unwise, to pursue that goal by giving harsh statements or provocative statements back to somebody who's already angry at

you.

That's an example of how the Proverbs give generalities. Usually, these things are true. Not always.

And it's not really pretending that it will always be true. In chapter 10 of Proverbs, and verse 4, it says, Well, I wouldn't be surprised if Paris Hilton deals with a slack hand, but she'll probably never be poor. And some people are very diligent, but they happen to live in a third world country or some place where they're oppressed by governmental policies, and they work hard and they never get rich.

It's not always going to be true, but it is the tendency. It is what anyone who's paying attention to the world would conclude, is that you want to be poor, be lazy. You want to be rich, be diligent.

That's generalities, but a very common generalities. It's not like it's rarely so, it's generally so. Chapter 10, verse 22, says, The blessing of the Lord makes one rich.

And again, that's a generality. God blesses some people. He blessed Jesus, but Jesus wasn't rich.

He blessed the apostles, but they weren't rich. Maybe we could say rich in another sense. Rich in faith, rich in spiritual blessings.

That would be true. And in some cases, we have to actually look at Old Testament statements of this kind through a New Testament lens that way, because in the Old Testament, most of the blessings that God promised Israel were economic or material blessings. Long life on earth, much cattle, many children, good crops.

These are the kinds of promises God gave. But the promises that God gave to Israel, because Israel is a natural nation, a physical entity, we could see them as a type of the spiritual blessings that apply to a spiritual Israel, to a spiritual people of God. Paul said in Ephesians chapter 1 that God has blessed us with all spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

So, certainly we could be said to be rich in a sense, even if we don't have money. The one who has the blessing of God is rich for only that. Rich that they're blessed, but maybe not rich in outward circumstances.

But the point here is that Solomon is talking about physical riches in all likelihood. Similarly, when he says a righteous man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, he's probably thinking in terms of the righteous man will be prosperous economically enough, but when he dies, there will be enough for his children and even for another generation to benefit from the estate. That's not always going to be true in material things, certainly for us, because God often calls us to forsake what we have, to adopt a

lifestyle that is itself deliberately not a wealthy one that leaves a lot to one's children.

But if God calls someone to that, it's not a contradiction to this. After all, we can spiritualize a proverb like that, too. A godly man leaves an inheritance to his children's children.

Well, certainly a godly man leaves a good example and a spiritual blessing on his family that can extend for many generations. That's the inheritance or the heritage of those who fear the Lord, is that his children and his children's children receive the trickle-down benefits of that wealth. Yet, when Solomon is talking about physical riches and so forth, it's different than a promise that you can always say is true.

The idea that if you're wise, you'll live long is another example of this phenomenon. In chapter 3, verses 7 and 8, it says, Do not be wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and depart from evil.

It, that is, fearing the Lord and departing from evil, will be health to your flesh, that is, your body will be healthy, and strength to your bones. And then in the same chapter, in verse 16, it says, Length of days is in her, that is, wisdom's, right hand. In her left hand, riches and honor.

Now, it's saying that if you have wisdom, with wisdom you will receive length of days, a long life, health to your flesh, riches and honor. Now, these are glowing promises, just the kind of promises that the Word of Faith people would say are literal promises to those who have enough faith. I'm not a Word of Faith person, I don't believe those kinds of promises are literal promises made to people with faith.

But, you see, what it is saying is, the man who wants to live long, the man who wants to be healthy, the guy who lives a godly life, is doing the wise thing if he's hoping to live long. Now, you might be a godly person, like Stephen, the first martyr, and die when you're a teenager, because you got a martyr. There's not a guarantee that godly people will live long.

Jesus didn't live that long, and he was as godly as they come. There are many Christian martyrs who died young, and there are Christians who die young of disease, cancer, and other things, accidents. A friend of mine lost two teenage daughters who were very godly girls in an accident.

A drunk driver hit their van and killed them both. They were godly girls, they died young. So, when you see that wisdom will give you length of days, and bodily health and so forth, this is not always going to be true.

But, when you think about it, it's almost proverbial when you see someone, and they say their age, and they're much older than they look, and someone says, well, time has been good to you, must be clean living, you know. That was the old saying, clean living is what

makes you seem so healthy and young. Well, there's some truth to that.

You don't drink a lot of alcohol, and you don't waste yourself on drugs, and basically pleasurable but unhealthy behavior. It does make a difference in the age you die at, all other things being equal, of course. If you're not out causing trouble unnecessarily with people, and causing fights, you might not get yourself killed in a barroom brawl.

