

A woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised

Hebrew poetry sometimes uses acrostics, eg. Psalm 119 which has 22 sets of 8 verses, one set for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Proverbs closes with an acrostic poem which praises the virtues of a wise and godly wife (10-31). Matthew Henry comments, ‘This description of the virtuous woman is designed to show what wives the women should make, and what wives the men should choose.’ Physical beauty eventually fades, but the beauty of a godly life endures. Physical attraction does play a large part in our choice of spouse, but surely we must look first for the beauty of godliness (cp. 1 Peter 3:4).

The virtuous wife is a priceless treasure and rare. Such a wife is from the Lord (19:14) and her husband *safely trusts her* (11). She stands in beautiful contrast to the evil woman (eg. 30:20,23). She does her husband good (12), she does her household good (13-15, 21,27), and she does the poor and needy good (20). She is hard-working (13-19, 22,24,27), wise and kind (26). Her beauty is more than skin-deep (30) and her husband and family praise her (28-29). A good husband does not take his wife for granted and children should not be thoughtless but show their appreciation for their mother.

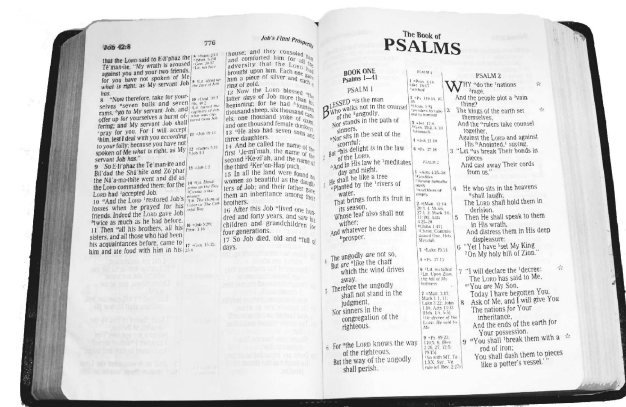
What is the secret of a godly and beautiful personality? We are directed to where we began in Proverbs – *the fear of the LORD* (30; cp. 1:7). *A woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised* (30). Those who fear the Lord are blessed indeed (Psalm 112:1). As we leave the book of Proverbs, let us remind ourselves of Charles Bridges’ definition of *the fear of the LORD* – ‘It is that affectionate reverence, by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to his Father’s law’ (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, pages 3-4). **Do you have this kind of fear of the LORD?**

*Fear him, ye saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear;
Make you his service your delight,
Your wants shall be his care,*

(Based on Psalm 34 — Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady)

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God’s holy Word simply explained and applied



April 2022

Bible readings from Proverbs chapters 16 to 31

Open your mouth for the speechless

The last chapter of Proverbs introduces us to King Lemuel. This is the only place that his name is found in Scripture and most Bible commentators believe that it refers to King Solomon. He wrote of what his father taught him (4:4) and now tells us what his mother taught him. As a good mother she yearned for his well-being. Her three questions beginning with the word *'what'* indicate her anxiety to give him good advice (2). Charles Bridges comments, 'Happy mother — when the son of her womb is the son of her vows! ... If thou wouldst have, Christian mother, thy child a Samuel or an Augustine, be thyself a Hannah or a Monica. The child of thy prayers, of thy vows, and of thy tears, will in the Lord's best time be a child of thy praises, thy rejoicings, thy richest consolation' (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, pages 616–617).

Lemuel's mother warns him against:

- Giving his strength to women (polygamy and sexual immorality – 3). Solomon failed to remember this advice and was brought to ruin (1 Kings 11:1–9; Nehemiah 13:26).
- Drunkenness (4). Charles Bridges comments, 'The vice that degrades a man into a beast, is shameful to all, specially unseemly for kings.' (COMMENTARY, page 617). The drunken ruler will forget the law and pervert justice (5; cp. Isaiah 28:7–8). The Christian must beware of excess in drinking, but the medicinal use of wine may be acceptable (6–7; 1 Timothy 5:23).

She also teaches him to speak up for the poor and needy who cannot speak for themselves. *Open your mouth for the speechless, etc.* (8–9). Many people are quite rightly concerned for justice for the oppressed but they support the abortion of unwanted babies. The babe in the womb cannot speak for itself or defend itself against those who appoint it to die through abortion. **We must plead its cause. We must open our mouths. Silence is sin!** Those who insist that it is the mother's right to have an abortion hardly consider the right of the unborn child.

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If you have been foolish in exalting yourself

Agur was a very thoughtful man who pondered much the things that he observed. He places them into groups of four:

- Four things which are unsearchable (18–20). He observed the eagle soaring into the sky, the speed of the serpent as it moved over a rock, the ship cutting its way through the sea and the way of a man with a maiden. Bridges and Matthew Henry understand the latter to mean the schemes that a man will devise to seduce a young woman and to lead her into sin. The adulterous woman eats her forbidden fruit and says, ‘*I have done no wickedness*’ (20). This wicked attitude prevails in the world around us and we must resist the pressures of our permissive society.
- Four kinds of people who are intolerable (21–23). The NIV and ESV translate ‘*a hateful woman*’ as ‘an unloved woman’ but I believe that the AV and NKJV are nearer the mark. Charles Bridges writes. ‘If marriage be the ordinance of lust, not of godliness, what wonder if an odious woman should be the result, a canker to every domestic comfort?’ (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 609).
- Four creatures which are little but wise (24–28). None of them are strong, but they survive. The ant through its diligence and work, the rock badger because its home is sheltered in the rocks, the locusts because they are disciplined in their advance and the spider (or house lizard) which can so climb that it is able to enter palaces.
- Four things which are majestic and stately in their walk (29–31). The translation ‘*greyhound*’ is literally ‘one girded’. Some take it to be a war-horse ready for battle while some versions translate it as a ‘strutting cock’.

Agur closes by warning us against pride and evil-doing: ‘*If you have been foolish in exalting yourself, or if you have devised evil, put your hand on your mouth*’ (32). **If you are tempted to think too highly of yourself or if evil thoughts come into your mind, guard your lips.**

In mercy and truth atonement is provided for iniquity

God *has made all things for himself*, but we may be puzzled that *he has made even the wicked for the day of doom* (4). John Gill wrote, ‘God made man neither to save him nor to damn him, but for his own glory. And it is secured, whether in his salvation or damnation. Nor did, nor does, God make man wicked. He made man upright. Man makes himself wicked, and being so, God may justly appoint him to damnation for his wickedness; in doing which he glorifies his justice’ (quote by Bridges in his COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 228). *All your works shall praise you, O LORD* (Psalm 145:10). He is glorified in his justice (Revelation 19:1–3).

