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Proverbs 4 - 5



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

In Proverbs 4-5, Steve Gregg emphasizes the importance of character and behavior over solely having right opinions or concepts. He stresses the influence of good and bad influences on shaping one's mind and the importance of keeping one's heart diligent. Gregg encourages listeners to be mindful of the entertainment they consume and guard against careless speech that reflects what's in their hearts. Ultimately, he advises listeners to decide on the focus of their hearts and be intentional about what they allow to shape their sensitivities.

Transcript

We're in the midst of a survey of the book of Proverbs. It may not seem like it because we have paused to talk about specific verses in some detail. And so I guess I'd have to say it's a somewhat slow survey of the book of Proverbs.

At some point we're going to be looking topically at the book of Proverbs, taking each topic that is recurring in the book and sort of scanning the entire book for material on each topic. But at this point, I'm trying to cover the first seven chapters. The first nine, well, the first seven chapters basically are Solomon's exhortation to his son to seek wisdom.

You might think it wouldn't take quite so many chapters to do that, but he's enthusiastic about the subject. And we have been looking at chapters one through three so far. Chapters four through seven remain ahead of us before we get to something a little new, but even that is an advocacy of seeking wisdom.

It's just that chapter eight is a standalone kind of chapter, which is wisdom personified as a woman making her appeal to the sons of men to seek her rather than foolishness. Now, these chapters we're in right now, chapters two and three and four and five and so forth, they tend to begin with an expectation to listen to what the father is saying to his son. And we're in chapter four right now.

He says, Hear my children, the instruction of a father, give attention to no understanding, for I will give you good doctrine. Do not forsake my law. Now, I want to

say something about doctrine, if I could, because in our theological frame of reference, our religious frame of reference, when we think of doctrine, we're probably most likely to be thinking immediately of things like doctrines about the nature of God and theological concepts.

You know, the Trinity, the deity of Christ, justification by faith, maybe even, you know, doctrines about the end times, doctrines about the sovereignty of God. Those are what we usually think of as doctrine these days. In other words, theological concepts.

But the word doctrine is simply a word that means teaching. It does not in itself tell you what the teaching is about. It is just teaching, and it would appear that teaching in Proverbs is not so much what we would consider the deep theological concepts.

He does not delve into those, but he's teaching wisdom. He's teaching right living. He's teaching, you know, how to make decisions that you will not regret.

So it's a practical teaching. And I would just point this out here because it's also true in the New Testament, though we often don't think of it as so. Because when we get to the New Testament, we think that doctrine must be something about having the right opinions, right concepts.

And that's not necessarily how the New Testament understands the word either. It's more how to live right. And this came up with a call on the air, I think it was yesterday, someone was talking about doctrine.

In fact, they were talking about Proverbs. They asked about Proverbs and whether Proverbs is useful for doctrine. And I wasn't quite sure what the caller meant, but I had a feeling that.

She was not thinking of doctrine the same way that I think the Bible uses the term I showed her Titus, and I'll show you again what I showed her yesterday. Titus chapter two, we have a good example of what Paul considers to be sound doctrine. Now, I was in a movement for some years that emphasized the need for sound doctrine.

And what that meant was proper eschatology, I think, for the most part, you know, having the right views of the end times was what they called sound doctrine. I'm sure that it was very important that also the right views of the Trinity and the right views of justification by faith. These were the things that they called sound doctrine.

Paul used the term sound doctrine right here in Titus chapter two, verse one. He says, but as for you speak, the things which are proper for sound doctrine. Now, what are those things? The next verses he tells us what he considers to be sound doctrine, that older men should be sober and reverent and temperate, sound in faith, in love and in patience.

Well, none of that has to do with theological concepts that has to do with character and behavior. And then verse three, the older women, likewise, that they should be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given too much wine, teachers of good things. In other words, what they're supposed to do, sound doctrine, you teach the old men sound doctrine.

What's that? You teach them to be sober. You teach them to be reverent. Same thing.

You teach older women sound doctrine, teach them to be reverent and sober. And then it says that the older women should teach the young women, verse four, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good. I mean, these are really practical, everyday kind of down to earth things.

They're all about behavior, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober minded. So not one of the things that Paul lists under the category of sound doctrine has to do with your theological beliefs.

Which is not to say that theological beliefs are unimportant, but it's it means that we often think of doctrine as a reference to the wrong category of information. The category of concepts is not what is intended, but doctrine is teaching about how to live. And so we find Solomon using it that way, too.

He says to his son or children, in this case, chapter four, verse two of Proverbs, I give you good teaching, good doctrine. Do not forsake my law when I was my father's son, tender and the only one in the sight of my mother. He also taught me and said to me, let your heart retain my words, keep my command to live, get wisdom, get understanding.

Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her and she will preserve you. Love her and she will keep you.

Wisdom is the principal thing. Therefore, get wisdom and all you're getting. Get understanding.

Exalt her and she will promote you. She will bring you honor when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace, a crown of glory she will deliver to you.