A wise man who follows the ways of God, he avoids certain dangers that sinful behavior invites to the life. And, one of those dangers has the consequence of short life, and bad health, and so forth. A lot of people who are dying of AIDS, or who are dying even of cancer, or many other major killers, or who are dying in accidents, in many cases it's directly due to lifestyle choices, which they would have avoided if they had been wise and followed the ways of God.

But, not in every case. Now, these generalizations, because they are generalizations, and not absolutes, they sometimes are seen in tension with each other. As I said earlier, sometimes the wise course is one thing, and in a very similar circumstance, the wise course might be another thing, depending.

You're never going to violate the general principles of wisdom, but the application to situations is not always going to be identical. And, when you look at Proverbs 26, verses 4 and 5, I've made reference to this in an earlier lecture, because people often bring this up, it's perplexing to people. It says in Proverbs 26, verses 4 and 5, Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him.

Next verse, answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes. Now, sometimes people point out, the Bible can't be the word of God, it contradicts itself right there. And, you know, I don't think the person who says that is thinking very clearly.

Somebody who wrote this knew that those were opposite statements. It's not like they had a memory lapse. After they wrote verse 4, they forgot what they said and then wrote the opposite thing in verse 5. There's obviously an intentionality about putting these two seemingly contradictory, paradoxical.

There's something paradoxical about it. Why do these two commands opposite of each other, sit next to each other? Well, I think the answer is simply this. Wisdom would tell you that a fool who's saying foolish things to you, there are times when you might need to answer back in such a way that resembles him, so that he sees the foolishness of what he's saying.

And there's other times, perhaps more frequently, that you shouldn't. Lest you just reduce yourself to his level. Now, it'd be nice if you just always knew, you should never answer someone who's being foolish.

Sometimes people make false accusations against you and you think, well, as a

Christian, should I just absorb it and say nothing? Or should I go out there and defend the truth of the matter? A story is told about Jonathan Edwards, the famous revivalist of the great American awakening, back in the 1700s, that he came under some apparently false criticism as he was pastoring a church and scandals circulated about him that were apparently not true. And he would not answer in his own defense. He just let the rumors fly and he gave no answer whatsoever.

He even lost his pulpit over it, lost his ministry temporarily. Eventually, he was restored and vindicated by some means. I don't remember the details, but the point is, the memorable thing about it was that his policy was he wouldn't answer.

Even though the accusations were totally false, he just left his defense in God's hands. To a large extent, Jesus did that too when he was on trial. But that's not the only thing you can do.

Once when Paul was on trial, he began his defense by saying, I've lived my life in all good conscience before God and men. He said nothing wrong. And the high priest who was judging him told the soldier, say, I shall strike that man.

And the guy hit Paul on the face. And Paul said, God will strike you, you whitewash wall, because you stood in judgment against me according to the law. And you break the law by having me struck.

Because there's a law that said you should do no injustice in judgment. And so, I mean, he answered that. Now, he did retract that, but not because it was an inappropriate statement.

They said, do you answer a high priest that way? And Paul said, well, I didn't know he was a high priest. The Bible does say you're not supposed to speak evil of the ruler of the people. But Paul, apparently a spiritual man, certainly a mature Christian, did not feel initially it was wrong to rebuke and point out the error of the fool who was judging him.

And there are many times when Paul defended himself against false accusations. He wrote the whole book of Second Corinthians to do that. And portions of other epistles to defend himself against false charges.

So sometimes, frankly, the Christian has to be led by the spirit, not by rules. There's not a rule. Never answer a fool according to his quality.

Or a rule, always answer a fool according to his quality. But a rule is always do the wise thing in the circumstance. Do the spiritual thing.

Do the thing that God leads you to do. But know that there are times when it would be a mistake to answer back in the right way. And know that there are times when it would be a mistake not to.

And so, wisdom is something that has to reside in you. You don't just get a rule book that says in every situation just do that. That's what legalism is.

That's what almost all religion is. Religion is legalism for the most part. And people like it.

Because it's a secure thing to think, okay, I know what to do in every situation. I don't have to ever use any personal judgment, any discernment. I don't ever have to be spiritual or have to know what God's saying.

I just have to know the rules. As long as I have a mini graph sheet that's got all the rules for every situation. Life is simple.

It might be difficult, but it's simple. It's not hard to figure out what I have to do. And some people find that very secure.

The book of Proverbs isn't going to provide that for you. Wisdom is not about memorizing the rules. Wisdom is about sensing what is the right course of events to reach the desirable end in this situation.

