Proverbs Resources

# The Instruction of Amenemope

Amenemope was a scribe in Egypt in about the 1100s, the period of the Judges in Israel.

Introduction

The beginning of the instruction about life,  
    The guide for well-being,  
All the principles of official procedure,  
    The duties of the courtiers;  
To know how to refute the accusation of one who made it,  
    And to send back a reply to the one who wrote,  
To set one straight on the paths of life,  
    And make him prosper on earth;  
To let his heart settle down in its chapel,  
    As one who steers him clear of evil;  
To save him from the talk of others,  
    As one who is respected in the speech of men.

Written by the superintendent of the land, experienced in his office,  
    The offspring of a scribe of the Beloved Land,  
The Superintendent of produce, who fixes the grain measure,  
    Who sets the grain tax amount for his lord,  
Who registers the islands which appear as new land over the cartouche of His Majesty,  
    And sets up the land mark at the boundary of the arable land,  
Who protects the king by his tax rolls,  
    And makes the Register of the Black land.  
The scribe who places the divine offerings for all the gods,  
    The donor of land grants to the people,  
The superintendent of grain who administers the food offerings,  
    Who supplies the storerooms with grain  
A truly silent man in Tjeni in the Ta-wer nome,  
    One whose verdict is "acquitted" in Ipu,  
The owner of a pyramid tomb on the west of Senut,  
    As well as the owner of a memorial chapel in Abydos,  
Amenemope, the son of Kanakht,  
    Whose verdict is "acquitted" in the Ta-wer nome.

For his son, the youngest of his children,  
    The least of his family,  
Initiate of the mysteries of Min-Kamutef,  
    Libation pourer of Wennofre,  
Who introduces Horus upon the throne of his father,  
    His stolist in his august chapel,

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The seer of the Mother of God,  
The inspector of the black cattle of the terrace of Min,  
    Who protects Min in his chapel,  
Hoermmaakheru is his true name,  
    A child of an official of Ipu,  
The son of the sistrum player of Shu and Tefnut,  
    The chief singer of Horus, the Lady Tawosret.

He Says:

Chapter 1

Give your years and hear what is said,  
    Give your mind over to their interpretation:  
It is profitable to put them in your heart,   
    But woe to him that neglects them!  
Let them rest in the shrine of your insides  
    That they may act as a lock in your heart;  
Now when there comes a storm of words,  
    They will be a mooring post on your tongue.

If you spend a lifetime with these things in your heart,  
    You will find it good fortune;  
You will discover my words to be a treasure house of life,  
    And your body will flourish upon earth.

Chapter 2

Beware of stealing from a miserable man  
    And of raging against the cripple.  
Do not stretch out your hand to touch an old man,  
    Nor snip at the words of an elder.  
Don't let yourself be involved in a fraudulent business,  
    Not desire the carrying out of it;  
Do not get tired because of being interfered with,  
    Nor return an answer on your own.  
The evildoer, throw him <in> the canal,  
    And he will bring back its slime.  
The north wind comes down and ends his appointed hour,  
    It is joined to the tempest;  
The thunder is high, the crocodiles are nasty,  
    O hot-headed man, what are you like?  
he cries out, and his voice (reaches) heaven.  
    O Moon, make his crime manifest!  
Row that we may ferry the evil man away,  
    For we will not act according to his evil nature;  
Lift him up, give him your hand,  
    And leave him <in> the hands of god;  
Fill his gut with your own food  
    That he may be sated and ashamed.  
Something else of value in the heart of God  
    Is to stop and think before speaking.

Chapter 3

Do not get into a quarrel with the argumentative man  
    Nor incite him with words;  
Proceed cautiously before an opponent,  
    And give way to an adversary;  
Sleep on it before speaking,  
    For a storm come forth like fire in hay is  
The hot-headed man in his appointed time.  
    May you be restrained before him;  
Leave him to himself,  
    And God will know how to answer him.

If you spend your life with these things in your heart,  
    Your children shall behold them.

Chapter 4

The hot-headed man in the temple  
    Is like a tree grown indoors;  
Only for a moment does it put forth roots.  
    It reaches its end in the carpentry shop,  
It is floated away far from its place,  
    Or fire is its funeral pyre.

the truly temperate man sets himself apart,  
    He is like a tree grown in a sunlit field,  
But it flourishes, it doubles its yield,  
    It stands before its owner;  
Its fruit is something sweet, its shade is pleasant,  
    And it reaches its end as a statue.

Chapter 5

Do not take by violence the shares of the temple,  
    Do not be grasping, and you will find overabundance;  
Do not take away a temple servant  
    In order to acquire the property of another man.  
Do not say today is the same as tomorrow,  
    Or how will matters come to pass?  
When tomorrow comes, today is past;  
    The deep waters sink from the canal bank,  
Crocodiles are uncovered, the hippopotamuses are on dry land,   
    And the fishes gasping for air;  
The wolves are fat, the wild fowl in festival,  
    And the nets are drained.

Every temperate man in the temple says,  
    "Great is the benevolence of Re."  
Fill yourself with silence, you will find life,  
    And your body shall flourish upon earth.

Chapter 6

Do not displace the surveyor's marker on the boundaries of the arable land,  
    Nor alter the position of the measuring line;  
Do not be greedy for a plot of land,  
    Nor overturn the boundaries of a widow.

As for the road in the field worn down by time,  
    He who takes it violently for fields,  
If he traps by deceptive attestations,  
    Will be lassoed by the might of the moon.