Now, this is apparently what his father said to him and who was Solomon's father? David. These are the words, apparently, of David, at least paraphrased by his son Solomon. Now, he said, when I was, you know, my father's son and tender and the only one in the sight of my mother.

David had a number of wives, but apparently Solomon was the only one by Bathsheba. So it's a reference to David and Bathsheba. And basically, David said to Solomon, make sure you get wisdom.

Now, this is apparently when he was a young boy on his mother's knee. And so it explains a lot, because when he was a young man after his father's death and God appeared to him and said, you know, ask whatever you want. And he asked for wisdom.

Obviously, he had acquired a taste for that. That was the thing that came to his mind that he most needed to get and very much probably because of the influence of David imparting to him this value. You know, she will preserve you, wisdom will preserve you, if you're foolish, you'll walk into trouble, in other words, and wisdom will keep you from that.

In verse six, it's the principal thing to get. Therefore, get wisdom, he says. Now, verse 10.

Hear my son and receive my things and the years of your life will be many. Once again, the idea of wisdom giving you long life, not in every case, but tending that way. I have taught you in the way of wisdom.

I have led you in right paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hindered. And when you run, you will not stumble.

Take firm hold of instruction and do not let go. Keep her, for she is your life. Do not enter the path of the wicked and do not walk in the way of evil.

Avoid it. Do not travel on it. Turn away from it and pass on, for they do not sleep unless they have done evil and their sleep is taken away unless they make someone fall.

For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. Now, he had already said in chapter one that his son should be wary of peers who would influence him to do violent and criminal things in order to obtain riches. That is obviously the epitome of foolishness, apparently to Solomon, and it's the walking, seeking a criminal lifestyle is just courting disaster.

Crime ultimately generally does not pay. And so he says about those people that Solomon's son should avoid that they are so corrupt that it's like they feed on violence. It feeds them, it energizes them to think of hurting somebody, victimizing somebody.

In fact, they can't sleep if they haven't victimized somebody that day. There's no doubt a hyperbole. There are wicked people who probably can sleep all right, even if they haven't had a victim that day.

But he's basically saying these people are shot through with a love of evil so much so that it's a disappointment to them. They worry about it if they haven't done enough evil that given day. You know, this is an exaggeration.

But he is saying there definitely are those kinds of people who are just plain lovers of

evil. And I know that it's hard for maybe us to realize that or to think that. Because when we when we see someone do something really evil, we think, well, there must be something, you know, they must be not seeing things clearly.

They must maybe they're traumatized from their childhood or something. Why would anyone do such horrible things? And no doubt there often are explanations of this kind. But the fact is that people who do evil things often they're just lovers of evil.

How they came to be lovers of evil, we don't know. It's not very likely that many babies are born just loving to hurt people. Something gets twisted in the course of their upbringing, maybe early on even.

But the fact is, you run into people who are just the opposite of what you are as a lover of God, a person who doesn't want to hurt people. You may hurt people, but it'll be by accident and you don't have viciousness and cruelty in you. And Solomon's saying don't hang out with the people who have that in them, because as it says in a later proverb in the book, he says, you know, go from the presence of an angry man lest you learn his ways.

Your peers will influence you, not only your behavior through peer pressure, but even your thinking and your values. You begin to pick them up. Your mind is malleable, possibly fortunate or unfortunately.

I mean, it can be shaped in a good way through the right influences, but it can also be shaped in the wrong way. And the company you keep is quite a pressure applier to thinking, agreeing, following the crowd, keeping your thoughts within the box that your peers agree with. And if they happen to be people who love violence, you'll eventually, if you don't part from them, you'll pick up a taste for that yourself.

But it says they eat bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. But verse 18, the path of the just, the word just is the same as the word righteous, I think the New American standard is the path of the righteous, is like the shining sun. Here again, I think the New American standard translates shining sun as the light of dawn.

It is a reference to the light of dawn that shines brighter, ever brighter until the perfect day. Now here, the New King James is following pretty slavishly the King James version. The word perfect is used of the day in the King James.

And so the New King James keeps it, but the word perfect can mean also complete. And so I think the rendering of the New American standard in this case would be a good example of how these words could be understood a little more clearly to us today. It says the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn that shines brighter and brighter until full day.

The complete or perfect day is the full day when the sun is actually visible over the

horizon. Prior to that, the horizon becomes lighter. It's first very black and then it gets dark blue and then it gets lighter blue and then it gets orange and red.

And as you watch the horizon at sunrise, you see it changing color and getting brighter and brighter until finally the sun itself is visible. And that's what the path of the righteous is like. And I I've mentioned before, I think that that's actually something that Jesus encouraged us to anticipate with reference to the righteous people on the earth as the full day of his reappearing approaches.

We don't know how near it is, but whenever it is coming, it will be presaged by an increase in glory, an increase in light, no doubt. Now, I take that from a number of different things. So I've pointed out to you before that in Matthew 24, 27, the statement Jesus made that as lightning flashes from the east even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be actually can be translated, in my opinion, should be translated as the bright shining shines from the east even to the west.