That's what wisdom, of course, is. Another example of, we could say, generalizations that are in tension with each other is if you would compare chapter 15, verse 22, with chapter 19, verse 21. In chapter 15 of Proverbs, verse 22, it says, without counsel plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors, they are established.

Chapter 19 and verse 21. There are many plans in a man's heart. Nevertheless, the Lord's counsel, that will stand.

Now, what it's saying is, if you have enough counselors in the first place, your plans will succeed. You want to guarantee that your plans succeed? Just get enough counselors on the job. And there's the statement there.

With good counsel, your plans will be established. But then, it also says, not necessarily. What God allows sovereignly to happen is what will be established.

People's plans sometimes, well, are not the final authority on things. No matter how many good counselors you have, it's not your plan, but God's plan. There are many plans in a man's heart.

Nevertheless, the Lord's counsel, that will stand. So, on one hand, it says, you want your plans to be successful? Get good counsel. On the other, it says, but, really, God's counsel is what's going to happen, not what you come up with.

So, God can, in other words, veto anything. There's not an absoluteness here. And you'll find that to be true in a number of places.

For example, there are a number of Proverbs that talk about the danger of going surety for a stranger. And that the person who goes surety for a stranger is a fool, and he's going to hurt for it, and it's just something wise people don't do. What does that mean? That means you, like, co-sign on a loan for someone that you're not sure what their credit's like, and you're just taking the risk that, you know, they may not be really reliable, and you may end up having to eat it and pay the bills for him, and so forth.

That's a foolish position to put yourself in, it says. On the other hand, many of the Proverbs say that you should have mercy on the poor, and have compassion on the poor. And there might be times when doing so means that you do impoverish yourself, or at least make a sacrifice in your own financial situation for somebody else.

So, are you supposed to take risks, you know, for the sake of helping poorer people? Or are you supposed to just protect your assets and never show mercy? Well, both things are suggested. And frankly, you know, we face that kind of a dilemma lots of times in our modern life when we see a person begging at the bottom of an on-ramp and saying, you know, hungry, anything helps, God bless you, as our sign says, always. And they used to say, we'll work for food, but they don't say that anymore, because everyone found out when they offered work they wouldn't, so no one believes that part anymore.

But they do say they're hungry, and we can maybe believe that. And you think, well, what should I do? Jesus said, give to him that asks you. I mean, should I help these people? And then on the other hand, you hear that they make about 80 bucks an hour doing what they do, and I don't make that much doing what I do.

So, you think, well, what can I say? And, you know, are they going to buy drugs with the money I give them, or what? On the other hand, maybe they really are hungry. They look like genuine down-and-outers. What are you going to say? You've got to use wisdom.

Sometimes God's Spirit will just say, give them something. Other times he'll warn you off of it. There's times when you need to be merciful, and there's times when you need to be careful.

And that's, you have Proverbs that would advise both directions. So, these generalities sometimes are in tension with each other, which requires that the person who is applying wisdom has to possess wisdom internally, and exercise wisdom from an internal kind of discernment. But these are, the Proverbs are distillations of wisdom that apply to most circumstances or certain circumstances.

Some of the Proverbs are what I have called here pregnant specifics. That is, they're statements that talk about one situation, but you can see immediately that they're pregnant with application to many situations of a similar sort. And, for example, Proverbs 25, 16.

The examples I give here are sometimes some of my favorite Proverbs. Have you found honey? Eat only as much as you need, lest you be filled with it and vomit. Now, that may be literally true.

You like honey? Now, we have sweeteners that we might like even more than honey. If you're on a health kick, you'd probably prefer honey. But most people have a doubt taste for white sugar and junk like that.

So, when you have a taste for white sugar, sometimes honey isn't quite as appealing. But in biblical times, they didn't have sugar, and they had very little to sweeten stuff with. And honey is always in the Old Testament given as the epitome of that which is pleasurable to the palate.

You know, speaking of the Word of God, it says, more to be desired are they than gold. May they much find gold is sweeter than honey in the honeycomb. It's always honey is the emblem of that which is pleasurable to the human palate.

And whether we find it so or not, that's what it means to the readers here. That's what it is to them. It says, have you found honey? Eat only as much as would seem appropriate.

Be moderate in your enjoyment of it, because you can get too much of a good thing. You can get nauseated if you eat too much of something that tastes great. I myself have found that in my older age, I don't have as much of a sweet tooth as I used to.