All God’s works shall praise him and he is glorified in his work of salvation for sinners. *In mercy and truth atonement is provided for iniquity* (6). This does not mean that by showing mercy and truth to others we can atone for our own sins. There are many kind and compassionate people who are not Christians, but their kindness does not atone for their sin. The basic meaning of the word ‘*iniquity*’ is ‘perversity’ or ‘crookedness’. We are all born with a sinful nature and our sin is enormous in the sight of God who is absolutely holy; there is no way we can save ourselves or atone for it (Ephesians 2:8–9; Titus 3:5). Left to ourselves we are without hope, but the Lord, great in mercy and in truth, provides atonement.

God is so great in his love (Ephesians 2:4) that he provided for iniquity by sending his beloved Son into this world to die on the cross to save sinners. The Lord Jesus took our sins upon himself to suffer for them (1 Peter 3:18). *Christ died for the ungodly* (Romans 5:6). God’s justice and his love are glorified in the punishment of his Son for our sins. *All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth* (Psalm 25:10). Have you departed from evil because you fear the Lord and reverence his great name (6)? **Does the greatness of God’s mercy and love stir up in you a sense of love and devotion to him? Come to the Lord now with your grateful praise and adoration.**

Whoever trusts in the LORD, happy is he

The value of wisdom is again emphasised (16) and there is yet another warning here against the sin of pride which leads to destruction and spiritual ruin. *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall* (18–19; see also verse 5).

Many people engage in all manner of activities in their search for happiness, but there can be no lasting joy or satisfaction if God is shut out of our lives. The recipe for happiness is found in verse 20 – *Whoever trusts in the LORD, happy is he*. Bridges writes, “To feel that we know nothing, that we can do nothing, contrive nothing; then to look up to him as our supreme Good, and to trust him as our only Friend — when was such reliance and expectation ever disappointed? We feel that we, and all that we have, are in his hands. This is our peaceful security. “I have had many things,” said Luther, “in my hands, and I have lost them all. But whatever I have been able to place in God’s hands, I still possess.” In this quiet confidence we have nothing more to do with ourselves ... The soul is fixed in God. He reigns over all with an all-seeing eye, and an all-moving hand. The eye of faith pierces through the darkest cloud and reads God’s thoughts of peace and love. All the world cannot rob us of one word of God. Providence may seem to oppose his promises, but there is more reality in the least promise of God, than in the greatest performance of man’ (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 240).

We tend to associate fading beauty and diminishing strength with old age, but where it is accompanied with godliness, it has a special beauty. *The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness* (31). Old age has its limitations, but the Bible points us to many examples of godly men and women who had great usefulness in their closing years (eg. Abraham, Moses, Simeon and Anna). **We should not be depressed at the thought of growing old, but prepare for it by walking with God day by day, serving him and trusting in him. That is happiness indeed.**

Every word of God is pure ... Do not add to his words

We know nothing about Agur apart from his utterance recorded in this chapter. He was a humble man who felt his own ignorance before God whose greatness overwhelmed him (1–4). He later warns, *‘If you have been foolish in exalting yourself ... put your hand on your mouth’* (32). He proves to be a keen and discerning observer of the world around him and gives us excellent advice. He had very low views of himself but very high views of Scripture: *Every word of God is pure ... Do not add to his words, lest he reprove you, and you be found a liar* (5–6). **The Word of God is inerrant; it is pure and true. The Bible is also sufficient to teach us the way of salvation and to direct us in the Christian life. We no longer need words of prophecy or new revelations.** Many so-called prophets in our time have made great prophetic claims which later proved to be false. They have been found to be liars but they do not blush with shame or repent of their sin. Never listen to such people, however persuasive they may be.

Agur’s prayer is beautiful in its simplicity. He prayed, *‘Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches – Feed me with the food you prescribe for me; lest I be full and deny you, and say, “Who is the LORD?” or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God’* (7–9). Agur recognised the weakness of his own heart and knew that riches could tempt him to feel self-sufficient and poverty tempt him to steal. The so called ‘health and wealth’ teaching taught by extreme charismatics is not only heretical but far removed from the godliness reflected in this prayer. What things do you pray for when you pray for yourself?

Agur also warns us about the unacceptable behaviour spoken of earlier in Proverbs – slander (10), cursing parents and showing ingratitude toward them (11, 17), pride (12–13), cruelty and oppression (14). These sins are seen all around us in these last days (2 Timothy 3:1–5); We must keep ourselves from them!

The fear of man brings a snare

The child who has been brought up with godly discipline will bring delight to his parents (15,17) but such an upbringing is becoming rare today. Why is this? In the western world, we have abandoned Christian principles based upon the Word of God and we are reaping a terrible harvest of lawlessness and crime.

Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint (18). The word ‘revelation’ could be translated ‘prophetic vision’. We now have the words of the apostles and prophets set forth in Scripture and we are faced with a great challenge to take the gospel to those around us. Political reform and a well-meaning social agenda will do nothing to deal with man’s basic problem which is his sin. The people need to know what God says in his Word. God spoke through the prophet Hosea to the northern kingdom prior to its collapse. He said, ‘*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*’ (Hosea 4:6). The wicked perish in their sins for lack of knowledge but *happy is he who keeps the law* (the Word of God, 18).

We must beware of *the fear of man* which will turn us into cowards when we should be *bold as a lion* (28:1). *The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe* (25). The snare that such a fear brings is just as deadly as that of flattery (5). It spoils our witness and silences us when we ought to speak; it dishonours God and may cause us to be entangled in a web of compromise and other sins. **We should be more concerned about what God thinks of us than what people think. We will then do what is right and pleasing to him.** The fear of the Lord in our lives will drive away any fear of man.

Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him (20; cp. 26:12).