To one who has done this on earth, pay attention,  
    For he is a weak enemy;  
He is an enemy overturned inside himself;  
    Life is taken from his eye;  
His household is hostile to the community,  
    His storerooms are toppled over,  
His property taken from his children,  
    And to someone else his possessions given.

Take care not to topple over the boundary marks of the arable land,  
    Not fearing that you will be brought to court;  
Man propitiates God by the might of the Lord  
    When he sets straight the boundaries of the arable land.

Desire, then, to make yourself prosper,  
    And take care for the Lord of All;  
Do not trample on the furrow of someone else,  
    Their good order will be profitable for you.

So plough the fields, and you will find whatever you need,  
    And receive the bread from your own threshing floor:  
Better is the bushel which God gives you  
    Than five thousand deceitfully gotten;  
They do not spend a day in the storehouse or warehouse,  
    They are no use for dough for beer;  
Their stay in the granary is short-lived,  
    When morning comes they will be swept away.  
Better, then, is poverty in the hand of God  
    Than riches in the storehouse;  
Better is bread when the mind is at ease  
    Than riches with anxiety.

Chapter 7

Do not set your heart upon seeking riches,  
    For there is no one who can ignore Destiny and Fortune;  
Do not set your thoughts on external matters:  
    For every man there is his appointed time.

Do not exert yourself to seek out excess  
    And your wealth will prosper for you;  
If riches come to you by theft  
    They will not spend the night with you;  
As soon as day breaks they will not be in your household;  
    Although their places can be seen, they are not there.

When the earth opens up its mouth, it levels him and swallows him up,  
    And it drowns him in the deep;  
They have made for themselves a great hole which suites them.  
    And they have sunk themselves in the tomb;  
Or they have made themselves wings like geese,  
    And they fly up to the sky.  
Do not be pleased with yourself (because of) riches acquired through robbery,  
    Neither complain about poverty.  
If an officer commands one who goes in front of him,  
    His company leaves him;  
The boat of the covetous is abandoned <in> the mud,  
    While the skiff of the truly temperate man sails on.  
When he rises you shall offer to the Aten,  
    Saying, "Grant me prosperity and health."  
And he will give you your necessities for life,  
    And you will be safe from fear.

Chapter 8

Set your good deeds throughout the world  
    That you may greet everyone;  
They make rejoicing for the Uraeus,  
    And spit against the Apophis.  
Keep your tongue safe from words of detraction,  
    And you will be the loved one of the people,  
Then you will find your place within the temple  
    And your offerings among the bread deliveries of your lord;  
You will be revered, when you are concealed <in> your grave,  
    And be safe from the might of God.

Do not accuse a man,  
    When the news of an escape is concealed.  
If you hear something good or bad,  
    Say it outside, where it is not heard;  
Set a good report on your tongue,  
    While the bad thing is covered up inside you.

Chapter 9

Do not fraternize with the hot-tempered man,  
    Nor approach him to converse.  
Safeguard your tongue from answering your superior,  
    And take care not to speak against him.  
Do not allow him to cast words only to entrap you,  
    And be not too free in your reply;  
With a man of your own station discuss the reply;  
    And take care of speaking thoughtlessly;  
When a man's heart is upset, words travel faster  
    Than wind and rain.

He is ruined and created by his tongue,  
    And yet he speaks slander;  
He makes an answer deserving of a beating,  
    For its work is evil;  
He sails among all the world,  
    But his cargo is false words;  
He acts the ferryman in knitting words:  
    He goes forth and comes back arguing.

But whether he eats or whether he drinks inside,  
    His accusation (waits for him) without.  
They day when his evil deed is brought to court  
    Is a disaster for his children.  
Even Khnum will straightway come, even Khnum will straightway come,  
    The creator of the ill-tempered man  
Whom he molds and fires....;  
    He is like a wolf cub in the farmyard,  
And he turns one eye to the other (squinting),  
    For he sets families to argue.  
He goes before all the wind like clouds,  
    He darkens his color in the sun;  
He crocks his tail like a baby crocodile,  
    He curls himself up to inflict harm,  
His lips are sweet, but his tongue is bitter,  
    And fire burns inside him.

Do not fly up to join that man  
    Not fearing you will be brought to account.

Chapter 10

Do not address your intemperate friend in your unrighteousness,  
    Nor destroy your own mind;  
Do not say to him, "May you be praised,: not meaning it  
    When there is fear within you.  
Do not converse falsely with a man,  
    For it is the abomination of God.  
Do not separate your mind from your tongue,  
    All your plans will succeed.  
You will be important before others,  
    While you will be secure in the hand of God.

God hates one who falsified words,  
    His great abomination is duplicity.

Chapter 11

Do not covet the property of the dependent  
    Nor hunger for his bread;  
The property of a dependent blocks the throat,  
    It is vomit for the gullet.  
If he has engendered it by false oaths,  
    His heart slips back inside him.  
It is through the disaffected that success is lost,  
    Bad and good elude.

If you are at a loss before your superior,  
    And are confused in your speeches,  
Your flattering are turned back with curses,  
    And your humble action by beatings.  
Whoever fills the mouth with too much bread swallows it and spits up,  
    So he is emptied of his good.

To the examination of a dependant give thought  
    While the sticks touch him,  
And while all his people are fettered with manacles:  
    Who is to have the execution?  
When you are too free before your superior,  
    Then you are in bad favor with your subordinates,  
So steer away from the poor man on the road,  
    That you may see him but keep clear of his property.

Chapter 12

Do not covet the property of an official,  
    And do not fill (your) mouth with too much food extravagantly;  
If he sets you to manage his property,  
    Respect his, and yours will prosper.