So shall the coming of the Son of Man be. In other words, not like a bolt of lightning, but like a sunrise. The light that shines from the east is the sunrise.

And so the coming of Christ is likened to that. And Peter said in 2 Peter chapter one and verse 19 that we are to give heed to the scriptures of the Old Testament as until light that shines in a dark place until the day dawns and the day star arises in our hearts. So there's something going on in our hearts, a sun rising that is to take place, maybe not speaking of us each individually, although maybe so, but maybe collectively, the church, that the church becomes a mature man gradually.

And so it says in Ephesians chapter four, verses 11 through 13, Paul said that God Christ gave the church some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ until when? What is the goal here? Until we all come in the unity of the faith and of the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a mature man. Now, Paul has earlier referred to the church as a man, a new man. He said God took the Jew and he took the Gentile and broke down the middle wall of partition between and he made in himself that is in Christ in the body of Christ.

He made one new man. The body of Christ is one new man. So Ephesians 2 says, but in Ephesians 4, verse 13 it says we must become a mature man.

The body of Christ must mature into the fullness of the measure of the stature of Christ, become Christ like. That's what the glory is that should be revealed in us, Paul says. And so we are changed from glory to glory into that same image, he says in 2 Corinthians 3, verse 18.

So there's a lot of I mean, the New Testament is full of references of this kind that what

God is predestined for those that he foreknew is that they'd be transformed into the image of his son. Romans 8, 29 says and so forth. There's so many more.

I wouldn't be surprised. I don't know if Solomon had this concept in mind, but the Holy Spirit might have that the path of the righteous being like the light of dawn growing brighter and brighter until the full day is not a bad. Description of what the New Testament seems to imply God has in mind that the church should become more and more like Christ, the glory of the Lord, more and more upon us.

You know, there's an interesting passage is probably about the first coming of Christ, but some think it's about the second coming of Christ. And it used with every language of a dawning day in Isaiah 60. It certainly is about Christ coming, whether it's his first or second.

It's been disputed, but in Isaiah 60, verse one, it says, arise, shine for your light has come and the glory of Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness, the people, but the Lord will arise over you and his glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles will come to your life and tings to the brightness of your rising and so forth.

So the sunrise, this is a sunrise that's talking about and the glory of the Lord arising upon his people. So this is this appears to be the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and savior, Jesus Christ, Titus 2, 13 says. And Paul says, we rejoice in the hope of glory.

And Christ in you is the hope of glory, the hope of the Christian's glory and the glory is the image of Christ or the likeness of Christ that God has predestined to those who he's foreknew will be transformed or changed into the image of Christ, though it is a process from glory to glory. We've become more like him. And collectively, it would seem the body of Christ is to grow into such a mature man.

You know, Jesus told an interesting parable in Mark four about the kingdom of God. He said the kingdom of God is like a man who sowed the seed in the ground and then says he went and he slept and he woke and he slept and he woke and the seed grew by itself. But he doesn't just stop there.

He says the seed, he said the earth itself made the seed to grow first the blade, then the ear or the head of grain on the stock. This is then the king James is the full corn or mature grain in the head of the of the stock. So Jesus is describing the growth of his kingdom starts like a blade of grass.

After it's been sown, the seed is sown, you've got a little blade of grass doesn't look much like a full mature stock at all. But then eventually the heads form on it and then within the heads, the grain itself matures. And he says, and when it says and when the

grain is mature, then he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come.

As before Jesus comes before the harvest, he awaits the grain to become mature. And so the maturing of the saints is something that Paul anticipates, Jesus anticipates, and perhaps we can see this verse in that light. The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn shines brighter and brighter until full day or till the perfect day that new King James says.

But by contrast to the path of the righteous, the way, verse 19, of the wicked is like darkness. They do not know what makes them stumble. They don't get any better over time.

We could people say about the same or get worse while the righteous get better. Now, by the way, some might say, well, you know, I'm looking at the church today and I'm not seeing that it's improving that much, at least in terms of spirituality and maturity. Seems to me like the church that I'm looking at is kind of getting shallower and weaker and more embarrassing.

But, of course, the church is not the same thing as the institutional church. Institutional churches are a mixed bag of Christians, non-Christians, half-Christians. When we talk about the church, we're talking about the body of Christ, those who are followers of Jesus, those who are holding the head.

They are the body. That's what a body does. It upholds the head.

And those who uphold Christ's headship and lordship in their lives, they are the true body of Christ. And it is that group that is going to grow more and more like Christ as his time of coming approaches, I believe. The way of the wicked, though, is not going to improve.

They're not going to get lighter and lighter. They're going to just, it doesn't say they get any worse here, but they tend to do that. Societies tend to decay if they're not following God.

Romans 1 is a good example of that tendency. First, they just don't want to think about God. And then God gives them over to their vile passions.

