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Proverbs Introduction (Part 4)



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

In this segment, Steve Gregg delves into the principles of Proverbs and how they can be applied to one's discretion. He explains that value has a hierarchy of importance and advises listeners to invest in things that bring the highest value. Gregg emphasizes the importance of fearing the Lord as it is valued more than riches. He also discusses the theme of taking a long-term view in decision-making and looking down the road before making hasty decisions.

Transcript

Proverbs Introduction We'll continue now looking at the book of Proverbs. And I've been telling you some of the features of Proverbs as a genre. That is, what a proverb is, what it is seeking to accomplish, and what it is not.

And the Proverbs in the book of Proverbs, as we've seen, presents lessons learned from observation. A wise man observing his world, observing nature, observing human nature, observing how things really end up, characteristic providences of God, observing cause and effects of certain things that maybe other people would miss. That's the difference between a wise man and a fool, is that a wise man notices these things, and Solomon was a wise man.

He noticed, he recorded these things, he hoped his son would notice them, and so he points them out to him. We said that the Proverbs are generalities, not universalities. They are things that are not, in every case, going to be true, but in most cases they are.

Sometimes, because they are not always true, they might stand in tension with other things that are not always, but often true. And so we saw that there are principles which have to be applied with discretion. Sometimes you answer a fool according to his policies, and sometimes you don't.

There are rules for certain situations that would not apply to other situations, and that is also observed in these Proverbs. There is flexibility sometimes. Wisdom doesn't always call for exactly the same response to things.

But there are principles that nonetheless govern what is and what is not a wise response to things. Many times the Proverbs are stated with reference to some particular specific thing, but actually the thing itself is a sampling of a general principle, a larger category of things that might, in a sense, be under the surface of the same Proverbs. So, when he says, Have you found honey? Eat as much as is sufficient for you, lest you be filled with it and vomit it, the idea is obviously applicable to many situations.

Too much of a good thing can actually end up not being a good thing. And that is true in a lot of different areas, not just with honey. So, I personally think that when a Proverb like that is given, it is obviously making an observation that is true about eating too much honey or too many sweets.

But I think it is intentionally taking that as a paradigm for a broad array of things in life, which though good if you got them without moderation, they would not be good. And so forth. These kinds of Proverbs often have application far beyond the specifics that they embody in the statements.

We were talking last time, when we ran out of time, about various similes, which are very common in the Proverbs. As X, so also is Y. It is a very common structure for a Proverb, you know. And a lot of times, just to show how wise he is, he observes things that are not obvious similes.

I mean, we were reading in Joshua how when God stopped the waters of the Jordan, it says, it was like when he parted the Red Sea. Well, that is not very hard to observe. That is an obvious simile.

The stopping of the waters of the Jordan is like the parting of the Red Sea. It is a simile that no one could miss. It is obviously a repetition of a very similar thing.

But Solomon picks things that are not so obvious, like a jewel of gold in his flying snout is like a lovely woman lacking discretion. Or like vinegar to the teeth, so is a slugger to the one who sends him. These Proverbs actually require a little bit of reflection to figure out, well, why is it like that? But when you do reflect on it, you can pick up what he is saying.

And you know the very fact that it is not right on the surface. And that it does require reflection is perhaps part of the strategy. You could just read over something that is extremely obvious and forget it instantly because it was so obvious.

But when you stumble across something and say, well, I don't understand how that is true. It makes you dwell on it. It makes you meditate on it.

It makes you consider it. And by doing so, gets it more ingrained in your mind. Now, one of the main things that you will see recurring in Proverbs takes for granted what I said earlier.

That wisdom is the ability to identify a desirable end and to also identify the best course of action to reach that end. I would simply say that is the generic definition of wisdom, whether we are talking about godly wisdom or secular wisdom. It is the ability to know what you really should seek and know what steps to take to acquire that thing of value.

And so Proverbs has a lot of times where it seeks to identify what is really of value. What a person really should be seeking. Because it is obvious, and the scripture brings this out a great deal, that mankind doesn't always value what is good for him.

Doesn't always value what has eternal benefits for him. In Jeremiah chapter 9, I think it is verse point 3, God says, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man glory in his might.

Let not the rich man glory in his riches. But he that glories, let him glory in this, that he understands and knows me, says the Lord. Now, wisdom or education or a reputation for being smart, that is something people often will glory in.

That is a goal they will seek for themselves. Or might, prowess, the ability to overpower others. Maybe power, maybe political power or military or athletic achievement.

People glory in that. Or riches. The man who has got wisdom, don't let him glory in his wisdom.

If he has got might, don't let him glory in that. Don't place such a high value on these things, on riches and all these things that men do value. But the one who glories ought to recognize what is worth glorying about.

Namely, that he knows and understands me, the Lord says. So, it is not always obvious to mankind what is of value. For one thing, most people don't know there is a God or they believe there is.

But they don't believe it strongly enough to make much difference in their lives. Almost everybody, if you pin them down and say, do you believe there is a God? They realize that there probably is. That the evidence is good.

It is true we are hearing much more from atheists today than we used to. But they are still a very, very small minority when polls are taken. In any part of the world, but especially in America of course.

