

Pearls from Proverbs

Proverbs for Teens & Young Adults

Dale Jenkins

I have a good friend who, while he does not oppose Bible classes, thinks that all ages should meet together. He doesn't think that young people need specialized lessons or that middle-agers or parents need lessons directed just to them, but what we all need is the Bible. Of course, in a sense he's right. We all do need the Bible, just the Bible and all of the Bible. I have noticed, however, that even the Bible is specialized in its directives to different groups—sometimes to women (Isa. 32:9, 11), sometimes to men (Job 34:10), some things are for young people (1 Tim. 4:12), some specifically for older folks (Joel 1:2), some for married people (Eph. 5), some for singles (1 Cor. 7:8) or widows (1 Tim. 5:14), some for young men (1 Pet. 5:5), some for young women (1 Tim. 2:9).

There are a number of the proverbs that appear to have been tailor-made for teens and young adults. In fact, the book is written to a young man going into full adulthood (1:1-7). So in this study we notice and highlight some of the major themes for younger people.

God has given us the tremendous ability to think, to reason, to decide; and He has given us the gift of choice. Every day we make many choices—what clothes to wear, what to eat, when to sleep. Have you noticed that the older you get the more freedom you have? As an infant you ate what was put in front of you—your mom shoved that

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spoon in your mouth and you could spit it out, but that was what was coming. You wore what they put on you, regardless of how embarrassing some of those outfits may seem to you today. As a young school-aged child, you watched what was put in front of you and went only where your parents either took you or arranged for you to go.

The older you get the more you make your own choices. By this time you are old enough to be making many decisions by yourself, or at least you are old enough to think that you can. So, why do you do what you do? Why do you make the choices you make?

What God wants is for us to do right because it is right. It has its own reward. If you do it for any other reason, it falls short of God's desire. Through the years I've met many young people who made their choices in a number of ways. There was Mary who confessed she'd stopped praying because she only did it because she was told she had to do it. She went to church every week because her parents forced her to. There was Tom who learned that through deceit he could get by with things he otherwise would be forbidden to do. His lying ways cost him respect, jobs and eventually his marriage. There was Ted who spent time with internet porn and became an embarrassment to his family and his church. James, who decided the rules to which he was forced to submit were inequitable, tested every one he could and messed up his future—almost to an irreparable point. Thankfully, he has been able to turn it around. Andy, whose early choices were short-circuited by an unhealthy fear: he did right only because he thought his dad would literally kill him if he did otherwise. Those stringencies pushed him to a life of utter rebellion as soon as he got out from under the forced demands to do right. Then there was Stuart, who

made his decisions based on his base desires and without any restraints or control, and he lost it all. So, how will you make your decisions?

Solomon would say, “Fear God, keep His commandments,” it’s the whole duty of man and it’s the beginning of knowledge. As we study Proverbs, there are some that are written rather pointedly to teens and young adults.

Why are these things said to younger people? The same reason that widows are warned not to be busybodies (1 Tim. 5:13) and that older men are instructed to be patient (Tit. 2:2)—it’s what they needed to hear. They are specific warnings, designed for the many in that group who are easily lured into that danger or sin. So, here in Proverbs, because the writer is wise (inspired no doubt), his warnings ought to really cause our ears to perk up!!! One of the first things said is, “Fools despise instruction...” Experience has taught me that the Proverbs are richer than you think and that this guy knows more than you believe he does. If you’ll stay with me, we will learn from the wisest and richest *man* that ever lived the secrets to living life to its fullest.

If you would live life to its fullest...

...LISTEN TO WISDOM (1:9).

Learn from it. This is the major theme of the book. If you listen and learn, all will be well; if not, you will be an embarrassment to all around you and eventually reap the consequences of not heeding the Word.

Why all this attention to listening to wisdom?

First, because of the great benefits of listening to wise counsel. In the NLT, the word “listen” occurs 26 times; “pay attention” occurs nine times; and the word “receive,” in the sense of listening, is found six times.

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Here is what the Proverb writer promises to those who listen: you show yourself to be wise and will become wiser (1:5); you will be crowned with grace and clothed with honor (1:9); you will have the spirit of wisdom poured out on you (1:23); you will live with peace and safety and without fear (1:33); you will gain knowledge of God (2:1-5); you will be protected, exalted and honored (4:1-8); you will live a long good life (4:10); you will have a fulfilled life (4:13); you will have radiant health (4:20-21); you will learn to be discrete and become a storehouse of knowledge (5:1-2); you will learn common sense (8:1-5); you will learn excellent things (8:6); you will gain insights more valuable than gold, silver or rubies (8:10-11); you will find happiness (8:32); you will learn to be calm even when insulted (12:16); you will grow in understanding and be at home among wise people (15:31-32); and you will prosper (16:20).