And then they still persist in that. And he finally gives them over to reprobate minds. So those who aren't following Christ, who are suppressing the truth in their unrighteousness, as Paul uses the phrase in Romans 1, those people get turned over to worse and worse conduct.

But the righteous get better and better. The polarization then becomes greater as we near the end. So also in the parable of the wheat and the tares, the wheat and the tares look so much alike in the early stage of growth that one dare not go out and try to

remove the tares, lest they also accidentally remove wheat with it.

But wait till the harvest. Wait till they both mature into what they're becoming. And the wheat and the tares are clearly different from each other.

As Christians get more like Christ and the world goes down the path, it's going apart from Christ. The polarization, the distinction should become more and more obvious who's really a servant of God and who's really not. Now, verse 20, my son, give attention to my words, incline your ear to my sayings.

Do not let them depart from your eyes. Keep them in the midst of your heart, for they are life to those who find them and health to all their flesh. Once again, the idea that it's a healthier way to live if you follow the ways of wisdom.

Verse 23, keep your heart with all diligence for out of it spring the issues of life. That's a wonderful verse. You keep your heart, your heart is the fountainhead of all that proceeds out of you.

And Jesus said the same thing in only slightly different words in Mark, chapter seven, when he was contrasting the emptiness of keeping regulations that have no impact on your soul and on your character. In this particular case, that of washing properly. The Jews washed their hands, they washed many things before they ate.

Again, this is not because of any concern for hygiene, but because of ritual cleanness they were concerned about. They were afraid that if they had any contact with Gentiles, they'd be ritually unclean. Now, you know, this isn't germs we're talking about because touching a Gentile or touching a Jew would be about equally risky if germs are your concern.

But to touch a Jew did not defile, but touch a Gentile did. In fact, even if the wind happened to blow across Samaria down into Judea and the wind hit your face, you were considered to be unclean because the wind that passed over Samaria was defiling. The Jews had come up with all these traditional ideas.

They're not what the Old Testament teaches. It's what the Jews, the rabbis were teaching. You can be defiled by almost anything going into the house of a Gentile and so forth.

So because of that, the Pharisees would wash continuously. Whenever they came in from outdoors, they figured something's probably defiled me. So they would do these ceremonial washings to remain ritually clean.

And Jesus' disciples were not doing that and were criticized for it. And Jesus defended his disciples. They had been eating without first washing their hands in the ritual manner.

And Jesus said to the Pharisees, you know, it's not what he said, nothing that defiles a man, nothing that a man eats will defile a man. And in Mark 7, 15, Jesus clarified that to his disciples. He said, there is nothing actually before he clarified, he clarified it after this, but he says there is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him.

But the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. And then the disciples came and asked him about this.

And he said, do you not perceive that this is verse 18, that what enters, whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him because it does not enter his heart, but his stomach and it's eliminated. Thus, Jesus' comment purified all foods or declared all foods clean is what that means. Verse 20.

And he said, what comes out of a man that defiles a man from within, out of the heart of men. Proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, which means greed, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.

Why? He said, because they come out of the heart. A man is, in essence, what his heart is. It's so it's important to guard your heart because not only do things come out of your heart, but things can go into your heart.

Now, Jesus made very clear that what you eat doesn't go in your heart. That's why what you eat will never defile you, because it is the heart that is either defiled or not defiled that makes you either a defiled or not defiled person. God's looking at the heart.

Man looks on the outward appearance, regardless of the heart. But not only does the heart cause important things to proceed out of your life, because you live your life out of the heart. In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 12, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

Not only does the mouth speak, but we saw a moment ago, adulteries and fornications and idolatries and drunkenness, all this proceeds out of the heart. Bad behavior comes from a bad heart. But not only does the heart exude behavior and speech, it also takes in things.

Now, not through eating, but definitely through hearing and seeing. I mean, the eye gate and the ear gate are definitely the way in which influence comes into your mind. If you embrace what comes into your ears and it's bad, then it'll make your heart bad.

Taking bad counsel, hanging out with the wrong people so that their opinions of you matters, that shapes your heart, shapes your desires. And so your heart can be corrupted. And of course, if your heart is corrupted, then what comes out of it will be corrupted.

So there are things that enter the heart and shape it. And then there's what comes out of the heart. What comes out of the heart is all your behavior and all your speech and all your influence and all your reputation comes out of what's in your heart.

So you need to guard your heart from the things that go into it, that shape it in the wrong way. That's what it is. Guard your heart.

In verse 23, keep it means guard. In fact, it reads in the New Thinking of James, keep your heart with all diligence. The expression with all diligence in the Hebrew literally is above all keeping.

Keep your heart above all keeping. That is, of all the things you keep or that you guard, guard your heart above that or more than that. Do you guard your possessions? Do you lock your doors when you leave so they aren't stolen? Do you lock your car? Do you, you know, do you protect your family from danger? Whatever you would guard, do you guard your garden from birds and pests and so forth? There are all kinds of things we value and we guard and we protect.