But in any part of the world, when you take polls, you are going to find a tiny, tiny, tiny fraction of the human population would identify themselves as an atheist. The vast majority, the overwhelming majority believe or say they believe there is a God. But if you watch the way they live, the values that draw them in the course of life that they choose, it is not at all obvious that they believe there is a God.

Or at least, perhaps they don't believe as the writer of Hebrews said, one must believe that God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. You see, it says in Hebrews chapter 11 that he that would come to God must first believe in God. Okay, well most people would say they have reached that point.

They believe there is a God. Must believe that he exists, it says in Hebrews, and that he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. Well, there are people who have decided that God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him.

But they decide the reward is health and wealth. And so they join churches that will affirm to them that if they seek God in the way the church suggests, then they will be rewarded with health and with wealth. And these are the same worldly values that people who don't believe in God would pursue.

Of course they would pursue health and wealth. That's not spirituality. When the Bible says God will reward those who diligently seek him, we should assume that he will reward them with what they are diligently seeking.

I'd be very disappointed if I'm diligently seeking one thing and I'm rewarded with something that's not what I'm after. If I'm diligently seeking God, my reward that I'm hoping for is to find God. That's the reward.

But the average person can't imagine why that would be particularly attractive. You know, what good is God to me? I've got kids to feed. I've got troubles in my life.

I want security. I want peace. I want comfort.

I want good health. I want those things. What do I want with some kind of ethereal, invisible, spiritual thing? Well, because most people don't place value on God and don't diligently seek him.

Because the thing that's visible, the thing that's tangible is much more real to them. It's obvious that they set as values for themselves things that have some kind of this-worldly reward, this-worldly enjoyment about them. What people don't seem to realize is that human beings were made as spiritual beings.

Unlike the other creatures that God made on earth, humans are made spiritual beings. And our primary needs are spiritual. So that when we pursue earthly values and earthly goals, even if we obtain them, they disappoint.

I mean, of course, most people would rather be comfortable and rich and healthy and all of that, than all the opposites and all other things being equal. But the interesting thing is that not all other things are equal. When they pursue after things that are not really of value, they end up grabbing it and finding it slips like dust through the hand, or they thought it was gold dust and it's just sand.

It's not anything of real value. Because the spiritual side of their existence is not satisfied, and that is the part that is crying out for satisfaction. And the wise person has learned to identify what things are really of value, and they are things that are related to spirituality.

They are things related to spiritual wisdom. They are things related to being connected with God and on good terms with God. And Solomon knew very well, as he reports in the book of Ecclesiastes, that you can pursue just about everything that human beings value, and in his case, acquire it.

The irony is that most people who are seeking all the things that Solomon tried out, they won't really have the opportunity to obtain them. People might wish they could have as many women as they wanted, or as many free days to party as they wanted, or as much money as they wanted, or as much admiration from the public as they wanted. They may wish for it, they might even strive for it, but very few people are going to get it.

Solomon had all that stuff at his fingertips. He could seek it and obtain it and evaluate it. And he did.

He said, you know what, this is empty. This is just plain emptiness. And so he realized there are things of value that are different than what men under the sun would value.

And the book of Proverbs, written in one of the wiser times of his life, sometimes, tell us what is of value. Now we all have, of course, in our own lives, a hierarchy of values. Meaning that we think some things are more valuable than others.

There might be many things that we value. It's not just that we value some things and don't value other things, and there's nothing else in between. The things we value, we value on a hierarchy of importance.

Some things are more valuable to us than others, although the ones that aren't the highest value are still of value, maybe more valuable than some other things. And so what Solomon wants to tell his son, and in part to his son, is an appreciation for the things that are really best. The best things.

The best values. You could aim too low. If you aim at becoming the President of the United States, you're aiming way too low when you could be a child of God.

If you aim at having access to important people, you're aiming way too low when you could have access to God. If you aim at having all men speak well of you, you're aiming way too low because you could have God speak well of you if you took another course. There are some things more valuable than others, and people typically, when they don't have God in their thinking, they aim too low.

And what they acquire, if they acquire it, see the problem is there's no guarantee that

they will. But if they acquired it all, it proves that they had been on the wrong course, then they start looking for the right thing, and it's usually as misguided as the thing they sought first. Jesus said, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

You see, you can hunger and thirst for fame or fortune or money or comfort or, you know, sex or anything you want, and there's no guarantee that you'll be satisfied, even if you get it. But, he said, if you hunger and thirst for righteousness, you will get it, and you will be satisfied with it. It is the thing that actually brings permanent and eternal satisfaction.

So, that is something Jesus points out, and that information is sort of underlying the things that Solomon recommends us valuing. He's always saying, or not always, but very many times saying, Such and such is better than such and such. In other words, he's identifying a hierarchy of values.

Both things mentioned might be of value to people. He's not saying one thing is worthless and the other thing is valuable. He's saying two things may be valuable, but this is better.

If you're going to have to invest your life in something, invest in the thing that is going to be best. If you're going, you know, we are all investing. We have so much time of life and no more.

We don't know how much, but there's certainly a finite amount. Time, money, opportunity, there's a finite amount. And every time any of it gets past us, every time a day goes by or we've spent some of our resources, they're not there anymore.

You've done it. You've used that one. And it is an investment in something.

It's either an investment in vanity, which at the end is saying, it's all like striving after the wind, or it's an investment in something of true value. And so Solomon is advising his son to be wise in choosing the highest values. And even when there's some things that are good, there may be something that's better and best.