*Fear not, my soul, alone to stand
With him who faced alone
The teeming malice of his foes,
Where mercy was not known.* (T. C. Hunter Clare)

A friend loves at all times

We accept that silver and gold must be refined to rid it of dross, but the Lord also refines the hearts of believers (3). He refines us to purge away the dross in our lives and the process is painful (Isaiah 1:25). If you are passing through trial remember to look to your precious Lord who leads you in such a way to bless you and to fit you for his service.

*When through the deep waters I cause thee to go,
The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
For I will be with thee thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.*

Those who are motivated by the love of God will not seek to expose their neighbour’s sins, but to quietly seek to lead the offender to repentance (9–10). God is just and those who reward evil for good will reap a harvest of evil in their own household (13).

Friendship is a most precious possession. *A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity* (17). David proved this in his friendship with Jonathan who was loyal to him despite his father’s hatred towards his friend. When David was a fugitive in the wilderness of Ziph, Jonathan sought him out *and strengthened his hand in God* (1 Samuel 23:16). The apostle Paul was greatly used by God but he relied on fellow-workers in the gospel who were also close friends. Those friends included Timothy and Onesiphorous who were among his most valued companions (Philippians 2:19–23, 25; 2 Timothy 1:16–18). The new Christian needs friends to encourage him, especially when his old associates drop away because he will no longer follow their lifestyle. Paul found Barnabas a great encouragement in this respect in his early years as a Christian (Acts 9:26–28; 11:25–26). I have heard believers complain about ‘unfriendly churches’. May that never be true of our church. **We all need friends and we need to be friendly (18:24). Are you a friend who can be relied on to encourage a fellow-believer in the Lord?**

A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city

Most of us like tasty food but there is one tasty morsel that we must always avoid. The words of a talebearer. These *are like tasty trifles*, and they go down into the inmost body (8). Do not encourage gossips by listening to them; such talk dishonours our testimony and damages us.

There is a significance in many of the names found in Scripture, especially the names and titles of God. His holy name reveals his character (cp. Exodus 3:13–15; Isaiah 9:6). There is great security for the Christian in the name (character) of God. – *The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe* (10). The security that we have in God is far greater than that of the rich man who trusts in his wealth (11; cp. 1 Timothy 6:17). In uncertain times we look to the unchanging God whose love for us is always the same, whose strength never diminishes (Malachi 3:6). When in need we look to Jehovah Jireh, the providing God (Genesis 22:14). He is the *Father of mercies and God of all comfort who comforts us in all our tribulation* (2 Corinthians 1:3–4).

Some of the most bitter and hurtful experiences come when there is a breakdown in trust between those who once were close friends. *A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle* (19). Disputes may arise over something that is quite trivial, but the consequences are often serious. Invisible barriers are erected that are like the walls of a castle. If you have offended someone through sin or carelessness, you must pray, repent and then go to them and apologise. It may take time to win over the offended brother and to regain his confidence. If you are the offended party, do not nurse grudges which will take over in your life and keep you from prayer and joy in the Lord. Seek out any who have offended you and try to understand their point of view. Gently explain how they have hurt you and pray for reconciliation.

Prevention is better than cure. Read Philippians 2:3–4 and act upon those instructions.

Without remedy

There is a very solemn warning in verse 1 to any who are stubborn in their rebellion against the Word of God. – *He who is often reproved, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy*. The story of Pharaoh vividly illustrates the folly of refusing to listen to what God has to say. He had many opportunities to repent of his sin, but he persisted in hardening his heart until there was no remedy (Exodus chapters 5 to 14).

I remember witnessing to a young man at work when I was a teenager and he poured scorn on the gospel. I never saw him alive again! He was killed by a bus. Later in life I worked with a man whose mother had been a godly believer. He had rejected her teaching and had embraced humanism and I was fair game for his scoffing each lunch hour. It was with a heavy heart that I heard the news a few years later that he had been killed in a plane crash. *Without remedy* – solemn and frightening words! **If you are not a believer, I urge you not to harden yourself against the Word of God. You may never have another opportunity to repent of your sin.**

Beware of flatterers (5); they feed our pride but destroy our souls. John Bunyan quotes this verse in ‘The Pilgrim’s Progress’ when he describes how Christian and Hopeful were ensnared in the net of the Flatterer, who was ‘a fine-spoken man’. True gospel preaching and teaching never use flattery (cp. 1 Thessalonians 2:5). A real friend will never flatter us. He will certainly encourage us, but he will also rebuke us when we go wrong (27:6; 28:23). We must learn to distinguish between a word of godly encouragement which we all need, and flattery which we can do without.

The Bible speaks of the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13). The evil man is ensnared by his own transgression (6) but the trap is set by Satan (2 Timothy 2:24–26). The devil makes sin appear attractive and exciting and it is always more enjoyable in imagination than in reality. Lasting happiness is only found through godly living (6).

Happy is the man who is always reverent

The best kind of prosperity does not depend on the possession of material things, on earthly attainment or honour, but on our relationship with God. Spiritual prosperity continues beyond the grave because the Christian is able to lay up for himself treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:19–21).

We can only know God if we confess our sins and forsake them. *He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy* (13). When we confess our sin, we uncover it but when we trust in Christ to save us, he covers our sin and we are no longer under condemnation. The Lord Jesus died on the cross so that our sins could be covered (the Hebrew word ‘atonement’ means ‘a covering’). Atonement for sin can only be made through blood sacrifice and it is through the blood of Christ that we have forgiveness and cleansing (Leviticus 17:11; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:11–15; 1 Peter 1:18–19; 1 John 1:7–9). *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered* (Psalm 32:1).

Many people imagine that reverence robs us of joy. They are greatly mistaken. *Happy is the man who is always reverent* (14). To be reverent means to respect God with a sense of fear and awesome wonder. The Bible urges us to be reverent and sober (‘serious-minded’ – Titus 2:2–3, 6–7, 11–15; Hebrews 12:28). True faith and godly fear are inseparable. Bridges points out that ‘faith without fear is self-confidence and self-delusion’ (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 541). **Reverence does not exclude joy or laughter**, but our laughter must be wholesome and never at anything that is filthy or at the expense of another person.

Are you faithful in your Christian life and seeking to honour God? Are you trusting in the Lord, not only for your salvation, but day by day in all your trials and for the supply of all your needs? Here are two great promises that the Lord gives to you in his Word. *The faithful man will abound with blessings* (20) and *he who trusts in the LORD will be prospered* (25).