Do not deal with the intemperate man,  
    Nor associate yourself to a disloyal party.

If you are sent to transport straw,  
    Respect its account;  
If a man is detected in a dishonest transaction,  
    Never again will he be employed.

Chapter 13

Do not lead a man astray <with> reed pen or papyrus document:  
    It is the abomination of God.  
Do not witness a false statement,  
    Nor remove a man (from the list) by your order;  
Do not enroll someone who has nothing,  
    Nor make your pen be false.  
If you find a large debt against a poor man,  
    Make it into three parts;  
Release two of them and let one remain:  
    You will find it a path of life;  
You will pass the night in sound sleep; in the morning  
    You will find it like good news.

Better it is to be praised as one loved by men  
    Than wealth in the storehouse;  
Better is bread when the mind is at ease  
    Than riches with troubles.

Chapter 14

Do not pay attention to a person,  
    Nor exert yourself to seek out his hand,  
If he says to you, "take a bribe,"  
    It is not an insignificant matter to heed him;  
Do not avert your glance from him, nor bend down your head,  
    Nor turn aside your gaze.  
Address him with your words and say to him greetings;  
    When he stops, your chance will come;  
Do not repel him at his first approach,  
    Another time he will be brought (to judgment).

Chapter 15

Do well, and you will attain influence.  
    Do not dip (your) reed against the one who sins.  
The beak of the Ibis is the finger of the scribe;  
    Take care not to disturb it;  
The Ape (Thoth) rests (in) the temple of Khmun,  
    While his eye travels around the Two Lands;  
If he sees one who sins with his finger (that is, a false scribe),  
    he takes away his provisions by the flood.  
As for a scribe who sins with his finger,  
 His son shall not be enrolled.

If you spend your life with these things in your heart,  
    Your children shall see them.

Chapter 16

Do not unbalance the scale nor make the weights false,  
    Nor diminish the fractions of the grain measure;  
Do not wish for the grain measures of the fields  
    And then cast aside those of the treasury.  
The Ape sits by the balance,   
    While his heart is the plummet.  
Where is a god as great as Thoth  
    The one who discovered these things, to create them?

Do not get for yourself short weights;  
    They are plentiful, yea, an army by the might of God.  
If you see someone cheating,  
    At a distance you must pass him by.  
Do not be avaricious for copper,  
    And abjure fine clothes;  
What good is one cloaked in fine linen woven as mek,  
    When he cheats before God.  
When gold is heaped upon gold,  
    At daybreak it turns to lead.

Chapter 17

Beware of robbing the grain measure  
    To falsify its fractions;  
Do not act wrongfully through force,  
    Although it is empty inside;  
May you have it measure exactly as to its size,  
    Your hand stretching out with precision.

Make not for yourself a measure of two capacities,  
    For then it is toward the depths that you will go.  
The measure is the eye of Re,  
    Its abomination is the one who takes.  
As for a grain measurer who multiplies and subtracts,  
    His eye will seal up against him.

Do not receive the harvest tax of a cultivator,  
    Nor bind up a papyrus against him to lead him astray.  
Do not enter into collusion with the grain measurer,  
    Nor play with the seed allotment,  
More important is the threshing floor for barley  
    Than swearing by the Great Throne.

Chapter 18

Do not go to bed fearing tomorrow,  
    For when day breaks what is tomorrow?  
Man knows not what tomorrow is!  
God is success,  
    Man is failure.  
The words which men say pass on one side,  
    The things which God does pass on another side.

Do not say, "I am without fault,"  
    Nor try to seek out trouble.  
Fault is the business of God,  
    It is locked up with his seal.  
There is no success in the hand of God,  
    Nor is there failure before Him;  
If he turns himself about to seek out success,  
    In a moment He destroys him.

Be strong in your heart, make your mind firm,  
    Do not steer with your tongue;  
The tongue of a man is the steering oar of a boat,  
    And the Lord of All is its pilot.

Chapter 19

Do not enter the council chamber in the presence of a magistrate  
    And then falsify your speech.  
Do not go up and down with your accusation  
    When your witnesses stand readied.  
Do not overstate <through> oaths in the name of your lord,  
    <Through> pleas <in> the place of questioning.

Tell the truth before the magistrate,  
    lest he gain power over your body;  
If you come before him the next day,  
    He will concur with all you say;  
He will present your case <in> court before the Council of the Thirty,  
    And it will be lenient another time as well.

Chapter 20

Do not corrupt the people of the law court,  
    Nor put aside the just man,  
Do not agree because of garments of white,  
    Nor accept one in rags.  
Take not the gift of the strong man,  
    Nor repress the weak for him.  
Justice is a wonderful gift of God,  
    And He will render it to whomever he wishes.  
The strength of one like him  
    Saves a poor wretch from his beatings.

Do not make false enrollment lists,  
    For they are a serious affair deserving death;  
They are serious oaths of the kind promising not to misuse an office,  
    And they are to be investigated by an informer.

Do not falsify the oracles on a papyrus  
    And (thereby) alter the designs of God.  
Do not arrogate to yourself the might of God  
    As if Destiny and Fortune did not exist.

Hand property over to its (rightful) owners,  
    And seek out life for yourself;  
Let not your heart build in their house,  
    for then your neck will be on the execution block.

Chapter 21

Do not say, I have found a strong protector  
    And now I can challenge a man in my town.  
Do not say, I have found an active intercessor,  
    And now I can challenge him whom I hate.