So helping his son, helping his reader, becomes sensitized to the fact that there is a hierarchy of things valuable. And to think clearly about what is the best thing, is the purpose of many of these proverbs. For example, Proverbs 15 and verse 16 says, Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure with trouble.

Now, certainly there's nothing wrong with having great treasure. But if you have great treasure and your life is troubled, your treasure is a small consolation. I mean, ask Howard Hughes if he was here to ask.

Or many, many people who are extremely rich, but they have never had a successful

relationship, and they don't have any real friends. They can get sick just like anybody else can, no matter how rich they are. A life can be very troubled in all the ways that make it miserable, regardless how much money you have.

But if you have even a little, and you have the fear of the Lord, well, the fear of the Lord is more valuable than riches. You're better off. You've chosen the thing of higher value to choose to live your life in the fear of the Lord.

Now, there's a lot of Proverbs and Psalms and verses in the Prophets about the fear of the Lord. The expression, the fear of the Lord, is a very prominent theme in the entire Old Testament. It comes up frequently as a value in Proverbs.

What is the fear of the Lord? Well, it's not nervousness. It's not insecurity. Lots of people, when they think of God, it makes them insecure.

They're always afraid that He's going to be displeased, and He's going to yank the trapdoor out from under them, and they're going to hang by the neck until they're dead. That He's just waiting for them to do something wrong so He can whack them. And they see God that way, and they live in a terror, and an insecurity, and a fearfulness of God.

And yet, in the New Testament, we're told in 1 John, that perfect love casts out fear. Meaning, if we are walking in perfect love, and if we really love God, we don't sense any fear. But that's not the same thing as saying that the fear of the Lord has somehow ceased to be appropriate in the New Testament.

Because Jesus Himself, and Paul, and Peter, all taught the fear of the Lord. Jesus said, do not fear him who can kill the body and can do no more. In Matthew 10, He said, I'll tell you who to fear, He says.

Fear Him who, after He's killed the body, can destroy the soul also in Gehenna. So, Jesus said, you should fear God. And Paul said the same thing.

In 2 Corinthians 5, he said, knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. That is, we're motivated to convert people because we know the terror of God, the fear of God. Peter said, in 1 Peter 1, verse 17, he said, If you call God your Father, who, without respect of persons, judges every man according to his works, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.

In Revelation, chapter 14, an angel flies through heaven, preaching the gospel. It says, the everlasting gospel to the whole earth pains. Fear God.

So, the New Testament teaches to fear God. But how does that jive with perfect love casts out fear? One thing we can say, whatever perfect love casts out all fear means, it can't contradict the whole teaching of both the Old and the New Testament that fearing God is appropriate. So, the fear of God must be something that is good while there's

another sense in which perfect love casts out fear.

Well, here's what the fear of God is. The fear of God is a healthy appreciation for the danger of being on the bad terms of God. Anyone who has no healthy appreciation for the disaster that will come to us if they are not on good terms with God is a fool.

That's why the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. I am not afraid of Chauncey. But, I don't really want to get him too mad at me.

Because he knows how to box and I don't. And he's bigger than me. There's not many people here bigger than me, but he's bigger than me.

And I've never really seen him angry, but I don't think I want to. So, I won't. I'm not really afraid of Chauncey.

But I have a healthy respect that he's bigger than me. And if I were on bad terms with him, it wouldn't probably be a positive thing for me. I'm not afraid of freeway traffic.

I get on freeway all the time without a thought. But that's because I'm on good terms with the traffic. I'm going the same direction.

The thought of being in a wrong relationship with the traffic is a very terrifying thought. The idea of accidentally getting on the off-ramp and driving against freeway traffic like they do in some movies, that's terrifying. That makes your heart really pound when you see that in a movie.

They're going the wrong way against traffic. Of course, no one can really do it, but special effects. But the point is, you know that freeway traffic is an awesome and terrifying thing if you're not on good terms with it.

If you're going the same direction it's going, there's nothing wrong. You don't even think about it. In other words, you fear being in a wrong relationship with that which can easily destroy you.

You appreciate the danger. But because you do, the Bible says, the fear of the Lord causes men to depart from evil. Well, because I fear being on bad terms with traffic, I think I'll stay on good terms with traffic.

Then I'm not afraid anymore. But why am I staying on good terms? Because I am afraid of not being on good terms. That fear of traffic is the wisdom, the foundation that gives me the wisdom not to go the wrong way on the freeway.

I must live with that fear for my whole life. But it doesn't scare me because it motivates me to stay on good terms. And then when I'm on good terms, I don't feel afraid.

But if I begin to contemplate getting on bad terms with it, then the reaction is reasonably

fearful. And that's what the fear of the Lord is. Now, perfect love casts out the sense of fear in that if you're walking in love, well, then you're on good terms with God.

If you're on good terms with God, you don't feel afraid of Him. I spend none of my time being afraid of God. I can't even remember the last time I was afraid of what God was going to do to me.

Maybe I can, but it's been a long time. But I'll tell you what it was. It was when I hadn't really been doing the right thing.

That's when you fear God. And by the fear of God, you depart from evil. The fear of God is a healthy, clean thing.

And it's always recommended in the Bible. And it's said to be, you know, if you don't have it, you're a fool. Now, there are people who are fools.