And I know that when I buy Reese's cups, they come, unless you buy them at Costco, they come in two in a package. If you buy them at Costco, they're 400 in a package. But I find that when I eat a Reese's cup, there's little that is more pleasurable to my palate than that.

When I take them out of the second one, it's almost like too much. It's like it's great the first one. The second one, it's like, if I finish the second one, I usually do, I feel like, yuck, I wish I hadn't had two.

You know, it's something that's really good when you begin. If you just overdo it, it can sicken you. It can turn bad on you.

And this is a specific thing about eating, you know, sweet food. But it's pregnant with all kinds of applications, because there's so many things that a little bit of it is pleasurable and good. Too much of it is really, it turns bad on you.

You know, if a little salt is a good thing, how about a whole canister of salt? No, it's not such a good thing. And it's true of many things in life. And we can see that's true.

And I'm quite sure that when Solomon wrote this, he wasn't thinking only of the palate. I'm sure that he was thinking of this as an emblem of a whole category of things in life

that you would find pleasurable if you're moderate. About activities, you'll be moderate.

You'll enjoy them the right amount, as much as is sufficient for you, he says. But if you go overboard on it, even that which is so good turns out to be a bad thing. This can be true even about a lot of relationships.

You know, loving your children, loving your wife or your husband. That's a pleasurable, wonderful thing. But it can become an idolatry if it becomes, you know, obsession.

If it becomes all there is, if it becomes all you're about is that thing, then you become kind of a neurotic, strange, dangerous parent or have some fatal attraction or something going on there. Because what is good in its proper amount becomes really bad when it becomes excessive, okay? Another example of what I would call a pregnant specific, something that's a very specific situation described but full of application to other situations would be in Proverbs 26, 27. It says, whoever digs a pit will fall into it.

And whoever rolls a stone will have it roll back on him. Now, you know that's not exactly true. I mean, there are cases where people who dig pits and they don't fall into it.

But what it's saying is essentially, if you dig a pit, it can be your downfall. You can fall into your own pit. If you're rolling a stone up a hill, gravity may cause it to get away from you and it may roll back on you.

Now, the idea in this case, of course, is you're doing something probably maliciously. You're digging a pit to catch someone else. You're rolling a stone to drop on somebody else, it would appear.

And you think of the Roadrunner cartoons when you think of this kind of thing. You've got the coyote setting all these traps for the Roadrunner and they always spring back on him. He never seems to die when he should.

But he always gets smashed and crushed and blown up. And the thing that he says, those are illustrations of what Solomon's Harmony. You dig a pit for somebody and you may fall into yourself.

Now, this is true of many things. Haman, in the book of Esther, he built a gallows to hang Mordecai on. And in the way things turned out, because Mordecai was righteous inside of God and Haman was wicked, God providentially turned it around that Haman got impaled on his own gallows.

I say impaled because gallows is a euphemism. They didn't have gallows in Persia. They had torture stakes.

They impaled people, which is like making someone into a shish kebab is what it's like. And so gallows, we think of the gallows, the old west, they hang the horse thieves. But in

Persia, they impaled them on a sharp pole.

And so here he sets up what's translated as a gallows or a gibbet for Mordecai. And then he, of course, gets impaled on it himself. A good example of this.

That is, when you seek to do something malicious to someone else, you may be the one who suffers more than they do from it. You know, when you get angry at somebody who did something to you, a lot of times they don't even know about it. I once in a while hear about somebody who's been angry at me for a long time, and I didn't even know they were.

I think, well, they've been torturing themselves. They're trying to punish me by being angry at me. I'm not feeling punished.

I didn't even know they were angry. When I find out about it, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for them, because unless I've done something wrong to them, if they're angry for nothing, they're the ones who are suffering, not me.

And so, you know, when you're seeking to be malicious and hurtful to somebody else, it actually often will hurt you more. You might be the one who suffers, not them. Another example of this kind of phenomenon, I would say, would be found in chapter 27, verse 14.

This is a funny one, too. A lot of the Proverbs have an element of humor in them. He who blesses his friend with a loud voice rising early in the morning, it will be counted a curse to him.

Now, blessing your friend means, you know, when you bless someone in biblical times, when you say, God bless you, you know, you pronounce a blessing or something, everyone wants that. Everyone wants to be blessed. You know, it was a friendly thing.

Jesus said, bless those who curse you. That means they're cursing you. They're doing something bad to you.

You give them something good. You give them, you bless them. Well, when you bless somebody, that's a good thing.