But he says above all the things you guard, guard your heart. That's the most important thing, because that's who you are and that can be invaded. If you are not diligent about guarding it against invasion, certainly we read that the devil put it in Judas Iscariot's heart to betray Jesus.

His heart was not well guarded. The devil was able to put stuff in there and stuff can be put into your heart from external influences if you're not guarding it. And that would mean, of course, you pay, you discern the impact that things that you hear and see are having.

No doubt should have a large role to play in our choice of entertainment. What we do for entertainment is particularly shaping of our sensitivities because when we're being entertained, at least when that's what we see ourselves as being, our guard is more down. If you're in a debate with an unbeliever, your guard is up.

If you're just relaxing in front of the TV and just wanting to veg out and soak in, then, of course, the values and the suggestions and the morality, you pick it up by osmosis. It's through times where you're being entertained. The very avenue of entertainment is an open avenue for thoughts and philosophies and stuff to come to you.

And so that if you listen to a lot of comedians talk or various things that you do, music that you listen to, the thoughts of it become things that would be shocking to you the first time you hear them. Eventually you become numb to them. Your heart becomes desensitized to it.

Eventually it's not really considered to be anything to be alarmed about. And in a way, we kind of feel good about ourselves if we come to a place where we're not really

shocked anymore. We're cool.

We're cool with it. You know, we're not too prudish, but the tendency to be shocked by things that once shocked us might not be a good sign. Might not be a sign of increased spiritual sensitivity, but perhaps with increased spiritual dullness.

And our heart is fully being reshaped by influences that we allow to reshape it. So we need to be careful about what influences we allow into our lives that we begin to see it reshaped. When my kids were growing up, we didn't allow any R-rated movies of any kind in the home.

Only children's movies were permitted. When my kids got older, they saw some movies that were R-rated, but not for moral content, but more for violence. Things like Braveheart.

And of course, there are some moral issues in that movie too. But a lot of war movies and stuff, because of the increased amount of vividness of the violence and so forth, are rated R. And my kids began to watch those when they were teenagers, older, at their friend's house and stuff. And eventually the R rating ceased to mean very much.

And so we'd watch movies occasionally that had R rating. And then eventually, of course, there's other things in those movies that you see those and think, oh, as a Christian, I don't feel very good about that. But it's going to be over in a few seconds.

You know, the movie's good. You know, this scene isn't very pleasing or isn't very, I don't feel great about what's going on in this particular scene, the moral issues there. But it's going to pass quickly and then the movie will go on and we can still enjoy the movie.

And no doubt that is something that can be done safely. You can just say, I don't approve of that. In general, the movie's good.

I even get a almost an edifying feeling at the end of the movie because of certain the way it turns out. And, you know, you feel good and everything at the end. But there's certain parts of it that I don't like.

I don't like the language that person uses. I don't I don't like the the sexual issues that are going on between these two characters and so forth. But but in general, it's good.

You know, the movie's pretty good. And so we begin to almost let our guard down about those other parts. And I remember that when my when we didn't watch many movies, my kids were little.

If I ever heard in a movie bad language, it really bothered me. And I just thought, oh, I don't like to hear that. But eventually I heard it enough that it didn't bother me so much, you know.

And I thought, that's not a good development. I think it probably should bother me maybe. On the other hand, we do live in a world where we'll hear that all the time.

And if we're too prudish and we have to say, oh, you know, I can't be around people who talk like that, then maybe we're not really like Jesus because the people who hang around with probably talk that way sometimes, too. But but we have to we have to be monitoring what's happening in our hearts. That's the main lesson here.

It's not that you can't allow yourself to hear something which is a morally questionable thing that you hear or see. But if you find that your attitudes toward it are changing in a direction that are not positive, then you make an adjustment. There's some secular music I like from the 70s and stuff.

Generally speaking, it has a positive impact on me. Even though it's secular, because it reminds me of the Jesus movement, reminds me of the 70s, which those were good spiritual times for me. But if I listen to it for too long, I find that I'm just starting to have those songs in my head and stuff like that.

I realize that that's not what I'm supposed to have. I don't want those in my head. It's like you don't just make a law.

We're not legalists and you can't ever hear a secular song. But you have to monitor your heart and say, well, what is this doing to me now? I mean, listening to this music yesterday was kind of reminding me of the good old days and the Jesus movement. And I felt kind of brought back sort of the positive spiritual memories of that era.

But now today, I'm listening to it, it's not having that effect on me. So instead of making laws and rules, you guard your heart by, you put a sentry there and say, how is my heart being affected by this influence that I'm allowing in? Is it time to stop allowing that influence in or for the time being anyway, until it's not having that influence anymore? The management of your soul is every bit as labor intensive, I suppose, as the raising of a child or the care of a garden that you're trying to produce good fruit from. There's weeds and there's predators and so forth.

You've got to keep up on it. You've got to keep your eye on it. You can't just set things on cruise and come back a few months later and see how things are looking.

You've got to watch over your heart. Because if it is corrupted, then you are corrupted out of your heart and its quality will flow the things that determine who you are and what you do. The springs of life spring forth from that fountain of your heart.