There are people who clearly don't fear God. And sometimes that's the dominant thing you can say about somebody's behavior. They have no fear of God.

In fact, the Bible says that about certain people. There's no fear of God before their eyes. And just as wisdom is a thing to be chosen above rubies, so the fear of God is something to be chosen above wealth.

So that he says there in Proverbs 15, 16, better is a little, that is a little bit of substance, a little bit of food and clothing and the things you need. If you are a God-fearing man, you're in better shape than a man who comes into trouble because he lacks the fear of God, even though he may have a lot of stuff and money. So this is setting in the balances two different values.

You want money? There's nothing wrong with having money. That's a valuable thing. A lot of good can be done with money.

There's nothing wrong with valuing money, but you need to value the fear of the Lord more than that. The fear of the Lord is better than riches. And so there are many of these kinds of Proverbs in chapter 16 and verse 16.

How much better it is to get wisdom than gold. Okay, this is better than that. This is a value to place above that value.

Gold is great. I wouldn't mind having more of it to tell you the truth, especially now. Gold is very expensive right now and worth a lot of money.

I don't have very much of it, but the thing is, I'm not saying it's not good. It's just not as good as wisdom. If you got to make a choice to have a lot of gold and no wisdom, well, you're not going to have much gold for very long.

The fool and his money, you know. Better to have wisdom and a little bit, and you'll probably end up having more as a result of that, than to have a lot of gold but no wisdom. You do that and you're likely to sell it when it's worth \$300 an ounce, like I did, and miss out on it when it's \$1,400 an ounce.

So, better to have wisdom than gold, he says, and to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver. So, again, this is better than that. This is the point of this kind of proverb.

There's not all proverbs say this, but a lot of them do. Chapter 16, verse 19. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide this foil with the proud.

So, if you're with proud people and you're splitting up the take for, you know, whatever they've done. They've gotten rich and they're in a, whatever, in a business, or did some crime, or made some venture that made them lonely, and they're splitting up all the money among themselves, but you're in the group of proud people rather than the humble people, well, you're not as well off as if you were with the lowly, even if you're economically in a low situation. Better to be humble.

That's the point. Humility is a value. More, again, in this case, more than material things.

Chapter 16, verse 32. He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes the city. Now, I hope that as we're looking at these proverbs, you're remembering what I said at the very beginning about Hebrew poetry, how it's parallelism.

And, you know, once you're on that, you see it everywhere. He who is slow to anger is parallel to he that rules his spirit. Mighty is parallel to the one who can conquer a city.

A man who is slow to anger is better than the man who isn't slow to anger, even though he might be a mighty man. He might be a military man. He might be a military hero.

He might be able to conquer a city. He might be able to conquer the world, like Alexander the Great did, but he couldn't rule his own spirit, and he died at age 33 for lack of self-control. Some say of syphilis.

Some say of depression. But the man didn't live long. He died pretty much because of his own behavior.

He didn't die of natural causes. He could conquer the world. A mighty man he was, but couldn't rule his own spirit.

And having rule over yourself is better than being able to conquer and rule over others. It's harder. I mean, I couldn't easily conquer and rule over others, but if you're just born with the right musculature and in the right circumstances and take the right military

career and so forth, once you're in the position, it might be easy to conquer other people.

But it's never easy to conquer yourself. The reason is because yourself is as strong as you are. If you want to conquer a city, all you have to be is stronger than the city.

But how do you conquer yourself? Yourself is at least as strong as you are, right? In fact, yourself is exactly as strong as you are because yourself is you. And how can you overpower you? Now, of course, in the New Testament we know, walk in the spirit and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. You cannot in your own power conquer your own self.

Because you're evenly matched against yourself. But if the Holy Spirit is empowering you, then you can overpower yourself. And so if you walk in the spirit, you don't fulfill the lust of the flesh.

The point is, if you don't have the power to master yourself, it is no glory to you to be able to master others. It's much better to be a man who can hold his temper, have a long fuse instead of a short fuse, who can hold his tongue, who can, you know, just, he makes decisions for himself about how he will react rather than others making the decision of how he will react. This is something I bring out when I'm talking about you know, refuse to be offended in that talk I give on that subject.

That if you don't rule your own spirit, someone else is going to rule it for you. Do you want that? It says in Proverbs 25, 28, He that has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down and without walls. Well, what's a city without walls like? It's like indefensible.

It's like a city without walls is not going to be ruled by its own people. It's going to be ruled by whoever invades it and takes it over. If you don't rule your own spirit, someone else is going to do it.

And, you know, if you can't decide I will remain loving and calm and self-possessed, then someone else is going to make sure you're not loving and calm and self-possessed because everything they do will control your reactions. So, the ability to manage yourself and rule your own spirit, far more desirable, Solomon says, than being able to conquer cities and do those kinds of things, which are, of course, the kinds of things that many people admire. An ability like that.

Chapter 17, verse 1, Better is a dry morsel with quietness than a house full of feasting with strife. I wonder how much he may have known this from his own experience. He had a house full of feasting.

He lived in a mansion. He had 700 wives. Do you think there was ever any strife in his home? There probably was.