Indeed, you cannot know the plans of God;  
    You cannot perceive tomorrow.  
Sit yourself at the hands of God:  
    Your tranquility will cause them to open.

As for the crocodile deprived of his tongue,  
    the fear of him is negligible.  
Empty not your soul to everybody  
    And do not diminish thereby your importance;  
Do not circulate your words to others,  
    Nor fraternize with one who is too candid.

Better is a man whose knowledge is inside him  
    Than one who talks to disadvantage.  
One cannot run to attain perfection;  
    One cannot create (only) to destroy it.

Chapter 22

Do not castigate your companion in a dispute,  
    And do not <let> him say his innermost thoughts;  
Do not fly up to greet him  
    When you do not see how he acts.  
May you first comprehend his accusation  
    And cool down your opponent.

Leave it to him and he will empty his soul;  
    Sleep knows how to find him out;  
Take his feet, do not bother him;  
    Fear him, do not underestimate him.  
Indeed, you cannot know the plans of God,  
    You cannot perceive tomorrow.  
Sit yourself at the hands of God;  
    Your tranquility will cause them to open.

Chapter 23

Do not eat a meal in the presence of a magistrate,  
    Nor set to speaking first.  
If you are satisfied with false words,  
    Enjoy yourself with your spittle.

Look at the cup in front of you,  
    And let it suffice your need.  
Even as a noble is important in his office,  
    He is like the abundance of a well when it is drawn.

Chapter 24

Do not listen to the accusation of an official indoors,  
    And then repeat it to another outside.  
Do not allow your discussions to be brought outside  
    So that your heart will not be grieved.

the heart of a man is the beak of the God,  
    So take care not to slight it;  
A man who stands <at> the side of an official  
    Should not have his name known (in the street).

Chapter 25

Do not jeer at a blind man nor tease a dwarf,  
    Neither interfere with the condition of a cripple;  
Do not taunt a man who is in the hand of God,  
    Nor scowl at him if he errs.

Man is clay and straw,  
    And God is his potter;  
He overthrows and he builds daily,  
    He impoverishes a thousand if He wishes.  
He makes a thousand into examiners,  
    When He is in His hour of life.  
How fortunate is he who reaches the West,  
    When he is safe in the hand of God.

Chapter 26

Do not stay in the tavern  
    And join someone greater than you,  
Whether he be high or low in his station,  
    An old man or a youth;  
But take as a friend for yourself someone compatible:  
    Re is helpful though he is far away.

When you see someone greater than you outside,  
    And attendants following him, respect (him).  
And give a hand to an old man filled with beer:  
    Respect him as his children would.

The strong arm is not weakened when it is uncovered,  
    The back is not broken when one bends it;  
Better is the poor man who speaks sweet words,  
    Than the rich man who speaks harshly.

A pilot who sees into the distance  
    Will not let his ship capsize.

Chapter 27

Do not reproach someone older than you,  
    For he has seen the Sun before you;  
Do not let yourself be reported to the Aten when he rises,  
    With the words, "Another young man has reproached an elder."  
Very sick in the sight of Re  
    Is a young man who reproaches an elder.

Let him beat you with your hands folded,  
    Let him reproach you while you keep quiet.  
Then when you come before him in the morning  
    He will give you bread freely.  
As for bread, he who has it becomes a dog,  
    He barks to the one who gives it.

Chapter 28

Do not expose a widow if you have caught her in the fields,  
    Nor fail to give way if she is accused.  
Do not turn a stranger away <from> your oil jar  
    That it may be made double for your family.  
God loves him who cares for the poor,  
    More than him who respects the wealthy.

Chapter 29

Do not turn people away from crossing the river  
    When you have room in your ferryboat;  
If a steering oar is given you in the midst of the deep waters,  
    So bend back your hands <to> take it up.  
It is not an abomination in the hand of God  
    If the passenger is not cared for.

Do not acquire a ferryboat on the river,  
    And then attempt to seek out its fares;  
Take the are from the man of means,  
    But (also) accept the destitute (without charge).

Chapter 30

Mark for your self these thirty chapters:  
    They please, they instruct,  
They are the foremost of all books;  
    They teach the ignorant.  
If they are read to an ignorant man,  
    He will be purified through them.  
Seize them; put them in your mind  
    And have men interpret them, explaining as a teacher.  
As to a scribe who is experienced in his position,  
    He will find himself worthy of being a courtier.

# Babylonian Proverbs from Ashurbanipal’s Library

Ashurbanipal was the last great Assyrian emperor, in the 600s BC. For his imperial library he commissioned the collecting and the copying of thousands of tablets from the centuries leading up to his time. The background and language of these proverbs suggests they come from the Old Babylonian period, a thousand years before Ashurbanipal’s time.

