

# ANCIENT WISDOM, EVERYDAY WORSHIP

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## Re-discovering Proverbs

*17-Week Group Devotional*  
**VOLUME 5: PROVERBS 20-25**



# ANCIENT WISDOM, EVERYDAY WORSHIP: Re-discovering Proverbs

WEEK 1 - PROVERBS 20: 1-10

VOL. 5

## PICK UP A PADDLE

*The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out. (PROVERBS 20: 5)*

We all need someone in our life who can draw out of us our deepest dreams, our most cherished desires, and our honest motives. Someone who can sense our intensions and either throw up a red flag or spur us on. These people give us clarity and that's the kind of person today's theme verse speaks of.

I have a friend that I worked closely with for several years. We planned, led or participated in numerous events around the country where coordination between various people, all from different cities, was crucial. You can probably guess that it didn't all go perfectly every time.

On those occasions, the anxiety must have shown on my face because he'd pull me aside and say, "Let's take a walk." And as we walked, he'd pray. And as he prayed, I'd be reminded of why I was doing what I was doing and for Whom. There were some tense moments, but you know what? I miss those encounters.

I think verse 5 of Proverbs 20 can be easily linked to verse 6, which can be easily linked to verse 9. If you were to combine them, and freely translate them, that new passage might go something like this:

*Even when we don't understand the deep thoughts of our spirit, a good and wise friend can pull them out. Lots of people may claim to be your friend, but a real friend sees through you and then sees you through. After all, we've all sinned; we've all fallen short; we're all in the same boat. Let's row together.*

Who's picking up a paddle for you?

## DISCUSS

Do you have a friend who sees through you and sees you through?

Are you that kind of friend for anyone else?

## THE REAL ISSUE IS PRIDE

*Food gained by fraud tastes sweet to a man, but he ends up with a mouth full of gravel.*  
(PROVERBS 20:17)

Proverbs is nothing if not vivid in its word pictures. Verse 17 of chapter 20 is a prime example.

Obviously, the implications are clear: whatever our sin (food gained by fraud), though it seems satisfying, and maybe even seems deserved, it always comes back to bite us. So ... why don't we ever learn this?

I'm convinced that timing is one issue. We tend to think that since we're not discovered or called out immediately, that we've gotten away with something. That since it was so easy and no one knows, we can continue and nobody will be the wiser.

The real issue comes down to pride. That's the source of all our sin, isn't it? Once again, it's the "I want what I want when I want it" disorder. And for the life of us, we can't figure out how this will be the death of us.

But before we do a quick inventory of our recent actions and feel good about that, let's remember that this whole discussion reaches also to our thoughts ... and our attitudes ... our very spirit.

If we think we can get away with harboring ill will, we're terribly mistaken. If we consider our attitude to be of no consequence as long as we get the work done, there'll be a steep price to pay.

Our old friend, King David, knew this. He's the one who wrote:

*Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not hold against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. And you forgave the guilt of my sin.* (Psalm 32: 2,3,5a,5c)

## DISCUSS

Have you ever felt separated from God because you were harboring an unseen sinful action or attitude?

Have you experienced the joy that comes from worshipping with a clean heart?



## GOD'S PEACE TO YOU

*Do not say, "I'll pay you back for this wrong!" Wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you.*  
(PROVERBS 20:22)

At the risk of allowing today's devotional thought to look too much like a Hebrew lesson, there *are* a few words in the rendering of today's theme verse that I think you'll find interesting. And maybe, just maybe we'll all remember this the next time we're tempted to seek revenge.

Let's look first at that phrase, "pay you back," as it's found here in the NIV. The NASB says, "repay evil," and the KJV puts it, "recompence." Originally, in Hebrew, the word is *shalam* – "to be safe in mind or body; to be completed; to make good; or to reciprocate." Do you see how close this word looks to the one we're more familiar with, *shalom*? It even has similar connotations, because *shalom* is more than just "peace." It also implies "to be well, happy, healthy, prosperous; to be at total, perfect peace; whole; completed."

The second word to consider is "wait;" *qavah* in Hebrew. That word can mean, as we'd expect, "wait or tarry." But it can also mean "to bind together, perhaps by twisting." It's the very same word used in Isaiah 40:31, where we're told that "those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength..." How about that?

In the end, vengeance is *not* ours. We find perfect wholeness, total completeness and ultimate satisfaction in being bound together (twisted) with God.

## DISCUSS

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In what areas of your life do you most often find yourself fighting for revenge or struggling for reciprocation?  
How do the words "shalam" and "qavah" impact those feelings?