So, he would have rather just had a dry cracker or a piece of two-day-old bread, a dry morsel, in a house where there's calmness, where there's quiet. He saw that things that people really value aren't as valuable as some other things that are harder to get, like a happy home, a peaceful home, much more desirable than a materially comfortable home, he says, and lavish meals and all of that. In chapter 21, it's not in your notes, but in chapter 21, verse 9, he said, It is better to dwell in a corner of a housetop than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

Now, most people like to have large, spacious living areas, and would not prefer to live just in the corner of a housetop. In other words, to be restricted in your living space to just a little corner on a housetop. But that could be really more desirable than having a large mansion with a woman who is impossible to get along with, really.

And a student of mine observed something interesting once in our school years ago. He saw this verse, and he compared it with the verse later in the same chapter, verse 19, Proverbs 21, 19. Where Solomon said, It's better to dwell in the wilderness than with a contentious and angry woman.

My student said, You know, I think I can picture Solomon writing this chapter. He was sitting at his desk, and his wife was there nagging him, and he wrote, he left his desk and went up and sat in the corner of a housetop, and he wrote, It's better to live in the corner of a housetop than in a big house with a nagging woman. And then she came up there and started nagging him, so he went out to the wilderness and said, It's better to be in the wilderness.

The corner of a housetop wasn't far enough. Now some people might say, Well, Solomon's a misogynist, you know, we men, when we teach Proverbs, need to almost be afraid to talk about these Proverbs about bad women. But see, Proverbs has things about good women, too.

And by the way, it has as many things to say about bad men. You know, I mentioned that in Proverbs 31, where it says, Who can find a virtuous woman? The implication is there aren't many good women. But Proverbs also says, A faithful man, who can find? So it's not taking on women.

Women and men, they're hard to find are good ones. Okay? And sometimes both are mentioned in the same verse. Or a good woman and a bad woman are mentioned in the same verse.

You know, A virtuous wife is a crown to her husband, but she that brings shame is rottenness to his bones. There's two kinds of men, two kinds of women in Proverbs. In this case, he's saying, If you got the wrong kind of woman, you'd be happier living in the wilderness.

It's better. So, this is a sort of a catalog of values, in a way. And this is really what is more or less at the core of what's godly wisdom.

Because all people who are successful in life, secularly or religiously or any other way, just anyone who reaches their goals, can be said to have been a wise person in the worldly sense. They've made the right business decisions, they've made the right investments, they've made the right choices about what education to get, and of the options available to them. They could foresee that this one's going to get them where they want to go, and they took the right road.

That's wisdom. That's worldly wisdom. And worldly wisdom is usually one of the features of successful people.

But godly wisdom, as I said, has this other component. It's not just knowing how to get to your goal, it's knowing what goal is worth getting to. Picking a goal that's worthwhile, and then knowing how to get there.

And so that's what Solomon's doing here. He's saying, here's a better goal. It's a better goal to have a quiet and peaceable house.

It's a better goal to have a modest meal in a happy home. It's a better goal to be wise and have the fear of the Lord than to have great riches in gold and silver. And so these are what some of these prophets are saying.

Now, when it comes to deciding what is of true value, one thing a wise man knows is that the thing that doesn't have immediate gratification but might, in the end, really pay off is really the thing of greater value. That is, a wise man takes the long view of things. Can look down the road and say, okay, I'm going to make these sacrifices for this period of time.

A man who wants to be a doctor, or a lawyer, or a professional of any kind. He says, okay, I have to go to school, my friends are going to get out of college or high school, they're going to go right into their job, they're going to be out having a lot of free time, they're going to be independent, I'm going to be in school for another 8 years, another 12 years, and I'll have my nose in the grindstone getting no sleep, and I'm putting away, you know, what percentage of my life is that? 15% of my life is being spent in more schooling. Not just schooling, but more.

What a sacrifice that is. And yet, those who do it realize that, but after that, I'll be a lot happier with what I've got than my friends who dropped out of high school, or who just, you know, who took a waived job or something. Now, I'm speaking in terms of worldly values, because I'm not talking about a value I pursued myself, or would.

But the point is, a wise man sees that there are times when taking a hit in your immediate gratification now, delayed gratification, is a mark of wisdom. Seeking a

delayed gratification, rather than an immediate gratification that's going to be a dead end. So, the wise man has to take the long view of things and consider, what's it going to be like in the end? And there's a lot of Proverbs that tell what the end of a thing is, so that you'll know.

If the end is a good thing, then that's a good course to go. If the end is not desirable, then no matter how desirable the path there is, if it's in the end not a good thing, don't go there. To be wise, you have to look down the road, and not just a few inches.

I remember when I was in high school speech class, one of the girls, we had to give speeches on all kinds of things, and one of the girls gave a speech on safe driving. And she gave, I forget, three or four rules for safe driving. And one stuck in my mind, because it was, the wording of it was so strange, it just stuck in my mind.

You know how strange wording, you remember it better than you remember things that are normal. And she says, one of the rules for safe driving is to aim high in steering. And I guess that just meant, don't look just over the nose of your hood, the few feet ahead of you, but look higher through the windshield, further down the road.

And, of course, anyone who drives can see why that's true. You know, if you're just looking immediately in front of you, the taillights a hundred yards ahead of you might go on, you won't know it. But if you're looking way down the road, you can actually, oh, there's trouble down there, so I'm going to adjust now to that trouble down there.