But if you do it with a loud voice early in the morning, when they'd rather be sleeping, then they'll think of it as a cursing. It's you're uttering a blessing. You're intending well, but it'll end up being absorbed as a curse.

It'll be received as something unwelcome to them. What's this mean? Well, it means, of course, that your good intentions may not be received if they are insensitively delivered. You know, if you act with a good intention, but you haven't thought through yet whether this is really the appropriate thing that this person will appreciate.

You're not aware of their circumstances or what kinds of things they may want. You're just feeling good. So you just want to be singing praises to the Lord while your neighbors, your roommates turn to sleep or something, you know, you say, well, everyone should enjoy hearing praise to the Lord.

Well, maybe they would under other circumstances. But the truth is that everything that people would like having done for them or to them at some time is something that they wouldn't like at another time. And so timing has got to be appropriate.

A blessing isn't always a blessing. If it's at inappropriate time or in a situation where it's insensitive to what somebody else really, even the person you're hoping to bless, but their state of mind may be such that you're not taking into consideration that you're annoying them. Some cultures are like this about offering food to you.

In fact, I have to say the Korean culture has been this way sometimes because I speak at Korean bases a lot and they always want to keep big piles of food. I mean, you know, when I'm the speaker at a YWAM base, if it's a Korean base, I come to the dining hall and they've got this huge pile of food for every meal. I say, you know, I don't eat this much food.

I usually only eat two meals a day and they're not this big, you know? They say, oh, no, no. They bring plate after plate after plate. One time I was in New York City speaking for a Korean YWAM base there and the hospitality lady at the base, it was just a house.

They didn't have a good kitchen. So she took me out to a Korean barbecue restaurant and she said, you like Korean barbecue? I said, oh, I love Korean barbecue. So she took me out to this barbecue restaurant.

She ordered in Korean. I couldn't hear what she was saying. Sat at this table.

Anyone who's been to a Korean barbecue restaurant knows there's a, I think other Asian cultures have similar things where they have a flame in the middle of the table and they put the meat on there and stuff. And the woman's bringing, you know, serving bowl after serving, there were 30 serving bowls full of different kinds of vegetables and rice and meat and stuff on the table. And I was thinking, well, I hope this lady who's with me is going to eat a lot because I can't eat a tenth of this.

Turned out she'd ordered just for me. That was, she wasn't eating. And I thought, I was so embarrassed.

It was, it was uncomfortable to me. Everything was delicious, but I could eat a hundredth of it, perhaps. I mean, honestly, maybe, maybe a thirtieth of it.

And sometimes they're just trying to be hospitable. They're just trying to be gracious, just trying to bless you. But if that's not what you are comfortable with, it only makes

you embarrassed and so forth.

I'm not trying to criticize Koreans. Every culture has this thing, but it's an example, a lot, and a lot of cultures do this very thing. I lived with a guy briefly when I was younger and single who was from another culture.

And every time I would come into the house, he'd say he'd be cooking something. Now, you know, I say, hey, you want some of this? I say, no, thanks. I'm fine.

And then a few minutes later, he'd come back and say, you want some of this? I say, no, I'm good. Thanks. And a few minutes later, he'd come back and say, you want some? And I said, and after, this happened all the time.

And eventually I said, you know, I, you know, when I say I don't want something, I don't want it. You know, why do you keep asking me, you know? And he said, oh, well, where I come from, if you offer someone something, they're supposed to say no the first time, even if they really want it. And if they're really polite, they'll say no the second time.

So if you say no the first two times, it may be that you really want it. So they, to me, it was just annoying. To him, he was just trying to be gracious.

He was just trying to bless me, you know, but to me, it was accounted as a curse. I mean, you see that same kind of culture in the Bible, like when Abraham's negotiating with the Hittites to buy the cave of Machpelah. He says, I'll pay you whatever it's worth.

And the man who owns it says, oh, no, it's yours. Just take it. It's free.

Well, Abraham knew better than to accept. That was the culture, you know? And Abraham said, no, no, I insist on paying. And the guy said, well, if you insist on paying, it's worth this much money, which was a huge inflated price because he knew Abraham was a rich guy and could afford it and was in trouble because he had a very, a body that was rotting.

And so the guy took advantage of him and charged him with it. But the guy, a person, just take it. What does that have between us? It's yours.

But Abraham dare not accept that offer. That was not in the culture. That's just what you do.

You just say, oh, you can have it. But they're not supposed to accept it, you know, and sort of like that food thing, ask you three times before you've done. That's all those are all, to my mind, examples of this same principle that, you know, he that blesses his neighbor rising early in the morning with a loud voice is counted a curse.