Verse 24, put away from you a deceitful mouth. Of course, heart and mouth are very closely related. As Jesus said, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

And that's why Jesus said in the same context in Matthew 12, that every idle word a man

shall speak, he'll give account of it in the day of judgment. Why is that? Because the idle words you speak are that which reveal what's in your heart. On the day of judgment, what's going to matter is where your heart is at.

But instead of God having to judge you on something as abstract and invisible as the condition of your heart, he can just put your words on display and say, here's what's in your heart. Every idle word you speak. In other words, idle means careless words.

The careless words you speak reflect what's in your heart. Of course, you can have a bad heart and if you're not careless, you can carefully make sure you say good, acceptable, religious things. And deceive people into thinking you're a very righteous person because you've managed to only say righteous things when you're around righteous people.

But that's because you're controlling your mouth. But the careless words that come out of your mouth, unguarded words, those will say pretty much where you're at. And so, put away from you a deceitful mouth and perverse lips far from you.

Speaking of heart and mouth, we now talk about the eyes and the feet. He says, let your eyes look straight ahead. And your eyelids look right before you.

Ponder the path of your feet and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or to the left. Remove your foot from evil.

Now, of course, you only need to reflect for a moment to realize he's not talking about your real eyes and your real feet. He's not talking about how you need to really keep your eyes focused on the road immediately in front of you in the literal physical sense. Nor that your feet, it's not like there's a sin to turn left if the road happens to turn left or if that's where you have to turn to get where you want to go.

Turning right or left is not wrong in the physical sense. It's talking about metaphorically. Keep your eyes focused on what you should be focused on and your feet will follow.

The eyes guide the feet. If they don't, you bump into things. Sometimes you're looking here and walking in another direction, bump into something.

You're supposed to and normally by default, your feet will follow where your eyes are looking. So, where your feet go is going to determine your destiny, the outcome. Therefore, you've got to give consideration one step behind your actions to what you're looking at.

You've got to decide what your focus will be. Will your eyes be on Christ? Will your eyes be on the pursuit of godliness or will they be on whatever distracts them in the world? Keep your eyes focused directly on what they should be on, he's saying. And then, of course, then you're pondering the path of your feet.

You're essentially choosing your path rather than just meandering aimlessly. What you focus your eyes on is going to determine where your feet go. Now, chapter five says, my son, pay attention to my wisdom.

Lend your ear to my understanding that you may preserve discretion and that your lips may keep knowledge. Now, he begins to talk about an immoral woman and he does so. This is the second time we've run into this woman in Proverbs, because back in chapter two, he was talking about when you have discretion and wisdom, it'll preserve you from the immoral woman.

In chapter two, verse 16, to deliver you from the immoral woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words, who forsakes the companion of her youth, that is, she cheats on her husband and forgets the covenant of her God. And it goes on and talks about this immoral woman that you need to avoid and wisdom will be what preserves you from succumbing to her seduction. And so also in chapter five and in chapter six and in chapter seven, we're going to have, and chapter nine, there's sort of a coming back again and again to this topic of the dangers that his son must be aware of related to, well, illicit sex, really.

Talks about the immoral woman. Obviously, she's not going to be a problem unless he's an immoral man, too. Immoral women are trouble to immoral men.

But they can also be trouble to men who want to be moral. That is, their choice is to be moral, but they can be seduced. That's why she's called a seductress.

And the same is true, of course, going the other direction. A man can also seduce a woman, but Solomon's not giving advice to his daughters or else he might talk about the seducing man. He's talking to his son about a characteristic weakness of young men, and that is women.

And women are not all seductresses, although a man who's got evil in his heart might tend to view them all as, you know, sex objects. There are women who actually encourage that. And so Solomon is particularly warning his son about the women who will encourage immoral liaisons.

And he says in verse three, the lips of an immoral woman drip honey. Her mouth is smoother than oil. That is, she has a smooth, you know, come on verbally.

Her seductive talk, there's reference to her speech in seducing a man also in chapter seven and verse 14 through 21. We won't take time for that now because we will later as our topical research into problems, we'll look at this subject separately. But we have an example in chapter seven, verse 14, of how she speaks to a young man when she's trying to seduce him.

She says to him, I have peace offerings with me. I've paid my vows. I've been to church,

so I'm paid up with God.

Now we can sin until next time. That's how a lot of people think about their religion. You know, as long as you go to church and give my tithe and say the prayers, then or go to confession, if they're Catholic or whatever.

It doesn't matter how I live in between. And that's kind of how she's where she's at. OK, I'm I'm paid up on with God.

So I came out to meet you, she says, the man diligently to seek your face. And I found you. I've spread my bed with tapestry colored coverings of Egyptian linen.

I've perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon, appealing to his imagination and the feast to his senses, his sight and his smell. And come, let us take our fill of love till morning. Let us delight ourselves with love for my husband is not at home and he has gone on a long journey.