It's just wise. It's wise to get as much information as you can about what's down the road, further down, where you're going to be before long, so that you can make proper adjustments now, so that when you get to that spot on the road, it'll be as you want it to be, rather than as you wouldn't want it to be. And that's one of the common repeated themes in Proverbs.

The expression, in the end, or an equivalent to it, to that expression. For example, in chapter five, and verse four, Psalmist says, but, verse three and four, the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil, but in the end, she's bitter as wormwood. So, in the moment, there's some pleasure in this pursuit of immoral sex.

But, it rarely turns out well in the end. Usually, it's got a bitter ending, a sad ending. And, Solomon knew that.

Solomon and his son needed to know that. But, the point he's making is, in this one instance, a sample of a much larger paradigm. That which is immediately attractive, that which is immediately pleasurable, can have consequences at the end that you will bitterly regret.

As bitter as wormwood. In the end, that expression, in the end, is a key expression to

knowing what's desirable to pursue and what's not. What is it like in the end? What's it going to be like in the end? The same chapter, when it says in verses eight through twelve, it says, remove your way far from her, do not go near the door of her house, lest you give your honor to others, and your years to the cruel one.

Lest aliens be filled with your wealth, and your labors go to the house of a foreigner. And you mourn at last, that is in the end, when your flesh and your body are consumed. So, if you pursue that way, at the end, at the last, you're going to be unhappy about it.

You'll mourn. And so, that's not the only kind of in the end that Solomon talks about. If you turn to chapter fourteen, Proverbs fourteen, twelve through thirteen, he says, there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

Even in luster the heart may sorrow, and the end of mirth may be grief. So, there's a way, which when you first consider it, it may have an attractive aspect. It seems right.

It might even be a mirthful, a happy pursuit. But, even in mirth, the person who hasn't been wise has got to have this element of trepidation, thinking, well, but, what's it going to be like later? Even in laughter, the heart has sorrow. Like, I know I'm having a good time now, but, hey, there's always tomorrow morning, you know.

And, it kind of dampens the enjoyment. Because, he says, the end of mirth may be grief. So, to pick something as a thing to do on Friday night, because it seems like it'd be fun, is not the right reason to choose something to do.

Now, there's nothing wrong with fun, necessarily. But, what is fun and mirthful and happy can easily be something that you'd have regrets about in the end. And, what Solomon is saying is, think about that.

Think about later. Don't think about the immediate happiness and gratification. Think about later.

There's a way that seems right, seems desirable, seems fun, today, but the end of it can be the way of death, can be grief. Now, when he says that, I remember when I was raising my kids, when they were young, many a time, there were things I told them to stop doing. They were messing around or something.

I mean, nothing really bad. My kids never did anything very bad. But, there were things they were doing that I didn't want them to keep doing.

I'd say, stop doing that. And, they'd say, but it's fun. As if that's an argument for doing something.

And, I can't remember how many times I've told them, fun is not an argument for something. Fun is not a value in itself. Lots of things are fun that are wrong to do.

Other things are fun that are right to do. There's nothing wrong with fun, but it simply is inadequate as an argument in favor of any course of action. A lot of people kind of say, well, Steve, you need to take some time off and just go out and have fun.

I'm not against having fun. That's why I do it all the time. I have fun when I teach.

To me, that's fun. To me, everything I do is kind of fun. But, I don't do it because it's fun.

Fun is the enjoyment, is a byproduct of doing something that you think is worthwhile and profitable and good. But, if you do something only because it's fun, you make compromise on the part about it being good or profitable. And so, think about the end.

Is it going to end up in the way of death, in the way of grief, as he says here? If so, then the fact that it's fun and mirthful is not really much of an argument in his favor. In Proverbs 19, and verse 20, it says, Listen to counsel and receive instruction that you may be wise in your latter days. Why does he say in your latter days? Well, because a young man often receives counsel against what his immediate impulses are.

He knows he wants to do a certain thing, and his dad, his preacher, his wiser friends, they say, no, don't do that. And, listen to that counsel. Well, why? They always tell me to not do what I want.

Remember when Ahab was asking whether he should go to battle at Ramoth Gilead, which he wanted to do, and all his prophets said, oh yeah, do it. And, he asked Jehoshaphat to go with him, and Jehoshaphat said, well, isn't there a prophet of the Lord here? And, he said, yeah, there's this guy named Micaiah, but he always tells me stuff I don't want to hear. You know? I like these prophets who, I put bread in their mouth, and they tell me what I want.

It's like putting a coin in the vending machine to get the prophecy you want. But, this guy, Micaiah, it seems like he's always saying stuff I don't want to hear. Well, and Jehoshaphat said, don't talk like that.

Call him in here. That's what he said. He said, don't say that.

But, there's a reason Ahab said that. Ahab was that kind of guy. He said what he meant.

He didn't want the truth if it wasn't going to make him happy. He didn't want to hear that kind of counsel. When Rehoboam went to his old man counselors about what he should do about the people's request to have the taxes lowered, the old man said, you'd be wise to lower those taxes.

You relieve the burdens on these people, and they'll be your loyal subjects forever. He thought, hmm, but then I have less money. He said, I've checked these younger counselors, see what they say.

And the younger counselor said, oh no, you've got to put these people in their place right at the beginning. You've got to set a precedent here. You tell them, my father chastened you with whips, I'll chasten you with scorpions.