He who finds a wife finds a good thing

There has been a terrible drift from the teaching of Scripture concerning marriage and the home. Scripture teaches that marriage is honourable (Hebrews 13:4) but many think that they know better than our Creator; they live together as man and wife and consider marriage as unnecessary. *He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favour from the LORD* (22). Marriage involves the total commitment of a man and a woman to each other. Bridges reminds us that verse 22 must be taken with limitation because ‘some find a crown to their head, others, rottenness to their bones (12:4)’.

If you are single how do you find a wife, a husband?

- You must most of all be prayerful in your search and commit your way to the Lord (3:6; Psalm 37:5).
- Listen to the advice of godly parents or friends. Samson refused such advice and lived to regret it (Judges 14:1–3).
- Be sure that you look for someone who is a godly Christian. Do they love the Lord and display the fruit of the Holy Spirit? Do they seek to work for the Lord in their local church? Do they want a home where Christ is central? Beauty of character is far more important than physical beauty.
- Be sure that you have other common interests to share and that you can confide in each other. Lack of communication and commitment is behind the breakdown of most marriages.

Our marriage partner should be our best human friend, *but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother* (24). The Lord Jesus is a never-failing friend to all who trust in him and follow him. Christian, he loved you so much that he gave his life to save you from your sin. **If Jesus is your dearest Friend, how often do you talk about him to others? How often do you speak to him in prayer? Do you love to read about him in the Bible? Do you make it your aim to please him in all that you do?**

His heart frets against the LORD

This chapter repeats many of the themes that we have already considered as we have read through Proverbs. We are again reminded that those who pervert the course of justice will surely be punished (5,9) and we are encouraged to obtain wisdom (8). There is the contrast between a contentious wife and a prudent wife (13–14). We are warned against laziness (15,24), the need for parental discipline of children (18) and for children to honour parents (26). The Lord will bless and repay those who show compassion on the poor (17).

We must not blame God when things go wrong for us because of our own folly. If we continue in sin, we will bring disaster upon ourselves. *The foolishness of a man twists his way, and his heart frets against the LORD* (3). We have all met people who are quick to fret against God and blame him when things go wrong for them but they never thank him for his blessings and goodness when all is going well. It is also perverse to blame God when we sin (James 1:13–14). Such an attitude began with Adam (Genesis 3:12). We have no right to be angry with God when we bring trouble upon ourselves (cp. 2 Samuel 6:8). The Scots poet Robert Burns was perverse when he addressed God with these words:

*Thou knowest that thou hast formed me
With passions wild and strong;
And listening to their witching voice
Has often led me wrong.*

We have only ourselves to blame for our sin.

We sometimes pass through perplexing times of trial but at such times we must remember that the Lord is in complete control of all that happens to us and that he is wise in all his ways. Let us never make the mistake of the ungodly who fret against the Lord. *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose* (Romans 8:28).

The righteous are bold as a lion

God can cause the wicked to flee when no one pursues and he gives boldness to his people (1). An example of this was the way in which the Syrian army fled in terror from Samaria, though no one was in pursuit of them (2 Kings 7). *The righteous are bold as a lion* (1). Scripture and Church history are full of accounts of the courage of the righteous in the face of great danger or even death. Moses did not fear the wrath of Pharaoh and Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego were bold when threatened with death by a furious King Nebuchadnezzar (Hebrews 11:27; Daniel 3:13–18). John the Baptist boldly confronted wicked Herod Antipas; the boldness of Peter and John astonished their enemies and Paul's witness made Roman governor Felix tremble (Mark 6:14–20; Acts 4:13; 24:24–25). Luther displayed great boldness at the Diet of Worms and the past century has its own Christian heroes who have been courageous in suffering and in death.

This world is no friend to our Saviour and his people (John 15:18–19; 1 John 3:13) and we need to have courage in the face of opposition to our message and work for Christ. Let us remember that *if God is for us, who can be against us?* In all our trials *we are more than conquerors through him who loved us*. Nothing whatever *is able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 8:31,37,39). Bishop Hall said, 'The godly man is afraid of nothing; not of God, because he knows him as his best friend who will not hurt him; not of Satan, because he cannot hurt him; not of afflictions, because he knows that they come from a loving God, and end in his good' (quoted by Bridges – COMMENTARY, page 526). **If you are fearful, meditate on these things and ask the Lord to give you boldness to stand for him.**

We must not imagine that the Lord will answer our prayers if we refuse to listen to his holy Word. *One who turns his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination* (9). The righteous person can rejoice in answered prayer and as he enjoys fellowship with his Saviour, he will glorify God (12).

Faithful are the wounds of a friend

We were reminded of the value of true friendship in our notes on chapter 17. There are more valuable insights into what it means to be a friend in our reading today.

- The wounds of a friend. *Faithful are the wounds of a friend* (6). An enemy has no interest in correcting us and his kisses are deceitful but a friend may wound us by rebuking or admonishing us when we go wrong. The faithful wounds of a friend are not meant to leave permanent injury but rather to point us to the Lord and to encourage us to be more godly. There is little genuine Christian rebuke among believers because we are afraid of losing friends or of becoming unpopular. Bridges points out, ‘The mark of true godliness is an anxiety to have our faults pointed out; and a thankfulness to those who undertake the self-denying office. A faithful reprover is a very great help in our Christian course’ (COMMENTARY, page 505). If we are not walking with the Lord, we must be very reticent to rebuke other Christians. Rebuke must be prayerfully and considerately administered and given with gentleness and in humility. Godly rebuke does not destroy friendship but rather cements it. Are you courageous enough to rebuke the erring believer? Are you humble enough to accept rebuke?
- The counsel of a friend (9). Good counsel is sweet and it delights the heart; it brings comfort and encouragement. We are never so spiritual that we do not need the counsel of others. Moses greatly benefited from the advice of Jethro (Exodus 18:17–24).
- The conversation of a friend (17). Bridges writes, ‘If a brother seems to walk alone, sharpen his iron by godly communication. Walk together in mutual “consideration” of each other’s infirmities, trials and temptations; and the mutual “provocation” of each other’s gifts and graces’ (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 516). Spiritual conversation is a most blessed pursuit (Malachi 3:16) which sharpens us and makes us stronger Christians.