1. A hostile act you shall not perform, that fear of vengeance (?) shall not consume you.

2. You shall not do evil, that life (?) eternal you may obtain.

3. Does a woman conceive when a virgin, or grow great without eating?

4. If I put anything down it is snatched away; if I do more than is expected, who will repay me?

5 He has dug a well where no water is, he has raised a husk without kernel.

6. Does a marsh receive the price of its reeds, or fields the price of their vegetation?

7. The strong live by their own wages; the weak by the wages of their children.

8. He is altogether good, but he is clothed with darkness.

9. The face of a toiling ox you shall not strike with a goad.

10. My knees go, my feet are unwearied; but a fool has cut into my course.

11. His ass I am; I am harnessed to a mule---a wagon I draw, to seek reeds and fodder I go forth.

12. The life of day before yesterday has departed today.

13. If the husk is not right, the kernel is not right, it will not produce seed.

14. The tall grain thrives, but what do we understand of it? The meager grain thrives, but what do we understand of it?

15. The city whose weapons are not strong the enemy before its gates shall not be thrust through.

16. If you go and take the field of an enemy, the enemy will come and take your field.

17. Upon a glad heart oil is poured out of which no one knows.

18. Friendship is for the day of trouble, posterity for the future.

19. An ass in another city becomes its head.

20. Writing is the mother of eloquence and the father of artists.

21. Be gentle to your enemy as to an old oven.

22. The gift of the king is the nobility of the exalted; the gift of the king is the favor of governors.

23. Friendship in days of prosperity is servitude forever.

24. There is strife where servants are, slander where anointers anoint.

25. When you see the gain of the fear of god, exalt god and bless the king.

From George A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1916), pp. 407-408.

# Proverbs and Corporal Punishment

One of my students once asked the following question:

A current Christian parenting trend takes Proverbs as a “how to” instructional manual for parents. It notes that God has commanded people to use the rod to discipline and correct children. Careful, measured, physical punishment underscores the importance of obeying God and rescues children from continuing in foolishness ways that lead to death. Opinions may vary as to whether this applies only to children before they are verbal or whether it applies regardless of age. Is this a legitimate use of the Proverbs? If not, how are the Proverbs to be used? (Do you think I would have a less rebellious spirit if I had been spanked as a child?) Does the NT talk about disciplining children in this way?

Another students responded as follows:

One of the problems with this viewpoint is precisely the fact that the verses cited as “mandates” or “commandments” are proverbs. “Do not withhold discipline from your children; if you beat them with a rod, they will not die. If you beat them with the rod, you will save their lives from Sheol” (Proverbs 23:13-14). What would happen if we regarded the entire book of Proverbs as commandments meant to be fulfilled literally by God’s people today? Here are a few examples of the sorts of things we would be required (by “biblical mandate”) to do:

1. We must beat stupid people as well as our children (10:13; 14:3; 18:6; 26:3).

2. We must also beat scoffers (19:25) and those who need inward purification (20:30).

3. We must cut off the tongues of perverts (10:31).

4. We must subject lazy people to forced labor (12:24).

5. We must own many oxen if we want to have food to eat (14:4).

6. We must cast lots in order to resolve disputes (18:8).

7. We must commit suicide by slicing our throats if our appetites are too large (23:2).

My responses:

In the NT, Hebrews 12:3-11 takes up this strand of Proverbs, assumes it is an aspect of the way parents treat children, and then sees it as a way God as our Father treats us.

Note that Proverbs’ word for the “child” who is disciplined is a *na‘ar*, which means ayouth; it is the word Jeremiah uses to describe himself when called by God and it can apply to people in their twenties. There is no reason to think that Proverbs has little children in mind. Further, note that Proverbs’ word for “discipline” or ”correction” is the word that also means “instruction” (e.g., 1:2, 3, 7, 8) – it doesn’t need to imply physical punishment if the context doesn’t suggest that.

# Life's Choices: A Play Based on Eight Characters in Proverbs

Adapted fromRobin Gallaher Branch, Sterling College, Sterling, Kansas

**Lady Wisdom**   
I am Lady Wisdom. I invite you all to a banquet. I've prepared my meat and mixed my wine. Here! I'm calling to you from the highest point in the city. You who are simple, come! Come! Eat at my banquet! Drink my wine! I'll teach you to live and to walk in the way of understanding. Wise men, I invite you as well! For you long to be wiser still! You know that wisdom comes from instruction! The foundation of my teaching is respect for the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Getting to know the Holy One is the beginning of understanding ourselves. I invite you to know me, Lady Wisdom. Through me your days will be many and years, happy years, will be added to your life.

**Simple Youth**   
I am new in town. I came to get an education. Is that the same as wisdom? My parents are sacrificing a lot to send me to university. My father gave me much advice. He told me to remember his instruction and not to forsake my mother's teaching. He told me there would be many choices! He said I would see many lifestyles! He's right! They're here!

**Gossip**  
I like talking about people. Wherever I go there is strife. That's because I enjoy telling the truth about people. I make a point of separating friends. Once they know the truth about each other, they shouldn't be friends after all. I am the Gossip!

**Adulteress**   
I'm the wayward wife with beguiling words. I seduce. My husband has a huge belly that falls over his belt. I ignore the covenant we made because I cannot stand him. I have found other friends. Exciting friends. They love death. I know the paths and the dance that lead to death. I cultivate smooth speech. My lips drip with honey. Come, youths and real men! Give me your strength! Let's enjoy a wayward life together! Come. Let my seductive words convince you of the pleasures of life with me. Come. Let my smooth talk lead you where I know you really want to go.

**Lady Wisdom**   
Yes, her lips drip with honey and her speech is smoother than oil, but the way of death she advocates is as bitter as gall. In the end, she turns on her lovers with actions and words sharper than a two-edged sword.

**Satisfied Husband**  
I'm what you would call the satisfied husband. I have had a happy marriage, mainly because my wife works so hard at it. I admit that. I am the husband of the Proverbs 31 wife. She consistently amazes me. Actually I am amazed she chose me. I do not deserve her, and everybody knows it! You know the proverb that says, He who finds a good wife receives a blessing from the Lord. Well, the Lord has blessed me and blessed me for years with this woman. Let me tell you about her and about our life together. My wife truly has a noble character. The basis of her character is that she fears the Lord. Together we worship and obey the God of Israel. All our life together she has brought me good. Never has she brought me harm or shame. My total confidence is in her.

