

I want you to think about what we have been seeing from these central chapters in Proverbs.

What are we seeing about wealth?

What are we seeing about poverty?

Wealth and poverty are as much about relationship as they are about material stuff.

And – whether we like it or not – you can’t isolate relationships from stuff.

Yes, you can *distinguish* between them – and you should!

But Proverbs is showing us that all of life is connected.

Our relationship with God – our relationships with others – with ourselves –
and with all of creation – are all interconnected.

Our passage can be described in three sections:

first “wealth and poverty among friends and family” –

second “wisdom in the court and in the home” –

and third “discipling the next generation.”

If you think about it –

these proverbs demonstrate the importance of being properly related

first to God, but also to self, to others, and to creation (“stuff”).

1. Wealth and Poverty among Friends and Family (18:22-19:7)

a. A Wife, Wealth, and Failed Companions (v22-24)

²² *He who finds a wife finds a good thing
and obtains favor from the LORD.*

There are some proverbs that speak of how awful a quarrelsome wife is –

(we’ll hear one down in verse 13 of chapter 19) –

so it is striking that verse 22 has no qualifications.

“He who finds a wife” – not a good wife, not an excellent wife – but just “a wife.”

He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.

Marriage – and our text clearly indicates that it is a “he” who finds a “wife” –
male and female – finds a “good.”

After all, as we saw last time,

when God had made Adam, he said that it was *not good* for Adam to be alone.

And since Adam had *God* as a friend,

the problem was not merely “loneliness”!

After all, Adam needs a “suitable helper” in order to fulfill the blessing of God:

“be fruitful and multiply – fill the earth and subdue it!”

He can do a measure of subduing by himself.
He can name all the animals by himself.
But he cannot be fruitful and multiply by himself!

And so he who finds a wife finds a good thing.
Marriage is a good thing.

Marriage is a gift from God –
which is why he who finds a wife “obtains favor from the LORD.”

What you do with that gift – what you do with that good thing –
is up to you!
And unfortunately all of us have a certain tendency toward folly...

Verse 23 seems to shift gears dramatically:

²³ *The poor use entreaties,
but the rich answer roughly.*

We were just talking about marriage.
Now we're talking about the dispositions of the rich and the poor.

The poor use entreaties.
They know that they have no standing.
They have no way to accomplish their goals –
unless someone else helps them –
unless someone else does for them
what they cannot possibly do for themselves.

But the rich answer roughly.
The rich know that they have standing.
They don't need anyone else to help them accomplish their goals.

And so when they hear the entreaty of the poor –
they answer roughly (strongly –
the idea is that they don't feel the helplessness of the poor,
and so the rich tend to “rub it in”
by the way that they speak to the poor.

One of the nice things about moving downtown is that we live in a neighborhood
where there are all sorts of people.
There are half million dollar homes in the neighborhood.
There are \$10,000 homes in the neighborhood!

And everything in between.

Suburban living is designed to allow everyone to live in their own bubble.

We only live around people “like us.”

One effect is that we tend to forget that we are “the rich.”

All it takes is an encounter with a poor man to show us how “rough” we are!

Maybe we don’t mean to be rough!

We weren’t trying to be mean –

But the way it came out...

We were the ones in power – we were the ones in control of the situation...

All they could do was entreat...

This is not saying that power or wealth is *bad* –

but it is saying that people tend to use power and wealth *badly* –

and if we think that we are the exception to the rule,

it probably means that we are deceiving ourselves.

Verse 24 then completes our opening triad of verses with a contrast between many companions and the friend closer than a brother:

²⁴ *A man of many companions may come to ruin,
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*

The image here is of a man with many companions –

not *friends* – but “companions” – buddies that he hangs out with.

You may have lots of buddies – but do you have *friends* –

do you have people who have your back *no matter what*?

I remember a doctor telling me about a conversation he had with a patient:

“Doctor, I’m lonely.”

“Do you have any friends?”

“Yes! I have a friend who lives 500 miles away...”

We live in a world that has forgotten the meaning of friendship.

Do you want friends?

Then *be a friend*.

Be someone who will be there for others – no matter what!

And that means *show up*.

If you think about personal interaction in selfish terms

(do I feel like it? – what will I get out of it?),

then you are not *acting like a friend*.

In the language of verse 24, you are acting like a companion
someone who may or may not stick around when the going gets tough.