A blessing is a blessing, but not always. One is a blessing, not a blessing. When it's loud and disturbing, you know, and a wise person will take into consideration what really will

be a blessing and not just what I feel will bless somebody.

I need to consider what will really be a blessing. See, sometimes we're trying to bless people. We're just trying to get some good feelings ourselves.

You ever notice that when you give a gift at Christmas, you're watching very carefully to see if the person likes it. Is it because you really care how much they wanted one of those things? Maybe you might be, you know, you say, I just know they want it. I can't wait to see how much they like it.

Or is it just thinking, am I going to receive approval from them? Are they going to like this enough to like me for giving them this? And if it looks like they don't like it enough, you feel kind of you feel kind of like rejected or something. We really want to. We want to bless people, but we have our own ideas.

Of what will be a blessing, and it's important for us to kind of pay attention to what somebody else may actually count to be a blessing when they receive it. Then there are what I refer to as striking similes. What is a simile? Everyone knows what a simile is? It's like a metaphor, right? What's the difference between a metaphor and a simile? Jesus said, I am the door to the sheepfold.

That's a metaphor. If he had said, I am like a door, that'd be a simile. Similes and metaphors are really the same thing.

They're just stated differently. Because when Jesus said, I am the door, he didn't mean I literally am a door. He really meant I am like a door.

But if you don't use the word like, it's a metaphor. If you say like, or I am similar to, then it's a simile. That's how you remember.

A simile has the word similar or something equivalent. Like, I am like, or I'm similar to this. And so a simile is when you say this is like that.

And it's usually, you don't usually use similes unless it's something that's not at all obvious that it's like that. And you're observing a similarity between two things that is maybe not so obvious that it's worth pointing out. You've seen a similarity that maybe not everyone would see.

You see some correspondence, some parallels between two things. And so there's a lot of those kinds of similes in the book of Proverbs. Again, a lot of them have humor in them.

Chapter 10, verse 26 says, As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is a sluggard to him who sends him. In other words, a sluggard is like this. Like what? Well, like vinegar is to the teeth or like smoke is to the eyes.

What is vinegar like to the teeth? What is smoke like to the eyes? Irritating, obviously. The idea is it's an irritation. When you have somebody you've sent on to give them an errand to do.

When you've given them a job and you want to just walk away and make sure and hope the job gets done. And he's a sluggard. He doesn't do it.

He doesn't. He's lazy. He either doesn't do it.

He does it the worst, you know, most sloppy way or whatever, just because he's not diligent. It's irritating. It's like having smoke in your eyes.

That's that's what we call a simile. In chapter 11 and verse 22, I've always liked this one. As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, so is a lovely woman who lacks discretion.

You see the similarity? Maybe not. That's the point. A proverb points out a similarity you might not have seen.

And even when you're told, you might think, huh? How is a lovely woman without discretion like a ring in a pig's nose? Well, for one thing, a ring seems very inappropriate in a pig's nose. The two things seem unlike each other. Usually rings are in princesses' noses or women's noses or something in that culture.

They wear nose rings. Uh, as much as modern women wear earrings. But a pig wouldn't normally, you wouldn't decorate a pig with jewelry, usually.

But there's more to it than that. The idea is, if someone offered you a gold ring, you'd think that was a nice thing. But if it came with a pig attached and you weren't looking, you weren't running a farm, you know, you might think, well, I think I'll pass on the ring then.

Because, because the ring is a nice thing, but the pig is a much bigger offensive thing. If you have to receive something that's a large offensive thing with a small consolation, you might pass. And a woman who's beautiful, that's a desirable thing.

Men appreciate a beautiful woman. Even women appreciate a beautiful woman. That's why advertisers sell cosmetics to women and stuff, by using models for view.

Because even women take something seriously when it's advertised with a beautiful model. I mean, everybody's impressed with a beautiful woman, for some reason. And so, that being so, a lovely woman is a positive thing.

But if she lacks discretion, in other words, if she's a fool, and that would, in Proverbs, have moral, you know, moral implications too. She doesn't know how to govern her life, righteously or wisely. She's a fool.

Well, then a man might want to pass on it, you know. When a man sees a lovely woman, the first impression is, wouldn't mind having a woman like that. But then when she opens her mouth and she's a fool, or you can tell by her behavior that she's a fool, you think, I don't think she's that attractive, you know.