**Drunkard**  
I like a drink. It's when I'm alone, when everything is quiet that I see strange things and my mind imagines confusing things. That's when I really need another drink. I like drinking so much that when I get in a fight, I don't even know I've been hit.   
You have your nice house and your big car and your good job, but are you happy? I say you're a hypocrite! I'll laugh in your face and mock you! I have my bottle here and it's all I need. Yeah, I'm happier than you are.

**Lady Folly**   
Hey, Simple Youth! I call out to you! What's the value of discipline, I ask you? Nothing! Every person puts on trousers one leg at a time. There's no difference between us. None. You know me. I am at the door of my house, my big house. I don't like my neighbor, Lady Wisdom. We happen to reside in the same neighborhood at the top of the hill. She acts as if she's the only elite one, but I'm elite, too. I call out to all that my way is the best. The easy way is the best way. I call out to all who are simple to come to me. I have special favors for those who lack judgment. Come up to my house! I'll really show you how to live. We'll laugh at how hard others work and how much effort they exert. And for what? For nothing! Follow my way and be rich. I know how to get rich quick. I know how to win the Lottery! Look at my big house. I'll show you how stolen water is sweet to the taste and food eaten in secret is delicious!

**Lady Wisdom:**   
Oh, I hate all who speak with such pride and arrogance! Her speech is perverse! Her behavior is that of a scoundrel and villain, for she winks, motions with her hands, and plants evil and deceit in hearts. Wherever Lady Folly goes, she stirs up dissension!

**Sluggard**  
I'm Slothful the Sluggard. It's eight o'clock. Too early to get up! I don't care about getting money. I like the easy life. I like to go to KFC. I certainly don't like working on the farm during the harvest! That's hot work! I prefer sleeping. Once I had a job as a courier. But it was hot work and my boss wanted me to hurry. It's not in my nature to hurry. I stopped for coffees and met my friends. They were right along the way. But my boss fired me and said I was like vinegar to his teeth and smoke to his eyes! I crave a big car. I need a big car. I deserve a big car. Life is terribly unfair to me that I don't have one! So often my way seems to be blocked with thorns. Oh, woe! Life is terribly unfair to me!

**Lady Wisdom**   
Truly as a door turns on its hinges, Sluggard turns on his bed! Go to the ant, Sluggard! Learn the ways of the ant and be wise!

**Gossip**   
I think it's my duty in life to repeat a matter over and over throughout the town. After all, people should know the truth about their friends and neighbors, don't you think? Sometimes I betray a confidence, but then people really should know what's happening, don't you think? I am the Gossip. And I do my job!

**Lady Wisdom**   
Truly, the power of death and life resides in the tongue. Gossip spreads death. But my mouth speaks what is true. My lips detest wickedness. All — yes, all! — the words of my mouth are just. Not one of them is crooked or perverse!

**Adulteress**   
I cannot stand staying at home. There's nothing to do! So I dress up and survey the crowd. I go to street corners. I go downtown. I'll kiss you in public and call your name again and again! Let my words captivate you! I know you can walk on hot coals! Your feet will not be scorched! Who will ever know if we sleep together? Your wife is as dense as a doorpost and my husband is away all the time!

**Lady Wisdom**   
The man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever commits adultery destroys himself. His life from then on will be filled with blows and disgrace; his companion becomes shame. The jealous husband will never be his friend or business associate. No amount of money can repair what adultery takes from a marriage.

**Sluggard**   
You know what I'm really good at? Tearing down things others build. I like the easy way! Vroom! It's gone! Takes no time at all. Then I can go back and sleep. Yeah. I like deep sleep. You know, I like sleeping better than eating, yeah, better than eating. Sometimes I'll be eating and then won't even bring my fork to my mouth. It takes too much effort. Harvest is such a bore. I refuse to plough my father's field. He can do it himself. He was born to be a farmer. He does work I don't enjoy. See these hands? I don't want calluses! I refuse to let my hands get calluses! I refuse to work! I like to fold my hands in rest and take a little nap. People say poverty will come on me like a robber, but I don't believe them.

**Lady Wisdom**   
At the end, Sluggard, your life will end with a groan. You'll wake up one day and realize how worthless your life has been. You'll say, "How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! I have come to the brink of utter ruin — and everybody knows it! They've been laughing at me for years!"

**Gossip**   
Lots of times more people need to be involved in a quarrel. After all, it concerns more people than just two! So I just keep a quarrel going until everybody has had his or her say! I know I'm for equality! I talk about my brothers, too! After all, I am the Gossip! I do my job well!

**Lady Folly**   
I like your attitude, Gossip! We can be friends, because I like to hear all the dirt on people! I've heard that your mother is very bitter. She says she is sorry she gave birth to you! She says that listening to you is like living with a constantly dripping water pipe. But I like you! Let's wander all over town and eat like pigs!

**Drunkard**  
I'm the Drunkard. Let me tell you my story. I have so much woe. I have so much sorrow. Just give me space or I'll fight you. I'm used to fights — see these bruises? Look at my eyes — they'll tell you that I can drink any one of you under the table. Yeah. We'll see who can linger over wine or the hard stuff the longest!

**Lady Wisdom**   
Drunkard, you have rejected me for years. You have spurned my call and my rebukes to you over the years. So when calamity overtakes you, as it surely will, when it sweeps over you like a whirlwind, you will be devastated. Then you will look for me, but I will hide from you. You will not find me. You have hated knowledge and do not choose to fear the Lord and so you will eat the fruit of your own schemes — and die.