And if you say, “Oh, but when the going gets tough, I’ll be there!” –
no, you won’t.
You weren’t around for all the ordinary moments,
so you won’t even know when the going got tough.

There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.
We saw recently that a brother is born for adversity.
And yet we also saw last week that
“a brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city.”

It is amazing how closely siblings stick together –
unless you cross that invisible line one time too many.
And then the hurt just sinks in deeper and deeper –
and there is no going back!

But *usually* your siblings will have your back when no one else does.
But there *is* a friend who sticks closer than a brother.
It’s not about having the *most* friends – it’s not about having the *right* friends –
it’s about having the right *kind* of friends!

There is a John Newton hymn that gets at this well:
*One there is, above all others, well deserves the name of Friend;
His is love beyond a brother’s, costly, free, and knows no end.
They who once his kindness prove find it everlasting love.*

*Which of all our friends, to save us, could or would have shed his blood?
But our Jesus died to have us reconciled in him to God.
This was boundless love indeed; Jesus is a Friend in need.*

*Could we bear from one another what he daily bears from us?
Yet this glorious Friend and Brother loves us, though we treat him thus;
though for good we render ill, he accounts us brethren still.*

If you would know what friendship really looks like – look at Jesus.
I know – it’s easy to say, “We can never be *that* good!”
And yet, when you consider what it is about Jesus that we are called to imitate –
it is the incarnation (“have this same mind that was also in Christ Jesus,
who though he was in the form of God...”) and the atonement (“take up your cross and follow me”).

But the reason why Jesus is the sort of friend that he is –

is because this is the sort of friend that God is.
And this is the sort of friend that he created us to be!

Our problem is that we often walk the opposite direction.
And this is the focus of verses 1-3 of chapter 19.

b. Desire Without Knowledge Is Not Good: the Path to Ruin (v1-3)

*19 Better is a poor person who walks in his integrity
than one who is crooked in speech and is a fool.*

² *Desire^[b] without knowledge is not good,
and whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way.*

³ *When a man's folly brings his way to ruin,
his heart rages against the LORD.*

Crooked speech – desire without knowledge – and a heart that rages against the LORD.
These are the things that describe the path to ruin.

Notice that these three things describe a person's relations with others, with self, and with God.

The one who is crooked in speech deceives others.
The one who is driven by his ignorant appetites will miss the way –
and when his folly results in ruin,
he rages against the LORD – blaming God for his situation in life.

In other words, he is out of accord with others – out of accord with himself –
and thus out of accord with God.

Earlier in Proverbs we saw a lot of sayings
that made it sound like everything goes well for the wise.
But now we are dealing with the complications of this fallen world.
When things are *not* the way they should be –
which should you choose?
Wealth or integrity?

What is “integrity”?
Wholeness.
Completeness.

A person of integrity is one who is whole.
And that wholeness is expressed in being rightly related to God,
to self, to others, and to all creation.

When sin entered the world, it disrupted all of these relationships.
We became fragmented.
Augustine speaks of the disintegrated self.

It's not that we can escape from any of these relationships –
it's that these relationships become detached –
or (to put it another way) we try to integrate them around other things!

So, for instance, we make marriage the thing that holds our life together –
and so everything revolves around this person – this relationship.
But your spouse isn't God.

Yes, he who finds a wife finds a good thing –
but a good thing isn't sufficient to hold life together!

A steering wheel is a good thing – and a steering wheel is round.
But if you have a flat tire,
and you try to replace your flat tire with your steering wheel,
a steering wheel can't hold the weight of the car!

In the same way, your spouse can't hold the weight of your life.

Desire without knowledge is *not good*.

When your life is rightly ordered – with God at the center –
when his ways – his pattern of life – is what organizes your world –
then whatever happens, you will walk in integrity – wholeness.

Verses 4-7 then show what happens to the disintegrated self:

c. Poverty Destroys Relationships (v4-7)

⁴ *Wealth brings many new friends,
but a poor man is deserted by his friend.*

You can almost feel the “quotation marks” around “friends.”
“Wealth brings many new friends.”

Many people will “have your back” if they think they can get something from you!

But those who are “calculating” in their friendship will also bail on you
when they don't think they can get anything out of the relationship.

Aristotle describes two common reasons why we are friends:

Sometimes we are friends for the sake of what we get from the relationship.
Other times we are friends because we like to be around the other person.

He also says that there is a third form of friendship that is much more rare:
where we love the other person for their own sake.