What do you know about these aspects of friendship?

Who can say, ‘I have made my heart clean’?

The Bible contains many warnings concerning alcoholic drink. Though Christians differ on the rightness or otherwise of taking strong drink, Scripture is very clear that drunkenness or drinking to excess is sinful. *Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit* (Ephesians 5:18). We read in this chapter of Proverbs, *Wine is a mocker, intoxicating drink arouses brawling, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise* (1). Wine mocks when it causes people to lose control of themselves so that they become an object of derision in their drunken state. Look at the questions and the warnings in chapter 23, verses 29–35. Strong drink may also lead to brawling. Matthew Henry comments, ‘When the wine is in, the wit is out, and the passions up; and thence come drunken scuffles, and drunken frays, and drunken disputes over the cups.’

We should always seek to avoid quarrelling *since any fool can start a quarrel* (3). The Christian must aim to *live peaceably with all men* (Romans 12:18; cp. Hebrews 12:14). We all fall short of God’s holy standards and we cannot possibly cleanse ourselves from sin. *Who can say, ‘I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin’?* (9). Those who say that they have no sin show their ignorance of their own deceitful hearts and of human nature. We cannot save ourselves by leading ‘good’ lives or by ‘doing our best’ because we cannot atone for our sin. We are saved by grace and not by works (Ephesians 2:8–9). *Without the shedding of blood there is no remission* of sin. The Lord Jesus died on the cross to *bear the sins of many* and his blood cleanses us from all sin (Hebrews 9:22,28; 1 John 1:7).

*How helpless and hopeless we sinners had been
If he never had loved us till cleansed from our sin!*

(Arthur T. Pierson).

Are you trusting in the Lord Jesus alone to save you from your sins? If you are not, I urge you to come to him seeking his forgiveness and cleansing from your sin. He will then transform your life and accept you into his family.

Do not say, 'I will recompense evil'; wait for the LORD

Human nature does not change with the passing of time. Dishonesty in the world of business was found in Solomon's time just as it is in our day. Those who cheat by giving short weight are *an abomination to the LORD* (10, 23) and buyers who defraud are no better (14). The gains obtained by deceit may be sweet for a time but they will surely bring trouble (17). Achan and Gehazi found this true in their own experience (Joshua 7:21–24; 2 Kings 5:20–27). We must honour God by showing integrity in every aspect of our lives. We are again urged to avoid gossips and are reminded that the dishonour of parents is a great sin in the sight of God (19–20; cp. Ephesians 6:1–3).

Christians are not immune from being hurt or ill-treated (Matthew 5:11–12; 1 Peter 3:8–9) but we must never seek personal revenge (Romans 12:17–21). *Do not say, 'I will recompense evil; wait for the LORD, and he will save you* (22). Waiting for God implies patience and it involves prayer and meditation on the Word of God (Psalm 40:1). We must commit our lives, our grief and hurts into the hands of our wise heavenly Father. To seek revenge is to display a lack of faith in the good providence of the Lord.

When we are old, diminishing strength makes us we feel the physical limitations of our age, but those who are elderly have other advantages: *The glory of young men is their strength, and the splendour of old men is their grey head* (29). Those who are young face increasing pressure to conform to the wicked trends of the world and they need our prayers. A young person who loves and obeys God has the energy to serve the Lord which the elderly no longer have, but godly men and women have so much to offer in their later years. They have a wealth of wisdom and knowledge gained by walking with the Lord and their fellowship and counsel is precious. I know of people past the age of ninety who are great encouragers of young and old alike. *They bear fruit in old age* (Psalm 92:14). **Let us all be determined to serve the Lord throughout our lives!**

Do not boast about tomorrow

A godly, disciplined life will include prudent planning for the future but we must always commit our way to the Lord (3:6; cp. Psalm 37:5). To plan without prayerful submission to God is presumption. *Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth* (1). We read in James 4:16 that *all such boasting is evil*. The Lord Jesus told the story of a rich farmer who had great plans for his future without any consideration of God who called him a 'fool' and the man died that night (Luke 12:16–21).

If you are not a Christian, could it be that you are planning to seek the Lord in the future because you are not willing to follow him now? How do you know that you will be given more opportunities to come to Christ? *Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near* (Isaiah 55:6). If you are a Christian, are you planning to improve tomorrow? Perhaps you will then be more prayerful and disciplined in your Christian life and get more involved in the life and witness of your church? **It is good and proper to have spiritual desires, but you must be determined to act upon your resolutions and not keep putting them off until tomorrow.**

Verse 2 warns us against a different kind of boasting. Self-praise is no commendation but is rather the attitude of the Pharisees whose pride was nauseating (cp. Luke 18:10–14). Bridges quotes an old expositor who wrote, 'Praise is a comely garment. But though thyself doth wear it, another must put it on, or else it will never sit well about thee. Praise is sweet music, but it is never tuneable in thine own mouth. If it cometh from the mouth of another, it soundeth most tuneably in the ears of all that hear it'.

A man who wanders from his place is like a bird that wanders from its nest (8). Restlessness often comes from a lack of contentment and we must be sure that we do not behave like wandering sheep. Bridges aptly comments, 'Every step of departure, without a clear scriptural warrant, is departure from God' (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 508).

The words of a talebearer are tasty trifles

The lazy person will often excuse his indolence but his excuses are often quite pathetic (13–16). If there is work to be done in your church, are you eager to help, or do you make excuses?

The third section of this chapter warns against various kinds of mischief-making:

- The busybody causes trouble and should be avoided (2 Thessalonians 3:6,11). If we meddle in other people's quarrels it is as foolish as taking hold of a dog by its ears; we ourselves will get hurt (17; cp. 1 Peter 4:15). Moses was obliged to flee from Egypt after meddling in a fight between two Hebrews (Exodus 2:11–15).
- Not all humour is good. There is all the difference in the world between having a sense of humour and being stupid, thoughtless and hurtful. We may say something that is unkind or play a joke on someone that is designed to deceive them, making them appear foolish. When we are found out, it is not good enough to protest, *'I was only joking!'* Such behaviour is *like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death* (18–19). Foolish jesting is not a mark of godliness (Ephesians 5:3–4). The missionary Amy Carmichael wrote, 'If I can enjoy a joke at the expense of another; if I can in any way slight another in conversation, or even in thought, then I know nothing of Calvary love' (From her book, 'IF' – page 15, published by CLC).
- Gossip is a common form of mischief-making (20–22). *The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body* (22; cp. 18:8). These tasty trifles damage the soul. If you are enjoying God in your life, you will not enjoy gossip! Charles Bridges writes, 'We must remove the talebearer; stop him in his words; compel him to produce his authority; face him, if possible, with the subject of his tales. This decisive course will prevent a mass of slander, and put him to shame' (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 496).