**Simple Youth**  
Hey, guys! I've listened to all of you! I see your lifestyles! I'm making a choice! Thank you, Lady Wisdom, for the invitation to your banquet. I accept! I want to learn your ways!

**Lady Wisdom**  
To all of you I say this: Life offers you a choice between Wisdom and Folly. I urge you with all power in me to choose my instruction instead of silver. Value my knowledge rather than the choicest of gold.   
  
**Lady Folly**  
Simple Youth, I'll show you the easy way!

**Sluggard**  
Simple Youth, why work hard? We can tear down things others build!

**Adulteress**  
Simple Youth.......

**Drunkard**  
Ah, let's go have a drink!

**Gossip**  
Simple Youth! People will talk about you if you go to her banquet!   
  
**Lady Wisdom**   
Ah, Simple Youth, the wisdom I give you is more precious than rubies. Nothing you can possibly desire compares with my gift of wisdom! In me, reside counsel and sound judgment. I give understanding and power. By me and me alone, rulers make just laws and kings reign. By me, nobles rule the earth. With me are enduring riches and honor. I love those who love me. Those who seek me, find me. Yes. I love those who love me. Those who seek me, find me.

# Pondering on Proverbs

## Husbands and Wives

*Love covers all offenses (10:12)*

*Love turns a blind eye to every fault (10:12, NEB)*

1. Drink water from your own your own cistern and running water from your own spring;  
do not let your well overflow into the road, your runnels of water pour into the street;  
let them be yours alone, not shared with strangers.  
Let your fountain, the wife of your youth, be blessed, rejoice in her,  
a lovely doe, a graceful hind, let her be your companion;  
you will at all times be bathed in her love, and her love will continually wrap you around.  
Why, my son, are you wrapped up in the love of an adulteress? (5:15–20)

2. If a man walks on hot coals, will his feet not be scorched?  
So is he who sleeps with his neighbor’s wife. (6:28–29)

3. Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman without good sense. (11:22)

4. A capable wife is her husband’s crown; one who disgraces him is like rot in his bones. (12:4)

5. Better a dish of vegetables if love go with it than a fat ox eaten in hatred. (15:17)

6. Better a dry crust and concord with it than a house full of feasting and strife. (17:1)

7. Find a wife, and you find a good thing; so you will earn the favor of the Lord. (18:22)

8. A nagging wife is like water dripping endlessly. (19:13)

9. Home and wealth may come down from ancestors, but an intelligent wife is a gift from the Lord. (19:14)

10. Better to live in a corner of the housetop than have a nagging wife and a brawling household. (21:9)

11. At three things the earth shakes, four things it cannot bear:  
A slave turned king, a churl gorging himself,  
A woman unloved when she is married, and a slave-girl displacing her mistress. (30:21-22)

(See also the description of “a capable wife” in 31:10-31)

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Proverbs from other cultures:

Never marry a woman with bigger feet than yours [i.e., smarter] (Malawi)

Do not spare a bullock or a wife (Myanmar)

For the man who beats his wife, God improves the food (Russia)

A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree—the harder you beat them, the better they be (Europe)

The man who can’t slaughter his sheep or beat his wife is better dead than alive (Arab)

(From an article by Mineke Schipper in the *LA Times*, April 20, 2004, p. B15)

## 2. God’s Plans and Our Plans

*Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established (16:3)*

*Commit to the Lord all that you do and your plans will be fulfilled (16:3, NEB)*

1. A road may seem straightforward to a man, yet may end as the way to death. (14:2)
2. The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, surveying evil and good men alike. (15:3)
3. Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord, how much more the hearts of men. (15:11)
4. Schemes lightly made come to nothing, but with long planning they succeed. (15:22)
5. The Lord pulls down the proud man’s home but fixes the widow’s boundary stones. (15:25)
6. A man may order his thoughts, but the Lord inspires the words he utters. (16:1)
7. A man’s conduct may be pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs a man’s spirit. (16:2)
8. When the Lord is pleased with a man’s ways, he makes even his enemies live at peace. (16:7)
9. Man plans his journey by his own wit, but it is the Lord who guides his steps. (16:9)
10. Pride comes before disaster, and arrogance before a fall. (16:18)
11. The lots may be cast into the lap, but the issue depends wholly on the Lord. (16:33)
12. A man’s own folly wrecks his life, and then he bear a grudge against the Lord. (19:3)
13. A man’s heart may be full of schemes, but the Lord’s purpose will prevail. (19:21)
14. Care is the secret of good planning; wars are won by skillful strategy. (20:18)
15. Do not think to repay evil for evil, wait for the Lord to deliver you. (20:22)
16. It is the Lord who directs a man’s steps; how can man understand the road he travels? (20:24)
17. The king’s heart is under the Lord’s hand; like runnels of water, he turns it as he will. (21:1)
18. Forethought and diligence are sure of profit; the man in a hurry is as sure of poverty. (21:5)
19. Face to face with the Lord, wisdom, understanding, counsel go for nothing. (21:30)
20. A horse may be made ready for the day of battle, but victory comes from the Lord. (21:31)