My little finger will be thicker than my father's loin. And so, he took the foolish counsel. Why? Because it was more gratifying to him immediately.

But a young man who takes counsel when he is older will say, hey, I'm glad I followed the advice that I didn't really prefer because it was wiser. I ended up taking a course that has a better end to it. And that is what Solomon means in chapter 19, verse 20.

Listen to counsel and receive instructions so that you may be wise in your latter days. Don't just think about now. Think about what you're going to be feeling about this later.

I've always thought it was kind of helpful. I don't always do this, but sometimes I do. And when I do, I've always thought it was a good idea.

I just forget sometimes. But when I'm trying to decide what to do in a given case, I think, well, I've got this choice and this choice. If I make this choice, how will I feel about it ten years from now? Or better yet, how will I feel about it a hundred years from now, a thousand years from now, in eternity? As opposed to if I make this choice.

That's the way you really would be wise to consider those things in making important decisions because there is going to be a ten years from now. And if you died before then, you're still going to be around, either regretting what you did or not. It's great to do things that you'll be on your deathbed thinking, I'm glad I chose that course instead of another.

You know, you've heard people say this, that no one on their deathbed regrets that they didn't spend more time at the office. Many people on their deathbed regret that they didn't do more for God or that they didn't spend more time with their children or that they didn't cultivate their marriage more. There's all kinds of things which on your deathbed, you'll say, I wish I had done more of that instead of what I did do.

Well, whatever it is that you're going to think that about, do that now. Take counsel now because in your latter end, that's going to be what matters to you more long term in the future. Chapter 20 and verse 21, An inheritance gained hastily at the beginning will not be blessed in the end or at the end.

Now again, at the end is the idea here. You're eager to get rich? Going to take the get rich quick route? Why don't you go to Las Vegas? Maybe you can win the jackpot. Why don't you play the lottery? Why don't you do some kind of scheme to get rich fast? Because then you don't have to wait.

No, and you probably don't have to wait very long for the regrets either because you

know when people win the lottery, you've I'm sure heard as I have, I mean it's fairly well publicized, they follow up on these lottery winners a few years later and see what's going on. Most of them have ruined their lives and their relationships. You know, you just suddenly become a multi-millionaire when you're an ordinary Joe before.

It does not enhance your life if it's hastily gained. Now if you build a fortune through diligence and building your reputation and being honest and you know doing things that profit people and you know your estate builds up that way, that is a different situation because you are growing personally along with the growing of, with the passing of time as your estate grows and you can grow in wisdom about things as responsibilities for those things increase. But if you just suddenly have all this money dumped on you, that may be what everyone dreams of.

Oh, if I could just win the lottery, that would change everything. It sure would. It probably wouldn't be for the good though.

And, I mean, if case histories are any indication, it hasn't really helped people. An inheritance gained hastily at the beginning is not usually blessed in the end. Partly because money that's gained hastily is so often not gained honestly and therefore God can't bless you in it.

It is possible to be wealthy and blessed by God too. Abraham was, Job was, lots of people were. But if your aim is to get wealthy as quickly as you can and so forth, then that's the wrong values.

And in the end there's probably going to be no blessing in it and it could be the worst thing that ever happened to you. Chapter 23, verse 18. Well, verse 17, 18.

Do not let your heart envy sinners, but in the fear of the Lord continue all day long. For surely there is a hereafter, and your hope will not be cut off. Now, we use the word hereafter to mean the next life.

But, in all likelihood, hereafter just means a time after this. This is not the last chapter right now. There is more to come.

And if you envy sinners because they seem to be having a great time, there's more later. You're not seeing the whole story. Fast forward a few chapters to the end and see these people dissipated and sick and with most of their relations broken.

And you see, there is an afterward part. There's this present time and you see the sinners seem to be prospering, but there's more than that. It comes later.

There's a hereafter. And you really ought to look to that for your choices of what you're going to do with your now. In the same chapter, verses 31 and 32, it says, Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly.

At the last, it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper. In other words, when you're tempted to get drunk, is really what it's talking about. Or when you are tempted to give in to alcohol and you're not able to manage it, then it's going to bite you.

In the end, you might enjoy drinking. I'm not sure why anyone would. I've never been much of a drinker myself.

I don't mind it, but I've never seen what's so attractive about it. I guess it's an acquired taste, because I can't even stand the smell of most hard liquor. I've never tasted it.

The fact is, some people obviously find it attractive, even compelling, even addictive. But if that's how you see it, if looking at the red wine is something that causes you to give up self-control, then in the end, remember before you drink it, that you're going to be thinking something about this later. If it's only a hangover the next day, or if it's that you wake up in the hospital and realize that you killed somebody on the freeway.

There's another part to this story. Look to the end of the story and decide how you want the early chapters to go. That's what wisdom would do.

Chapter 24 of Proverbs, verse 14. Actually, verses 13 and 14. My son, eat honey because it is good, and the honeycomb which is sweet to your taste, so shall the knowledge of wisdom be to your soul.

If you have found it, there is a prospect, that is a future, and your hope will not be cut off. So again, if you find wisdom, and if you relish it like the palate relishes savory sweet food, if wisdom is sweet to your soul that way, then there is a prospect of a future that you'll be glad of, for having chosen wisdom. That's what he's saying, of course.