## SACRIFICE OR OBEDIENCE?

*To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.*  
(PROVERBS 21:3)

King Saul had blown it ... big time. He'd been instructed to totally destroy the Amalekites as well as all their possessions, including their flocks and herds. He completed that task for the most part, but kept back some of the animals in order to offer a sacrifice to God. That's when the prophet Samuel called him out.

Now, I don't know Saul's motivation for not totally completing the task at hand, and on the surface, it sounds like a noble thing. Who's going to argue with offering a sacrifice to God? Maybe it was Saul's arrogance; maybe he just forgot the "totally destroy" part; or maybe he just flipped into auto-pilot and commenced what he'd done and had seen done for years. At any rate, Samuel rebuked him and summed it all up by saying, "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams." (1 Samuel 15:22) And in the end, Saul's kingdom was taken away from him.

It's easy to read *over* this story without reading *into* it. And it's just as easy for us to fall back on what we know and are comfortable with, instead of listening to what it is God is saying to us, or commanding us to do. Our traditions and "business as usual" way of doing things may be pure and even God-honoring. But there are times when obedience trumps convention; when to obey is better than sacrifice.

And the only way we'll know is to pay attention. And the only way we can pay attention is to be sure we're listening.

## DISCUSS

Have you ever sensed God instructing you in a way that seems counter to convention?

Have you ever experienced this in the way you worship Him?

## THE HEIGHT AND DEPTH OF OUR RELATIONSHIP

*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings.*  
(PROVERBS 25:2)

I'm convinced that God honors those who seek out His truth. When you and I do that, we become more aware of "our place" in relation to Him and to others. Exalting ourselves is no good; but speaking well of, and speaking well to others brings life.

In the many years I've been able to spend leading worship, I've made some interesting discoveries. One of them is this: I'm more creative in planning when I don't study what others do so much as I study who God is. I'm less invigorated by what my colleagues are saying about *this* than I am by what God has said about *that*. I truly value the insight of others, but my heart races at the revelation of God.

Of course, we'll never totally understand God. We'll never fully comprehend Him. Besides, who wants a God we completely fathom? That's where wonder comes in. That's where awe has a place. That's where mystery is acknowledged.

This is where knowledge and wisdom really show their value. Searching out information about God just for the satisfaction of knowing it, isn't much different than any other educational experience. But seeking God so that we can heighten our response to Him, and deepen our relationship with Him is wisdom indeed.

And the good news is that He's invited us to do that very thing..

### DISCUSS

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s your knowledge about God deeper than your relationship with Him?

# ANCIENT WISDOM, EVERYDAY WORSHIP: Re-discovering Proverbs

WEEK 16 - PROVERBS 25:11-20

VOL. 5

## T-H-I-N-K!

*A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. (PROVERBS 25:11)*

*"I was only trying to help!"*

*"Listen, I don't know if this is true or not ..."*

*"I'm telling you this so you can pray more intelligently."*

*"I probably shouldn't say this, but ..."*

*"Well, at least I'm being honest!"*

*"I don't mean this the way it sounds ..."*

*"I'm at the age where I can speak my mind!"*

T-H-I-N-K!

Is it True?

Is it Helpful?

Is it Inspiring?

Is it Necessary?

Is it Kind?

## DISCUSS

Have you spoken recently without thinking?

## AN ODD WAY TO SHOW IT!

*If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head and the LORD will reward you.*

(PROVERBS 25:21 & 22)

Let me get this straight: If I feed an enemy, and give him something to drink, I'll really be heaping burning coals of fire on his head, and God will reward me.

What? Really? Seriously?

I thought Jesus said to *do good* to my enemies, and to *pray* for those who abuse me; not pour burning coals on their heads. I think I've been missing something here because evidently this concept was understood to those in biblical times (see also Romans 12:20).

I did a little investigating on this whole matter and here's what I found out. Fire was such an essential part of everyday life – maybe even survival – in ancient times that to be without it could be more than inconvenient; it could be disastrous. If your fire went out, you'd need some fresh burning coals to get you going again. Often, if you borrowed lighted coals from a neighbor, you'd carry them back home in a pot or pan on top of your head. Giving someone hot coals to restart their fire was a neighborly thing to do.

So, here's the point – doing good, especially to those who've misused us, mistreated us, become our sworn enemy, is like more than giving just a pan with a few hot coals. Offering forgiveness (even when it wasn't asked for) or building a bridge of reconciliation is like pouring a whole mountain of burning coals on someone's head! It's an overload of blessing.

And an added bonus of taking the high road? The traffic's pretty light.

## DISCUSS

When was the last time you poured burning coals on someone's head?

What are you waiting for now?