If you ignore, you will lose your honor (5:7-9); you will come to utter ruin and face public disgrace (5:13-14); you will be mocked in times of trouble (1:24); and you will eat the bitter fruit of living your own way (1:30).

The concept of seeking and then listening to wise counsel is a lofty one in the wise man's eyes: "And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel..." (1:5); "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (11:14); "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But he who heeds counsel is wise" (12:15); "Without counsel, plans go awry, But in the multitude of counselors they are established" (15:22); "Listen to counsel and receive instruction, That you may be wise in your latter days" (19:20); "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water, But a man of understanding will draw it out" (20:5); "Plans are established by counsel..." (20:18); "The heartfelt counsel of a friend is as sweet as

perfume and incense" (27:9, NLT). [All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] With all of those benefits, only a fool would not seek and then heed wise counsel!

A second reason that the writer urges us to listen so intently is because *it is sometimes simply difficult to listen*. Listening is hard work, especially when we are young. The Hebrews' writer spoke of the many things he had to say but refrained because his hearers were "dull of hearing" (5:11). I think that often describes us. Anybody who has sat through many sermons or classes knows that even with the most fascinating of subjects (and speakers) sometimes we grow weary in listening. We get tired. So a reminder from time to time of the value of listening is a good thing. Sometimes we don't listen because we are thinking of how we'll respond while the other person is talking. It's human nature to do that, but it's not very smart (Prov. 18:13). And sometimes we don't listen, because we won't listen. We think the person speaking is not wise (not everyone is) or we tune them out based solely on the fact that they are older and surely couldn't understand our world. We should hear Proverbs 23:22, "Listen to your father, who gave you life, and don't despise your mother's experience when she is old" (NLT). Experience has much to teach us. Why should we have to repeat the mistakes of the past? LISTEN.

If you would live life to its fullest...

**...LESSEN THE INFLUENCE OF
IMMORAL PEOPLE.**

The book of Proverbs is chock-full of some of the best advice for either finding a mate or building a strong marriage!

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While there are numerous warnings about how dangerous immoral people are (2:16; 6:24-32; 9:13-18; 11:22; 23:27; 27:13; 30:20), there seem to be three larger sections that explore this menace (chapters 5, 7, 22). I would encourage every young man to read these passages again and again. Read them from a number of translations for simplicity's sake. Read them when thinking about the person with whom you are involved. The writer cannot be clearer about the dangers of getting mixed up with the wrong kind of person. Married guys, when the going is rough at home, when the bills are overdue, the house is a mess, the kids are out of control, your physical relationship seems (at best) on hold and there's some sweet thing striving for your attention—print them out and give them to that “sweet thing”! Post them on your office door. Temptation will come to many of you and Satan will be more than happy to provide you attractive opportunity. RUN! It will not bring any lasting pleasure and Solomon didn't stutter—it will ruin you!

Solomon is the chief poet when he paints the pictures of the end of an immoral relationship. “But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, Her steps lay hold of hell” (5:4-5). “For by means of a harlot A man is reduced to a crust of bread; And an adulteress will prey upon his precious life. Can a man take fire to his bosom, And his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, And his feet not be seared? So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; Whoever touches her shall not be innocent” (6:26-29). “With her enticing speech she caused him to yield, With her flattering lips she seduced him. Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, Till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, He did not know it would cost

his life...Her house is the way to hell, Descending to the chambers of death" (7:21-23, 27). "She says to him, 'Stolen water is sweet, And bread eaten in secret is pleasant.' But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of hell" (9:16b-18). Frankly, I love the imagery of Proverbs 11:22, "A woman who is beautiful but lacks discretion is like a gold ring in a pig's snout." Wow!

Finally, in this section, notice a wonderful and needed warning: "Now therefore, listen to me, my children; Pay attention to the words of my mouth: Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, Do not stray into her paths; For she has cast down many wounded, And all who were slain by her were strong men. Her house is the way to hell, descending to the chambers of death" (Prov. 7:24-27). How many faced with temptation, how many who flirt with danger say, "I can handle it, I've got it under control" – angry at those who are trying to save them from sin and the impending disaster that follows. Solomon ponders aloud, how many men stronger than you have fallen to sin? I wonder if he might have been referring to his own failings. Here he was, a king with the hand of God upon him, yet he toyed with temptation and his sin contributed to the eventual division of a mighty kingdom. Or maybe Solomon was thinking of his own dad. That good man, David—sweet singer of Israel, inspired and inspiring pen, mighty man of valor, powerful enough to kill a lion with his own hands, wise enough to rule an impressive kingdom and quick enough to dodge a spear thrown in anger—this mighty man melted to temptation. Yes, how many strong men have you seen give in to immorality? How many elders have disgraced the kingdom, how many preachers have disheartened those they taught, how many leaders have destroyed their

influence? Don't dare say you can handle it! As Solomon is saying: It is fire, you will get burned!