It's like the unattractiveness of her character, being bad, overwhelms any sense of attractiveness of her looks. And like the unattractiveness of the pig, cancels out the attractiveness of the ring in the nose. The ring in the nose of a pig is attractive, but small compared to the big ugly pig.

And so, this is what he is saying. He's saying that, yes, everyone knows a beautiful woman is a lovely thing, except all too often, a lovely woman is also lacking in good character, and that's rather repulsive. So, even a gold ring can be repulsive if it comes with a pig attached.

And even a lovely woman can be repulsive if it comes with foolishness and bad character. That's the simile that he makes here. Then in chapter 25, verse 13, like the cold of snow in time of harvest, is a faithful messenger to those who send him.

For, he tells why, for he refreshes the soul of his masters. Now, this is like the opposite of what we learned about the fool and the vinegar and the teeth and so forth. Because, you send a messenger and he's a slugger, and he doesn't do the job you send him to do, it's like vinegar to your teeth or smoking your eyes.

But, the guy you send is always reliable. You send a guy on an errand, and you know he's going to do it, or you find out that he did it well. It's a relief.

It's refreshing. I've known a number of business owners who have had the unpleasant task of trying to hire a workforce, and a great number of them, especially in the last few decades I've talked to, said it's incredibly hard to find reliable help. Everyone wants to take extra long coffee breaks.

Everyone wants to do the least amount of work they can, go to the bathroom four times between coffee breaks. I mean, Rob from the employer, when no one's looking, it's just very hard these days, apparently. I've never been an employer, but I've talked to enough, it's really risky.

When you hire people. Nowadays, you don't even know if you're going to hire someone who's going to try to sue you for something. In fact, that's why they're trying to get hired.

They want to get into the company so they can do something to get themselves in trouble that they can sue you for. I mean, it's a scary thing to have to trust other people to do things for you. But, how refreshing it is when you trust somebody, they turn out to be trustworthy.

And, you know, hey, I can give this person this job. I don't have to worry about it. I don't think he's going to stab me in the back or rob me or sue me or neglect the work or take the easy way.

He's got some character. And that's like snow, like cold snow in the time of harvest. Well, the harvest is late summer.

In the Middle East, that's a very hot season. If you get a strange, unseasonal snow at that time, you actually like it. You're glad for it.

You think, wow, a break from the heat. And that's the simile here. The trusted messenger is like that, refreshing to his master.

Refreshes the soul of his master. This chapter has quite a few of them. In chapter 25, verse 19, says, Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble, sort of the flip side of that, is like a bad tooth or a foot out of joint.

Now, this is really graphic. My dad's getting pretty old. He's in his 80s.

And one day, he was sitting eating dinner, and he was chewing his tooth, his food. That happens, I guess, to people when they get old. And you don't expect that.

You kind of expect your teeth to stay attached while you're chewing your food. Even, you know, it wasn't even something especially chewy. It's just his tooth's time to go.

You know, it was a bad tooth. And, or, you know, if you bite down on something, you don't realize you've got a crack in your tooth or something like that. Or you don't realize there's a nerve ending, you know, and you drink something cold, you know.

It surprises you. You don't expect that. You kind of expect a normal routine with your teeth.

You put food in your mouth, they masticate, you swallow, all goes well. You don't even remember you even have teeth. You just do it routinely.

Don't even think about it. You're trusting in your teeth to do something reliably without drawing much exceptional attention to themselves. But when you end up having a bad tooth, it's painful.

And extremely surprising and disappointing, obviously. And a foot out of joint, similarly. You jump out of bed and you don't know you've got a sprained ankle from something.

Okay, you're down on the ground. I sometimes tell the story of back when I lived in Boulder Creek, in California, up in the mountains. I was running a discipleship school up there in 1975.

And two of the students and I were trying to get to town, about 20 minutes drive, I think, as I recall, from Boulder Creek to Santa Cruz. We're hitchhiking. And a neighbor stopped to pick us up, he and his wife and their Porsche.

And a Porsche only has front seats, no back seats, but there are three adult men climbing into the luggage compartment in the back to ride for 20 minutes to Santa Cruz. We were glad for the ride, better than standing outside. And we were glad to be picked up.

But back where a couple of suitcases usually would go, there were three grown men with their knees around their ears. And sat there for 20 minutes. So we got to our destination, he let us down.

I jumped out of the car and went right down to the ground. I had no feet. My feet had almost gone, you know.

Because they'd fallen asleep. I didn't know it. You don't expect that, you know.