He has taken a bag of money with him and will come home on an appointed day. In other words, he's got a lot of money. He'll stay gone a long time.

We won't get caught is the idea. So this is how she, with her smooth words, sets the scene for her mark and seduces him. In Proverbs 5.3, her lips are they drip with honey.

There's her mouth is smoother than oil, meaning her speeches. But in the end, she's bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two edged sword. Her feet go down to death.

Her steps lay hold of shale, here translated hell. It's actually shale, the place of the dead. Lest you ponder her path of life.

Her ways are unstable. You do not know them. Now, I think you do not know them as you're not familiar with the path she's going.

She's unpredictable to you. And therefore. You know, in a sense, you're going to be confused if you take her path, you don't know which way it's going to go.

Where it's going to end up. Therefore, hear me now, my children, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. Remove your way far from her and do not go near the door of her house.

So, you know, is avoid the very location where the temptation is likely to meet you. Lest you give your honor to others and your years to the cruel one. Now, actually, in Hebrew, it's to a cruel one, and it's not necessarily a reference to any particular individual.

The commentators really can't say for sure who the cruel one is, but it may just be generic for someone who might be a blackmailer. You know, you go sleep with your neighbor's wife. And then you're subject to blackmail.

She herself may blackmail you. You know, it's hard to say. So, you know, if you bring if you have some kind of a secret immoral life going on, then you are vulnerable to being blackmailed.

To have to lose your honor and so forth. Let aliens be filled with your wealth. That is to say, if they blackmail you, you have to pay them off.

I think there's like politicians sometimes end up having to pay off people not to tell. In fact, hasn't that happened recently in the news? I forget which one. You know, there's so many.

It seems like recently there was a politician who was dusted for. Sure. It was Edward, wasn't it? That he paid off his mistress or something like that to keep it a secret because he was running for office.

Yeah. So, I mean, this is an example of that kind of thing. You end up having to give your wealth to somebody who actually is blackmailing you because they seduced you.

And you give your labors. Your labors go to the house of a foreigner. The foreigner is the woman herself.

The idea here is that probably the prostitute or the woman who's cheating on her husband is probably one of the foreign women in Israel. Not that a Jewish woman couldn't be immoral or an adulteress, but the Jews at least have the law. The foreigners that lived among them came in with their cultural ideas, which included open marriage.

And I mean, not really, really open, but immorality. The pagans, of course, had very loose sexual standards. And so many times the immoral woman is referred to as the strange woman.

Now, strange in the Bible generally means foreign, but it might just mean foreign to you. She's not your woman. She's not your wife.

You know, she's somebody else's wife. It may not mean that she's really from another race or nation, although it could because there are plenty of foreigners that lived in Israel. And like I said, they didn't have, they didn't share the moral standards of God's law.

So sometimes it may be that he's thinking of an actual foreign woman who, you know, prostitutes herself out and seduces the Jewish men. Solomon knew a lot about foreign women. He married a lot of foreign women and they turned his heart from God.

I mean, he didn't take the advice that he gave to his son, but the advice was good. It just would have been good for him to follow it to verse 12. And then you'll say that is when you come into this state of affairs, you'll say, how have I hated instruction? And my heart

despised reproof.

I've not obeyed the voice of my teachers. That is, he said, I should have known better than this. I was told this when I was back before I did these things.

I was told by my father and by my teachers, by my rabbis not to fall into this. And once you do, you'll wish you had paid attention. You'll know better next time, but it might be a little too late for you.

Nor have I inclined my ear to those who instructed me. I was on the verge of total ruin in the midst of the congregation and assembly. I'm not sure what the reference to the midst of the congregation assembly means, except that maybe he's saying there was no excuse for this because, you know, I had plenty of support.

I had, you know, the worshiping community around me. How is it that I didn't pay attention to their teaching? Brought myself into ruin. And then this next section, verses 15 through 19, are really a classic passage about avoiding how to avoid sexual sin, and that is get married.

Now, obviously, not everyone has that option. A lot of people would like to get married, and the situation hasn't presented itself. So it's not the panacea.

It's not the cure-all that'll work for everyone. But Paul, of course, said something very similar when he was talking to people who were considering deliberately remaining single. In 1 Corinthians 7, he says, well, if you can contain yourself, then stay single.

It's a great, great option. But he said, if you can't contain yourself, you can't control yourself, he says, then get married because it's better to marry than to burn. So Paul sees marriage as a legitimate option, even solution, to problems of a single man's uncontrollable lusts.

And so also Solomon sees that. He said probably his son would be married. They probably had arranged marriages in those days.

And he says in verse 15, drink water from your own cistern. This was a metaphor for his own wife. Refresh yourself sexually.

Satisfy yourself from the supply that's in your own house, your own cistern, not your neighbor's, and running water from your own well. Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Now, of course, the whole sexual relationship between a husband and wife is described like a refreshing oneself with a drink of cold water on a hot day. And certainly, especially in a society like ours, more than in theirs, probably, because of all the visuals we have that suggest immorality to our minds wherever we look.