We will not have time to make mischief if we spend much time in prayer and Bible reading. Let us busy ourselves with good works and seek to encourage one another with kind words.

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD

This chapter of Proverbs teaches a most important truth about God – he is absolutely sovereign over all that happens in the universe. *The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; he turns it wherever he wishes* (1). This verse reminds us of the farmer who uses irrigation ditches to water his parched fields. He is able to divert water from one channel to another, turning it to flow wherever he wishes it to go. The Lord is in complete control of kings and nations and performs his will through moving upon the hearts of those in power. God prevented Abimelech, King of Gerar, from sinning (Genesis 20:6) and used kings as instruments of judgment or mercy (Jeremiah 25:8–9; Ezra 1:1–3). This does not deny human responsibility. We are not robots in the hands of God and we freely choose in our decision-making processes (cp. Genesis 50:20).

The truth of God's sovereignty encourages us to pray for leaders of nations (1 Timothy 2:1–2). They are subject to God and they cannot do anything that he is unwilling for them to do. He uses even wicked rulers to further his wise and holy purposes. What would be the point of prayer if God were a helpless bystander, unable to intervene in the affairs of men? He humbled the mighty King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon so that he acknowledged God's greatness and sovereignty (Daniel 4:34–37).

The wicked may plot against God but all their efforts are futile (30; cp. Psalm 2:1–3; 33:10–11; Isaiah 14:24,27). Pharaoh of Egypt and wicked Herod prove this. Our plans may be frustrated, but the Lord is never overtaken by unforeseen events. This does not mean that we should not make plans or fail to be diligent in the things that we do. We are to use the means available but always commit our way to the Lord. Derek Kidner comments (in his commentary on Proverbs), 'If verse 30 warns us not to fight against the Lord, verse 31 warns us not to fight without him.' **God uses our disappointments and setbacks to further his gracious purposes. Let us encourage ourselves in our sovereign Lord and trust in him at all times.**

He who follows righteousness and mercy finds life

The Old Testament prophets taught that religion without righteousness is a sham and that it is not acceptable to God (eg. Isaiah 1:10–17; Micah 6:6–8). Righteousness is far more important than ritual (3). *He who follows righteousness and mercy finds life, righteousness and honour* (21). To be righteous fulfils our obligation to God and to be merciful, our obligation to man. The Lord has been very merciful to us and he also expects us to be merciful (verse 13). We are merciful when we help the poor and support needy fellow-Christians in practical ways (Colossians 3:12–14; 1 John 3:16–17). We are merciful when we forgive those who have sinned against us (Ephesians 4:32).

If you have no interest in following righteousness, the question must be asked, ‘Are you truly saved?’ The word ‘follow’ means ‘pursue’. To run after righteousness is a far more profitable pursuit than running round in circles chasing after blessings. The Lord Jesus said, ‘*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*’ (Matthew 6:33); this has to be a priority with us!

Following righteousness means battling with remaining sin, shunning all that is harmful to our walk with God, spending time with God in prayer, in reading his Word and obeying it. If we follow righteousness, it will show in our lives. The Lord Jesus promised, ‘*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled*’ (Matthew 5:6).

God makes a great promise to those who follow righteousness and mercy. They will find *life, righteousness and honour*. He not only promises eternal life but a better quality of life here on earth (1 Timothy 4:8). If we follow righteousness we will find it and be able to lead a righteous life in this wicked world and God will honour us (1 Samuel 2:30; John 12:26). **To follow Christ means pursuing righteousness and mercy. Whom and what are you following?**

Honour is not fitting for a fool

This chapter contains instruction and warnings concerning three kinds of people – the fool (1–12), the sluggard (13–16), and the mischief-maker (17–28). Proverbs contains many warnings concerning foolishness. The words ‘fool’ and its plural ‘fools’ appear 61 times in the book. The fool in the eyes of the Lord is the person who lives as if there were no God. *The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’* (Psalm 14:1). The practical atheist refuses to obey God’s holy Word and the consequences are disastrous. A man may be endowed with great intelligence, but if he rebels against God, he is a fool. *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes; he mocks at sin and he trusts in his own heart* (12:15; 14:9; 28:26). The fool never learns but *repeats his folly* (11).

What should be our attitude to fools? We must never honour them. *Honour is not fitting for a fool* (1). Such honour is as inappropriate as snow in summer or rain at harvest. We must not encourage our young people to look to godless fools as role-models whatever their skill in the world of sport or music. They should rather be encouraged to honour those who are godly. Verses 4 and 5 appear to contradict each other, but they do not. Verse 4 means that we should not engage in disputing with fools because it is futile while verse 5 is telling us to rebuke such a person. When someone scoffs as you attempt to speak to them about the Lord, you must not be intimidated but ask them whether or not they want to listen to what you have to say and to think about your words. If they close their minds to the gospel message, do not prolong a conversation that is not getting anywhere. The Lord Jesus warns, ‘*Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces*’ (Matthew 7:6).

There is one person who is worse than a fool. *Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him* (12). **If you think that you know better than what God says in the Bible, you are very foolish and there is little hope for you unless you turn from your sinful ways.**

Whoever has no rule over his own spirit

One of the great tests of Christian living comes when we are wronged. How do we react? Do we vow to get even? God's Word is quite clear. *If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink* (21). When we are wronged, we must leave the Lord to vindicate us and to avenge us. He will reward us if we act kindly towards an enemy (21–22; cp. Romans 12:19–20). Charles Bridges observes, 'No man ever conquered his enemy's heart by revenge; many by love' (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 477).