If you would live life to its fullest...

**...LINK WITH THOSE OF
INFLUENTIAL GOOD (FRIENDS).**

Solomon would say, choose your friends carefully, they will determine to a large measure your success.

A word to parents here: I have seen it more times than I wanted to, and I can tell you simply, if your children's friends are worldly, your child will leave the Lord. Their attitudes and actions will be influenced. If you don't encourage your child, even force them, to be involved in the activities of the church, you will be lamenting it for the rest of your life. They may tell you there are hypocrites in the youth group—when did that become a newscast? They may tell you they need to study math before being a part of a Bible class or Bible Bowl session—don't give in to that excuse. They may try to tell you the youth group is "lame," but it's not as lame as the activities and lifestyles of those who don't love the Lord and are heading toward hell. If you as a parent allow your child to not be involved in the activities of the church, you will regret it! Your children will have friends; they will do something with their time—make both truly valuable.

There are a number of what come across as just good homespun sayings when it comes to friendship. "A perverse man sows strife, And a whisperer separates the best of friends" (16:28). "My son, if you become surety for your friend, If you have shaken hands in pledge for a stranger..." (6:1). "Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death, Is the man who deceives his neighbor, And says, 'I was only joking!'" (26:18-19; cf. 17:9; 27:6). But the strongest words concern choosing and being a friend.

He instructs us on choosing friends carefully. From these verses a couple of important lessons arise. Be careful where you choose your friends (7:6-7). You will ultimately become like the people you hang around (12:26; 22:24-25; 13:20). Finding a friend is as simple as going out of your way to be friendly to others (18:24), but keeping one requires a unique sacrificial love (17:17). Once you've found a good friend, one who will help you get to heaven, one who you enjoy, you will receive all sorts of benefits (27:17). As a Christian, choose your friends carefully; they will have a dramatic influence over your life both here and going into eternity.

If you would live life to its fullest...

**...LOVE YOUR PARENTS AND
TREAT THEM WITH RESPECT.**

You can tell a lot about a person by watching how they treat their parents. Solomon is echoed by Paul as he teaches proper respect due to them (17:25; 19:26; 20:20). Again, remember, though it comes across as corny to many of you, your parents have been where you are and really not that long ago. They won't be right 100% of the time, but the only time you have any right to not listen to them is when their instruction leads you away from the Lord. For most of you reading this, that's not an issue. Your parents have your interest at heart. They want to cheer you on. They want nothing more than for you to succeed in every way (15:20; 17:6; 23:15-16, 24-25). Try to understand the "why" of the rules they make and communicate respectfully with them (15:5; 28:7). That will have many rewards. Discipline is never really enjoyable, but the one who won't accept the parents' discipline is seen as a fool contributing to his own demise in Solomon's writing (15:10, 23:22-23). Assuming you are a Christian, Solomon

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would have a significant word for you, “Even a child is known by his deeds, Whether what he does is pure and right” (20:11). I remember well, and often, how Dad would delight when I was young in saying, “We only have one rule here...” At first it was exciting to hear; that was music to a young boy full of mischief. But then he would trail off, “...and that rule is, Do right!” In my teen years that seemed at times the albatross that kept me from many a fun adventure, but as I’ve grown older the truth is that rule kept me from ruining my life (cf. 30:17). “Even a child is known by his deeds...pure and right.”

Solomon has one more rule we’ll notice:

If you would live life to its fullest...

...LIMIT LAZINESS.

Because of time limitations we will not devote much to this one. But remember the lesson that Solomon learned first hand—hard-work does have some value. “The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; But the soul of the diligent shall be made rich” (13:4). “He who is slothful in his work Is a brother to him who is a great destroyer” (18:9). “Do not say, ‘I will do to him just as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work’” (24:29). Find something worthwhile to spend your time doing. Invest your life in something worthwhile, something that intrigues and interests you, something that gives back and that promotes your influence for God. And, don’t forget to “labor in the vineyard” of the Lord. It will outlive you and you can take it on with you! It seems this aspect of right living has been under taught. In dealing with issues like respect and more obviously moral issues that are tormenting our society, we might overlook how vital it is to not be lazy. We have a responsibility to work, to contribute. Christians cannot just “slough” their way

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through life and be acceptable to God (1 Thess. 4:11-12; 2 Thess. 2:10).

Dale Jenkins preaches for the Spring Meadows church of Christ in Spring Hill, Tennessee.