I didn't know my feet were asleep until I tried to use them. You usually count on them being there, and you just kind of act like they're going to be there. But when they're not there, it's really embarrassing.

And when you've got a foot out of joint or a bad tooth, these things are things that you normally rely on to be regularly reliable. And when they suddenly are not, it's not only embarrassing, it can be a pain and it can be damaging. And so it is when you trust an unfaithful man.

You trust your teeth to be there for you. You trust your feet to be there for you. But if they're not faithful, they're not reliable, there's harm suffered from it.

Same thing when you trust a man to be reliable, and he's not. The next verse, 20. Proverbs 25, 20.

Like one who takes away a garment in cold weather, and like vinegar on soda. Now you know what happens when you put vinegar on soda. It's volatile, right? So is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

This is kind of like blessing your neighbor with a loud voice early in the morning. If a person's not in a state of mind to appreciate having songs sung to them, because they're heavy hearted and the songs are just not expressing their sentiment, it's like pouring vinegar on soda, you know? You know how it fizzes up, it's a violent reaction, really. Or like, it's like taking a garment away from a man in the winter.

That is, when a man's in the winter cold and he has a garment on, rather than taking his garment away, it'd be better to help, you know, put another blanket over him or

something. Do something to comfort him. He's already in an uncomfortable situation, don't make him more uncomfortable by taking away his garment.

And so these are some of the things that Solomon observes. In chapter 25, verse 25, he says, As cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a far country. That's fairly self-explanatory.

Chapter 26, verse 9. Like a thorn that goes into the hand of a drunkard, so is a proverb in the mouth of a fool. Now, the assumption is the man is really drunk. I mean, that's the image.

A thorn goes in his hand, he's insensitive to it. He's feeling no pain. And he's drunk so much that though he gets punctured with a thorn, it doesn't register, you know.

It just doesn't register. So also, when a fool tells a proverb, it's like he doesn't really understand, it doesn't really register. It's like he's a drunkard and there's a point to it, but he's not getting the point, you know.

He's heard a proverb and he repeats it. Or he's heard a joke and he doesn't get it, but he heard people laugh, so he retells it. But he doesn't tell it quite right because he doesn't get the point.

Ever had anyone who repeated jokes, but they really had no sense of humor at all, but they wanted to be able to participate in a conversation where people were sharing jokes, so they tell the joke they've heard. But they didn't get it at the first time. And they don't tell it quite right and they just miss it, you know.

Like, I saw a cartoon once where the character was trying to repeat an old joke as little children, you know, what did the mayonnaise say to the refrigerator? And the joke is, shut the door, I'm dressing, okay. So this person's trying to repeat that joke. And they said, what did the mayonnaise say to the refrigerator? And the person said, no, I don't know, what is it? The person retelling the joke said, shut the refrigerator door, I'm putting my clothes on.

Well, they kind of paraphrased the punchline, but they didn't know that that wouldn't work, you know. It's like a proverb in the mouth of a fool. He doesn't quite get it.

He doesn't get the point. Like a thorn in the hand of a drunkard, it's not registering right. And that's what apparently Solomon is suggesting here.

There's a whole bunch of these also in chapter 26. We don't have time to look at all of them, but these are just some of the examples. Chapter 26, 9, we just looked at.

26, 17 says, he who passes by and meddles in a quarrel, not his own is like one who takes a dog by the ears. How is that like that? I mean, what does it mean to take a dog

by the ears? You know, Lyndon Johnson, the former president, used to raise beagles. And there's a famous picture that they used to circulate of him holding one of his beagles up off the ground by the ears.

I don't know if he's trying to show how strong their ears were or what, but I always think this one, he that meddles in a quarrel that's not his own, wasn't he pretty involved in the Vietnam thing? It's like a man holding a dog by his ears. But I'm thinking, what did Solomon mean by that? And I think it's this, two people are quarreling and you're not involved. You're safe.

If you leave it alone, you'll stay safe. You get involved, suddenly you're like someone who's taking a dog by the ears. What happens if you take a dog by the ears? Probably make the dog mad at you.

As long as you hold its ears away from you, it can't bite you. But what are you going to do? How are you going to let go? You know, you're in it now. You know, you've got an angry dog and you can't exactly let go now because he's mad at you.

You can keep safe and away from his jaws if you've got a hold of his ears, but you let go and he's going to come after you. So it's like you've gotten yourself into something unpleasant. You've made an enemy and so forth, but you're not really able to extricate yourself from it.

Not easily anyway. And so we have these kinds of stimulus. We're going to take a break now.