But he admits that if we are honest with ourselves,
we usually only reach this point with one or two others –

and usually only after we have benefitted much from the relationship.

After all, if you don't like being around the person,
and you don't get anything out of the relationship,
why are you still friends?!

How do you love a person for their own sake?

Aristotle never really gets you there.
Only the cross can.
It is only because God loved us when we were hostile to him.

The theme of friendship continues in verses 5-6:
⁵ *A false witness will not go unpunished,
and he who breathes out lies will not escape.*

False witnesses destroy friendships.
There is nothing like a lie to sow discord and mistrust!
People get away with lies all the time – for a little while!

But he who sows untruths – he who perpetuates crooked speech –
will reap a bountiful harvest *in due time*.

One lie *always* leads to another.
Once you have started to build an edifice based on untruth,
you will invariably have to keep going!
The only way out is to go all the way back to the first lie,
and start over with truth.

It may be painful –
no, it *will be* painful!
There is no “may be” about it!
But the alternative is worse!
The alternative is destruction – and you cannot escape.

Verse 6 brings back the theme of wealth and bribery:
⁶ *Many seek the favor of a generous man,^[c]
and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts.*

It is probably better to translate this “prince” or “noble” –
since anyone can be “generous” –
but this verse is indicating what sort of person people seek favor from.
And in order to grant favors, one needs more than just generosity –
one needs the power to accomplish the favor!

Many seek the favor of a prince –
and everyone is a friend to the man who gives gifts!

Do they just like me because I give them candy?

And verse 7 concludes with a rare triplet –
⁷ *All a poor man's brothers hate him;
how much more do his friends go far from him!
He pursues them with words, but does not have them.*^[d]

He pleads with them – but they are not in his corner.

This is all rather discouraging!
The good news is that section two provides something of an answer
to the problem of section one...

And verse 8 sets up the answer:

2. Wisdom in the Court and in the Home (19:8-15)

⁸ *Whoever gets sense loves his own soul;
he who keeps understanding will discover good.*

Remember that verse 3 had focused on our relationship to God.
Many of our verses have focused on our relationship with others!

But when our relationships with God and others are out of whack –
that is generally because our relationship with our self is out of whack!

“Whoever gets sense loves his own soul.”
You need to be rightly related to yourself!
If you hate yourself, then you are going to engage in self-destructive behavior.

If you love yourself, then you will get sense.

Many people have asked me what I think about “self-care.”
My answer is always qualified because “self-care”
in isolation from our relationships to God, to others, and to creation,
does not promote *wholeness*.

On the other hand, if you are always helping others, serving God, doing this, seeking that,
then that does not promote wholeness either!

That’s why Proverbs says “*whoever gets sense loves his own soul;
he who keeps understanding will discover good.*”

Adam was told to “keep the garden.”
Abraham was told to “keep God’s covenant”
Israel was told “keep the Sabbath”
The priests and Levites were told to “keep” the tabernacle and the holy place.

And we are told to “keep” understanding.
Guard it. Observe it. Practice it. Preserve it.

The rest of this section then applies the principle to our relationships with others –
first in society (v9-12) and then at home (v13-15):

a. Folly Makes a Mess of the Court (v9-12)

- ⁹ *A false witness will not go unpunished,
and he who breathes out lies will perish.*
¹⁰ *It is not fitting for a fool to live in luxury,
much less for a slave to rule over princes.*
¹¹ *Good sense makes one slow to anger,
and it is his glory to overlook an offense.*
¹² *A king's wrath is like the growling of a lion,
but his favor is like dew on the grass.*

Verse 9 starts with false witnesses in the court room.
Those who testify falsely will not go unpunished.
Their sins will find them out!

Verse 10 points out that social order *should* follow wisdom.
It is not fitting – it is not in keeping with wholeness –
that a fool should live in luxury.
It is most profoundly *out of order* that a fool should be wealthy.
What will a fool do with all that money?
How will a fool use power?
There are plenty of examples in all of history – and at the present day!

In contrast, verse 11 says that Good sense makes one slow to anger.
The one who gets sense loves his soul.
And you have good sense, then you are slow to anger –
because you realize that the anger of man
does not accomplish the righteousness of God.
And that is why it is his *glory* to overlook an offense.
When you are rightly related to God, self, others, and creation,
then you realize when something is no big deal.