Verse 23 warns against backbiting. This sin of speaking ill of others behind their back is all too common in the workplace, among family and neighbours, and in clubs and societies; it is also found in the church (cp. 2 Corinthians 12:20). Many Christians are guilty of backbiting or of encouraging such behaviour. If you are guilty of this sin, I urge you to repent and to seek the forgiveness of God. If you allow it to continue it will blight you and damage you. Bridges asks, 'Who should tolerate the backbiter? He is a pest in society; in the circle of friendship; in the church of God. ... Flee this deadly pest. Keep thine ears, as well as thy mouth, from the poison' (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 478).

Many a Christian has fallen into the temptation of seeking to make a name for himself rather than seeking the honour of God in all things. *To seek one's own glory is not glory* (27), it is self-love and it is sinful. Our reading ends with a warning against lack of self-control. Honey is good to eat, but only in moderation (27; cp. verse 16, 24:13). The principle is that we must not be gluttons, but bring our appetite under control and eat only as much as is necessary. *Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls* (28; cp. 16:32). If we lack in self-control, we are like an unguarded city which can offer no resistance to its enemies; we will fail to resist temptation and the attacks of the devil. **Self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:23). Do you have it?**

Train up a child in the way he should go

Reputation is important. *A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches* (1; cp. Ecclesiastes 7:1). The ungodly also recognise this truth; the men of Babel built their tower to make a name for themselves (Genesis 11:4). Religious hypocrites also go to great lengths to acquire a good name (cp. Matthew 6:2,5). A good name without true godliness is useless (Luke 6:26; 16:15).

The enemies of the gospel may seek to destroy our reputation by slandering us, but this must not deter us from leading God-honouring lives (Matthew 5:11–12; 1 Peter 4:14–16). A good name will support our testimony before those who are lost (cp. 1 Timothy 3:7). We must not, however, deny God or use flattery in order to please people (1 Thessalonians 2:4–5). We should rather aim to please the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:9), and show a selfless love and concern for others (9). A good reputation will then be gained and God will be glorified (Matthew 5:16).

We must never underestimate the influence of a godly home as we seek to train our children in a hostile, godless world. *Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it* (6). Timothy was taught the Scriptures by his mother and grandmother and this bore fruit in his life (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). John Newton strayed far from God but he never forgot the godly training of his mother and he was wonderfully saved and used by the Lord. We must pray with our children and show them that there are two ways, one leading to life and the other to destruction (Matthew 7:13–24). The rod of correction should be used when necessary (15). We must also instruct our children by godly example.

*How can you lead to Christ your boy
Unless Christ's method you employ?
There's just one thing that you can do –
It's let that boy see Christ in you.*

(Author unknown – quoted by William Hendriksen, Commentary on Gospel of John, page 254 – published by Banner of Truth).

The certainty of the words of truth

We begin a new section of Proverbs with verse 17 (*‘the words of the wise’*) which runs through to the end of chapter 24. If we want greater faith in God we need to apply our hearts to his knowledge and retain his Word within us (17–19). There is a beautiful description of the worth of Scripture here – *the certainty of the words of truth* (21). In his great prayer to God the Father the Lord Jesus said, *‘Your word is truth’* (John 17:17). Throughout the New Testament, Scripture is described as *the word of truth* (2 Corinthians 6:7; Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5; 2 Timothy 2:15; James 1:18).

The Bible is absolutely reliable because it is the Word of God. *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God* (2 Timothy 3:16; cp. 2 Peter 1:21). It contains *excellent things of counsels and knowledge* (20). Scripture instructs us how to lead a God-honouring and happy life and millions of Christians have proved its promises to be true. The Bible answers life’s most important questions: Is there an almighty, personal God? Can I really know God? Why is there so much suffering in the world? Why did Jesus come into the world? Is there a purpose to life? Is there a life after death? Is there hope for me?

The Bible rebukes the lifestyle of the wicked and their hatred of its teaching. The devil and many who are not Christians attack Scripture at every opportunity. King Jehoiakim of Judah burned the written word of God that came through Jeremiah but he could not destroy that word (Jeremiah chapter 36). One of the earls of Rochester in the nineteenth century led a very wicked and profligate life. He had no time for religion but he later became a Christian. He used to lay his hand on the Bible and say, *‘This is true philosophy. This is the wisdom that speaks to the heart. A bad life is the only objection to this Book.’* **Let us seek to know God’s Word better and give thanks that the Lord has made known to us *‘the certainty of the words of truth’*.**

Seldom set foot in your neighbour’s house

Silver that is used for fine jewellery has its dross removed (4). We have already been reminded in Proverbs (17:3) of the need for refining in the Christian life so that we can be used by God and shine as lights in this world. It would be the height of folly to exalt ourselves in the presence of a king and to take a place among those whom he honours. We may soon be humbled and made to take a lower place (6–7). The Lord Jesus may have had this proverb in mind in his teaching in Luke 14:7–11. He requires us to be humble.

This chapter has wise words for us concerning relationships with our neighbours. We should not be hasty to take legal action against our neighbour but rather seek to settle our grievance by discussion with him (8–10). If we refuse to talk to those who have wronged us and harbour resentment, we harm our Christian testimony. Charles Bridges comments, *‘The considerate Christian will rather concede his rights than insist upon them to the hazard of his own soul, and to the injury of the church’* (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, page 466). We must not bear false witness against our neighbour (18; cp. Exodus 20:16).

We must be considerate to others and realise that they need some privacy in their own homes. We must show kindness and be prepared to help our neighbour but never make a nuisance of ourselves by seeking to pass all our spare time in their house. They will soon resent such thoughtless behaviour. *Seldom set foot in your neighbour’s house, lest he become weary of you and hate you* (17). Charles Bridges contrasts this situation with the Lord who is never wearied by our frequent visits to him for fellowship. *‘Our earthly friend may be pressed too far. Kindness may be worn out by frequent use. But never can we come to our heavenly Friend unseasonably ... The more frequent the visits, the more welcome, the more fruitful. What with man would be intrusion, with God is confidence.’* (COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS, pages 472–473). **How often do you visit God in prayer?**

Deliver those who are drawn toward death

Every Christian should be concerned to take the gospel to the lost. We have the good news that Jesus died on the cross and rose again from the dead to save sinners and we must not keep this news to ourselves. *Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter* (11). We must always remember that men, women, boys and girls who do not know forgiveness of their sins through Christ are lost. They are alienated from God and are being *drawn toward death* (11). They are dead in their sins (Ephesians 2:1,5) and if they die without Christ, they will be separated from God for ever (Matthew 25:41). The Lord Jesus said, *'The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost'* (Luke 19:10).