It's like being sexually in a desert or spiritually in a desert where there's strong thirst may arise, but there's got to be a legitimate means of quenching that thirst. And he says drink waters for that thirst, that is, have an intimate relationship, but with your own wife. He makes that clear in verse 18.

He says, let your fountain be blessed and rejoice with the wife of your youth as a loving dear and a graceful doe. Let her breast satisfy you at all times. So we see the same metaphors that he actually uses in Song of Solomon, strange ones, but definitely characteristic of him and always being raptured with her love.

So. Instead of being vulnerable to temptations outside the marriage, cultivate a rapturous relationship with your own wife so that you are refreshed and that thirst, that hunger is palliated, that you don't walk around the street starving for sexual intimacy because you're not getting it at home. And this is, of course, instruction to a man, but there's an implicit command to the wife in this too.

And that is that the wife who does make herself readily available to her husband this way is protecting him and herself from destruction of their marriage. And, you know, obviously a wife might say, well, I just don't I'm not into it as much as my husband is. And he should just deal with it.

Well, he should, but he might not deal with it well. And a lot of times women, wives don't understand their men's needs and frankly, men don't understand their women's needs. That's a common problem.

But one of the needs that both men and women have, but I'm more aware of it among the men because I talk to the men more, married men and such, is that men feel like they need to have some kind of a relationship at home that protects them from the temptations outside the home. Now, women need that too more because women are outside the home more. Back in, you know, all generations previous to our own or our parents, women were mostly at home.

They're perhaps capable of being seduced as much as men are, but they weren't in the situations as much as men were. Men were out in the marketplace. Men were out, you know, in the streets doing their business and encountering sometimes the seductresses and so forth.

But the married women were usually at home taken by the kids to keep in the house and not in those situations. So the instruction had sort of a presupposition that the man is the one who's in danger and he needs to, he and his wife need to be properly apprised of that danger. And being enraptured with each other's love obviously speaks of a very erotic relationship.

And if you think that Solomon in the Bible did not believe in erotic relationships, then

read Song of Solomon. You'll find that he's on the same page there as he is here. The idea is you only need one woman.

And if you have a good woman and you can have a proper relationship with her, then you'll not be tempted so greatly. Maybe not at all with women outside the home. And that's what he's telling his son to do.

That seductress is out there, but your protection is to make sure that you and your wife at home are having a very satisfying relationship. And of course, we in our day and age where women are out in the marketplace almost as much as men are, the same would go the other way. You know, a man needs to be available to his wife because she's going to be having offers outside the home too.

It would be nice if it wasn't true. But it is the reality we live in. He says in verse 24, Why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman and be embraced in the arms of a seductress? For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord and he ponders all his paths.

Now, that's the way to avoid immorality is to keep that in mind. People who conduct themselves immorally usually do so under the cover of what they hope will be complete privacy. But you never have complete privacy.

There's always somebody watching and it's God. The ways of a man are before God's eyes. If you would not succumb to a sexual sin with somebody watching, then you should realize there is somebody watching and it's the Lord.

And so he tries to give his son a consciousness of God's presence that will provide the best incentive and the best help in warding off the temptations of immorality. Verse 22, For his own iniquities entrap the wicked man and he is caught in the cords of his sin. In other words, God doesn't have to do anything to him.

He can't, you know, the sins themselves catch up with him. The consequences of his own actions are severe enough. He shall die for lack of instruction and in the greatness of his folly, he should go astray.

So all of this, which we consider to be maybe just lustful friskiness on the part of a man going out and, you know, being a womanizer or something like that. All of that is simply, it's not about being a frisky male, it's about being a fool. It's about not having the wisdom to see the final end of a thing and, you know, going for the instant gratification rather than looking at the time when you'll say, how have I hated instruction? I've brought myself to total ruin.

So Solomon, in talking about the moral life, the sexually moral life of his son and his exhortations in that direction, it's all part of his exhortation to be wise. Now, wise is one thing, moral is another, but the two are not unconnected. Wisdom to a godly man is a

moral issue and whenever you succumb to a breach of God's law, you are courting God's disfavor and no one can be considered to be smart who's making an enemy for himself out of God.

It says in James, God, it says, let me turn to the passage because sometimes I have a hard time picking up the first word. Once I got the first word, I got the rest there. But there's a reference to the world.

He that is a friend of the world is the enemy of God. It's in chapter four of James. He says in verse four, James 4, for adulterers and adulterers, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever, therefore, wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

You want to be the enemy of somebody who can squish you like a bug and will if you persist in your rebellion against him. That's not the kind of enemy you want to make. It's not wise.

Keeping God on your side is the path of wisdom. And that's why the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the violation of God's laws. When God is watching every moment is just stupid.

There's no better word for it. And that's what Solomon says. Foolish is the word he uses.

We say stupid. And so wisdom will keep a person from that behavior, he says to his son, and therefore seek wisdom. And it'll prevent you from falling into those traps.