And this is especially true of the King.
¹² *A king's wrath is like the growling of a lion,*

but his favor is like dew on the grass.

Verses 13-15 then apply all this to home.

Verses 13-14 deal with marriage and parenting:

b. Folly Makes a Mess of the Home (v13-15)

¹³ *A foolish son is ruin to his father,
and a wife's quarreling is a continual dripping of rain.*

¹⁴ *House and wealth are inherited from fathers,
but a prudent wife is from the LORD.*

Both verses end by contrasting the quarrelsome wife with a prudent wife.

Our passage started by saying that he who finds a wife finds a good thing,
and obtains favor from the LORD.

But a wife's quarreling and brawling is really annoying!

In contrast a prudent wife is from the LORD.

This is very much related to what we saw about friendship earlier.

If only one partner is seeking the good of the other,
that makes it *really hard* on the other partner!

If only one party benefits from the relationship,
that is not contributing to *wholeness*.

But how do you figure out *in advance* whether a woman will be quarrelsome or prudent?

That's why it says, "a prudent wife is from the LORD."

In those days it was common for parents to "arrange" marriages –
so you might think that a prudent wife is due to the great wisdom of your parents!

But no, Solomon says that you have no say in whether your wife is prudent.

You cannot make her be prudent.

Nor can your parents (or her parents) guarantee that she is prudent!

When you try to control the situation – it generally goes awry.

You can't control your friend.

In the same way, you can't control your wife.

That's not your job!!

Verse 15 then applies this to our relationship with creation as well:

¹⁵ *Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep,
and an idle person will suffer hunger.*

Have you ever noticed that when you are lazy, you generally get tired sooner.

God made us to be diligent.

Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh day you shall rest.

The Sabbath commandment is not just about resting.
It's also about working!
The rhythms of life and work are integral to our wholeness.

And we need to teach this to the next generation.
And that is how our passage concludes (verses 16-23).
Verse 16 again opens with the general principle that shapes the section.

3. Discipling the Next Generation (19:16-23)

¹⁶ *Whoever keeps the commandment keeps his life;
he who despises his ways will die.*

“The commandment” has echoes of Deuteronomy –
where the Shema is “the commandment” which you are teach to your sons:
“Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One.”

And this gets applied in several ways.
First,

a. The LORD Rewards Generosity (v17)

¹⁷ *Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD,
and he will repay him for his deed.*

When you help the poor, you are lending to God.
No, the poor will not repay you!
You are giving to them – but in that gift
you are “investing” in the common well-being of the community.
And as such, the LORD will repay you for your deed.

What goes around comes around –
not just because of blind, impersonal “karma” –
but because *Yahweh* is God!

And *he* will make all things right – and bring all things to remembrance.

And teach these things to your children:

b. The Need for Discipline (v18-19)

¹⁸ *Discipline your son, for there is hope;
do not set your heart on putting him to death.*

That second line sounds strange!
What parent sets their heart on putting their son to death?!

A parent who neglects discipline, that's who!

If you let your child get away with whatever he wants,
then you are destroying your child's life!

And eventually that leads to verse 19:

¹⁹ *A man of great wrath will pay the penalty,
for if you deliver him, you will only have to do it again.*

If he doesn't learn self-control *now*, then he will have to learn it the hard way later.

I bailed a man out of jail once.

And sure enough, he called me again a few months later...

So... (v20)

c. The Need for Humility (v20-21)

²⁰ *Listen to advice and accept instruction,
that you may gain wisdom in the future.*

We need humility.

The wise man understands that he does not know what he needs to know –
and so therefore accepts instruction – listens to advice –
so that he may gain wisdom in the future.

After all:

²¹ *Many are the plans in the mind of a man,
but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.*

Unless we are clearly related to God – humbly accepting *his* sovereign purpose –
we will not be properly related to anyone or anything else!

And the whole passage concludes with the need for *hesed* – steadfast love.

d. The Need for Steadfast Love (*hesed*) (v22-23)

²² *What is desired in a man is steadfast love,
and a poor man is better than a liar.*

²³ *The fear of the LORD leads to life,
and whoever has it rests satisfied;
he will not be visited by harm.*

What does God require of us?

But to do justice, and to love mercy (*hesed*) and to walk humbly with our God.
If you walk humbly with God – fearing *him* and loving *him* –
that is the path to life –
and the one who has the fear of the LORD (and therefore has life)
will not be visited by harm (by “evil”).