There were once four lepers outside the city of Samaria which had been under siege and whose population was starving. The Lord graciously intervened, causing the besieging Syrian army to flee and the lepers were the first to find an abandoned camp full of food and treasures. After feasting and hiding away some of the treasure, they remembered the starving city and said to one another, *'We are not doing what is right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent'* (2 Kings 7:9). We have no excuse for remaining silent. The Lord knows our hearts and will *render to each man according to his deeds* (12). **If we love our neighbours as ourselves, we will want to tell them about the good news of the Lord Jesus and our great salvation.**

It is all too easy to feel a sense of satisfaction when our enemies come to grief. We must not rejoice when an enemy falls because this displeases the Lord, the righteous Judge (17–18). The Lord Jesus taught us that we must love our enemies and do good to those who hate us (Matthew 5:44). We must *not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the wicked* (19–20; cp. 23:17; Psalm 37:1–11). Many wicked people seem to prosper despite their evil ways and their indifference to God, but they have no prospect of future happiness.

Do not let your heart envy sinners

This chapter begins with a call for moderation in eating (1–3) and a warning against covetousness and miserliness (4–8). Scripture teaches us to have respect for the property of others. Ancient landmarks marked the boundaries of fields and evil men would often seek to remove such landmarks in order to seize land for themselves. Orphans and widows were particularly vulnerable to such predators. Landmarks were to be left intact and to remove them invited the curse of God (10–11; cp. 22:28; Deuteronomy 19:14; 27:17).

The value of the 'rod' is again taught in verses 13 and 14 (cp. 13:24; 22:15; 29:15,17). The old saying, 'Spare the rod and spoil the child' still holds true! We must remember, however, that it is sinful to chastise a child in an angry manner. We must also recognise that there are other effective forms of punishment (eg. depriving a wayward child of privileges).

There are times when we may be tempted to envy sinners who prosper and seem to have little worry. We have struggles in seeking to work out our obedience to the Lord and we may be baffled and disappointed when things appear to go wrong. Sinners may appear to be without care and they may be in better financial circumstances than we. The Word of God says, *'Do not let your heart envy sinners, but in the fear of the LORD continue all day long'* (17; cp. 24:1,19).

To fear God means to reverence him, to think much about him, to worship him, to praise him. Psalm 37 also urges us not to envy sinners and shows that trusting in the Lord, delighting ourselves in him, committing our way to him, resting in him and waiting patiently for him, is the antidote to such envy (Psalm 37:1–7). We have peace with God and we enjoy the special care of our loving heavenly Father. We have his presence with us and the privilege of prayer. We have a glorious future (18; cp. Romans 8:18). **Let us learn to count our blessings and to have the praises of God on our lips. We will then be kept from envying sinners.**

Buy the truth, and do not sell it

The company that we keep affects our lives for good or evil and we are warned not to mix with drunkards and gluttons (20–21). We come under many pressures to compromise vital Christian truth. Verse 23 should be impressed on our hearts and fixed in our minds: *Buy the truth, and do not sell it*. It is wicked to exchange the truth of God for a lie (Romans 1:25). Truth is not cheap. We may have to buy it at the expense of friends, job, reputation or even life. Though costly, it is a bargain because it never loses its value. It is the knowledge of the truth that brings freedom to sinners (John 8:32). Bridges observes, ‘Those who sell the truth, sell their own souls with it.’ (COMMENTARY, page 437). **Dare we sell the truth for that of the so-called Christian unity of the ecumenical movement or to gain acceptance with men?** Never! *Buy the truth, and do not sell it*. Let us be bold and gracious in proclaiming the truth of God and in living it out in our lives.

There are more warnings in this chapter against the misuse of strong drink. The person who is intoxicated with drink is in physical and moral danger (29–35). Drunkenness is sin (1 Corinthians 6:10; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:18). It blocks the exercise of self-control (a fruit of the Holy Spirit – Galatians 5:23). Lot allowed his two daughters to ply him with drink and he was drawn into incest and disgrace (Genesis 19:32–36). No one who is now addicted to drink ever intended to become an alcoholic. Strong drink leads to poverty and hurt (21,32). Noah bore a faithful witness to God in a wicked and violent world (Genesis 6:9–11) but after the flood he was ensnared by drink. The company of drunkards and the self-indulgent is not for Christians (20). We should seek the fellowship of God’s people which is precious and delightful (Acts 2:41–42; Hebrews 10:25).

*We love the place, O God,
Wherein thine honour dwells;
The joy of thine abode
All earthly joy excels.*

(William Bullock)

If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small

We are again warned, ‘*Do not be envious of evil men*’ (1–2; cp. 23:17). Those who would build a house must obtain bricks, mortar, timber and other materials for the structure. Wisdom and knowledge are just as vital for the well-being of a home (3–4). We have already seen in Proverbs that this wisdom comes through taking the Word of God into our lives and in obedience to God’s laws. The same principles also apply to our own households which need to be built upon the wisdom of the Word of God. The church is described as a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5) and a local church must be built with wisdom, understanding and knowledge if it is to prosper

Christians are not immune from trouble or sickness. Tragedy, disappointment, loss of health or job and bereavement come to Christian and unbeliever alike. What is so wonderfully different for the Christian is that the Lord is with us in times of distress. We do not know whether or not adversity will come upon us, but we can be prepared for it. *If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small* (10).

How can we prevent ourselves from being faint and feeble in the day of adversity? We must strengthen ourselves by feeding upon the Word of God (5). The strong Christian is one who knows the teaching of the Bible and feeds his soul continually upon it, applying its precepts to his own life. We must be prayerful and vigilant in order to overcome temptation (Matthew 26:41; 1 Peter 5:8). *Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength* (Isaiah 40:31). The Lord also deals with us and disciplines us to clear from our lives all that is harmful (3:11–12). He also gives us grace in time of need and strength when we are weak (2 Corinthians 12:9). We are not alone in the battle!

*We rest on thee, our Shield and our Defender!
We go not forth alone against the foe;
Strong in thy strength, safe in thy keeping tender,
We rest on thee, and in thy name we go.*

(Edith G. Cherry)