And in verse 20 of the same chapter, he says, there is no prospect for the evil man. So, if you're going to choose wisdom or evil, just realize there's a prospect. There's an outcome that's desirable for the wise man, but there's none for the evil man, so don't choose evil.

Look down the road further. Chapter 18, we skipped past that, but let's go back to it. Chapter 18, verse 18.

It's not in your notes. Verse 17. Proverbs 18, 17.

The first one to plead his cause seems right until his neighbor comes and examines it. I think it's more really verse 13. I'm thinking of he who answers a matter before he hears it.

These two verses kind of go together, but the one in verse 13 is more what I'm looking for. Proverbs 18, 13. He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him.

That is to say, we're always tempted to speak our mind, but before you do, you might ask yourself, do I really know enough about this situation to state an opinion? I might be answering a matter when I haven't really taken in all the facts. I may say something really stupid. I may embarrass myself later.

Maybe I'd better hold my tongue until I've heard more, until I know more. And that's, I say verse 17 is similar to it because the first one to plead his cause seems right until his neighbor comes and examines him. The idea is that you haven't heard the whole story yet if you've only heard one side.

Don't answer it yet. Don't give your answer when you've only heard one side. You might have the other side come and give a more convincing case.

And so he that answers a matter before he hears it, that's too soon. And later he may feel ashamed. And now chapter 25, verse 8. Do not go hastily to court, for what will you do in the end when your neighbor has put you to shame? So again, going to court, deciding early on that you've got a case or that the other guy's wrong and you're right, being hasty, if you haven't heard the whole situation, you don't know, maybe he's going to put you to shame in court.

Maybe you taking him to court is going to turn on you. If you haven't heard the whole story yet, don't give an answer, don't make a decision yet, certainly don't take him to court until you know all the facts because you go to court, you may be the one that the trap snaps back on. In the end, your neighbor may put you to shame.

Once again, it's just a matter of looking ahead, looking down the road. One more example and then we take a break. Proverbs 29, 21.

He who pampers his servant from childhood will have him as a son in the end. Now, I think what this means is that in a society that has household servants, the master is the complete authority and can treat them however he wants to. In many cases, as we know in American slavery, but certainly in all slavery throughout history, there are masters who have been very cruel, treated their servants like dirt, have not considered their feelings, have not considered them human and have just used them like a piece of property.

And no doubt have, you know, earned for themselves a great deal of hatred from their servants. And those servants who hate them, no doubt will take every opportunity they can to cheat them, to steal from them or whatever when they're not looking because they don't have any love for them. This is if you treat your servants right, even though you have the power to do otherwise.

If you treat your servants carefully and kindly, then they'll be loyal to you like a son. You know, it's not only true of servants, it's basically true of relationships in general. But the

point of a servant-master relationship is one where there's truly a total power of one person over another person.

So, he's got all the options. He can treat the person nicely or wrongly without any fear of anything, any retribution to himself. A master could kill his servant if he wanted to.

In most of our relationships, it's not quite that absolute. But in all relationships, we may have advantage over somebody else in some way. We can treat them well or badly.

But the idea is, even in a situation where you've got absolute impunity for treating someone badly like your servant, there's reasons to treat him well. There's reasons to be kind and pamper him and so forth because you may want him to be your friend. You may want him to think of you like a father instead of like an oppressor.

You may want his loyalty. You may want his honesty in the end. So, the basic idea of this is about relationships in general.

The way you treat people will curry their loyalty or their disloyalty, their resentment or their gratitude. And so, before you treat somebody who's standing before you a certain way, you may think about, how would I like him to think about me and how would I like this relationship to be down the line? You know, sometimes I need to choose my words, my actions, my responses to people with the mind that this could be a long-term relationship and there may be reasons why I will regret not treating this person well. Now, of course, the Christian knows there's especially reasons to regret it because God will hold you accountable for not treating people well.

But even just in the natural, he's pointing out, treating people well, treating your employees well, treating your neighbors well, your children well, your wife, your husband, anyone well, that's going to go better for you later on. And that's what you should be thinking about, not the momentary impatience or anger you're feeling towards somebody, but the long-term relationship you want to have with them. That's what he's saying.

So, in choosing the right values, Proverbs points out, some things are better than others and sometimes it's not intuitive. Sometimes the things that people think are valuable, like gold and silver and big houses, are not necessarily as valuable as some things that people don't think to pursue, like a peaceful home or the fear of the Lord. But a person will choose more wisely if they're looking down the road further and saying, okay, I'm making a choice about something today but there's going to be repercussions down in the end.

What will it be like in the end? So, that's what wisdom informs us about, is there is a hereafter, there is something beyond now. And the things we do now will have repercussions on shaping what that hereafter looks like. Christians know that to be true

even in the spiritual, in the eternal sense.

But the Proverbs are pointing out to a more worldly man that this is true even in the worldly sense. One guy said, the problem with the saying, eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die, is that sometimes tomorrow you don't die. Sometimes you have to live with the consequences of having eaten, drank and been merry.

It would be easier if you did die. But sometimes you eat, drink and marry and you don't die. And then you have to live with that.

So, the choices you make now, you have to figure, what am I going to think about this later? Am I going to have regrets? And if you think that way, you're thinking like a wise man. If you neglect to think that way, you're just, like Solomon said, neglecting wisdom, being a fool. Well, we'll stop there.