## 3. The Inner and the Outer Person

*Even in laughter the heart is sad (14:13)*

*Even in laughter the heart may grieve (14:13 NEB)*

1. Guard your heart more than any treasure, for it is the source of all life. (4:23)

2. Hope deferred makes the heart sick; a wish come true is a staff of life. (13:12)

3. The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger has no part in its joy (14:10)

4. A tranquil mind puts flesh on a man, but passion rots his bones. (14:30)

5. A merry heart makes a cheerful face; heartache crushes the spirit. (15:13)

6. In the life of the downtrodden every day is wretched, but to have a glad heart is a perpetual  
feast. (15:15)

7. A bright look brings joy to the heart, and good news warms a man’s marrow. (15:30)

8. The man who narrows his eyes is disaffected at heart, and a close-lipped man is bent on mischief. (16:30)

9. A man’s spirit may sustain him in sickness; but if the spirit is wounded, who can mend it? (18:14)

10. Who can say, “I have a clear conscience, I am purged from my sin”? (20:9)

11. A young man is known by his actions, whether his conduct is innocent or guilty. (20:11)

12. The Lord shines into a man’s very soul, searching out his inmost being. (20:27)

13. A man may think that he is always right, but the Lord fixes a standard for the heart. (21:2)

14. Oil and perfume bring joy to the heart, but cares torment a man’s very soul. (27:9)

15. Sheol and Abaddon are insatiable; a man’s eyes too are never satisfied. (27:20)

16. The melting-pot is for silver and the crucible for gold, but praise is the test of character. (27:21)

17. The rich man may think himself wise, but a poor man of discernment sees through him. (28:11)

18. Conceal your faults, and you will not prosper; confess and give them up, and you will find mercy. (28:13)

## 4. Attitudes to Wealth

*The wealth of the rich is their fortress (10:15)*

*A rich man’s wealth is his strong city (10:15 NEB)*

1. Honor the Lord with all your wealth. (3:9)

2. Wisdom is more profitable than silver. (3:14)

3. Ill-gotten wealth brings no profits; uprightness is a safeguard against death. (10:12)

4. The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry, but he disappoints the cravings of the wicked. (10:13)

5. The blessing of the Lord brings riches, and he sends no sorrow with them. (10:22)

6. Wealth is worth nothing in the day of wrath, but uprightness is a safeguard against death. (11:4)

7. Rogues are trapped in their own greed. (11:6)

8. Be timid in business and come to beggary; be bold and make a fortune. (11:16)

9. A man may spend freely and yet grow richer; another is sparing beyond measure, yet ends in poverty. (11:24)

10. A generous man grows fat and prosperous, and he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed. (11:25)

11. He who withholds his grain is cursed by the people, but he who sells his corn is blessed. (11:26)

12. Whoever relies on his wealth is riding for a fall. (11:28)

13. A poor man is odious even to his friend; the rich have friends in plenty. (14:20)

14. He who oppresses the poor insults his maker; he who is generous to the needy honors him. (14:31)

15. In the righteous man’s house there is ample wealth; the gains of the wicked bring trouble. (15:6)

16. A grasping man brings trouble on his family, but he who spurns a bribe will enjoy long life. (15:27)

17. Better be poor and above reproach than rich and crooked in speech. (19:1)

18. Wealth makes many friends, but a man without means loses the friends he has. (19:4)

19. The wise man has his house full of fine and costly treasures; the stupid man is a mere spendthrift. (21:20)

20. A good name is more to be desired than great riches; esteem is better than silver or gold. (22:1)

21. Rich and poor have this in common: the Lord made them both. (22:2)

22. He who grows rich by lending at discount or at interest is saving for another who will be generous to the poor. (28:8)

23. The rich man may think himself wise, but a poor man of discernment sees through him. (28:11)

24. The man who is stupid and grasping will perish, but he who hates ill-gotten gain will live long. (28:16)

25. He who gives to the poor will never want. (28:27)

26. Give me neither poverty nor wealth, provide me only with the food I need.  
If I have too much, I shall deny thee and say “Who is the Lord?”  
If I am reduced to poverty, I shall steal and blacken the name of my God. (30:8-9)

## 5. Here’s the Wealth Material Analyzed:

## The Wealth of the Rich is Their Fortress (Proverbs 10:15)

1. A message especially for people who stress poverty and the option for the poor
2. The advantages of money: it gives security 10:15

popularity 14:20

enjoyment 21:20

Proverbs is realistic about how life really works:

does not assume that property is original sin (Marx)

encourages us to seek wealth.

1. How to get hold of some:

be bold 11:16: compare the parable of the bag of gold

be generous 11:25: business involves being sharp, but it also profits from getting on with people

be honest 15.6: another surprising comment that assumes it is a moral universe; cf. 10:2; this connects with...

be reverent 10:22: prosperity comes from God so trust is important – cf. 3:9-10; prosperity gospel like most heresies gets into trouble by taking a truth out of context

but be realistic 11:24: prosperity is unpredictable; Proverbs’ “rules” are broad generalizations not universals

1. A message especially for people who stress the prosperity gospel

(a) The drawbacks of money:

it comes to seem all-important 11:28

but it has its limitations 11:4: money can’t buy me love/wisdom (3:14)/forgiveness/God

it tends to make people forget its moral connections 11:6

it tends to make people forget relationships 15:27 (if money becomes all-important it affects friends, family)

it tends to give people inflated ideas 28:1; 22:2: in other words, it tends to drive you to the opposite of the attitudes that will actually lead to your making some - generosity, honesty, reverence;

so be moderate 30:8-9

so don’t “rely” on it - “rely” on God; you can’t serve two masters

(b) How to get rid of it:

honor God with it 3:9

serve the community with it 11:26

be generous to the needy with it 28:27; 14:31

The answer to Marx’s point about money causing evil is to do good with it.

Usually in the world there are people who have none and people who have lots doing nothing. Proverbs’ solution is cash-flow.