

Proverbs 16

God-Given Foresight

Pride comes before the fall (Proverbs 16:18). We've heard it said a million times. Yet we often only remember this when we get to the point of actually falling! In hindsight, our pride becomes painfully obvious. In the destruction and stumbling, we see that pride led us there.

Tragically, God's people can lead the march on that road to destruction. We see it in Scripture and we see it in the lives of Christians today. But that only happens when we operate by human wisdom instead of God's wisdom. *There is a way that seems right to us, but that way that seems right is wrong* (v. 25).

Throughout Proverbs we see that we must choose God's way instead of our own. Left unchecked, pride causes us to think we know everything, so that we depend on ourselves as we make choices in our relationships, our work, and our words. Pride shapes our worldview. It prompts us to not listen to wisdom or receive it, believing we know ourselves the way to avoid dangers-or that we can figure it out along the way. In our pride, we want to earn a pat on the back from God and people. We hold up our good works and church attendance as if we have checked all of the boxes God desires for us.

The Lord knows all of this about us. He knows we are inclined to lean on our own abilities, contributions, and talents. And He has given us His Word so that we don't have to get to the point of hindsight before we recognize the danger of pride and our inclination toward it. He gives us foresight! His call to humility and dependence on Him is a call to life. It's a call to save us from destruction.

¹ To humans belong the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the proper answer of the tongue. ² All a person's ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the Lord. ³ Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans. ⁴ The Lord works out everything to its proper end—even the wicked for a day of disaster.

God's sovereignty is a running theme through the book of Proverbs. We can make plans, but whether or not they happen is up to the Lord ([Pr 16:1, 9](#)). For this reason, we should make our plans in submission to Him ([Pr 16:3](#)), especially since He already knows all our thoughts and motives ([Pr 16:2](#)). Americans have our own

proverb for this: "Man proposes, but God disposes." Since God is the One who sets the standards, He rules over both ordinary citizens and kings (vv. 10-15). Even the wicked are somehow part of God's plan ([Pr 16:4](#)), as we see everywhere in Scripture, from Joseph ([Gen. 50:20](#)) to Jesus ([Acts 2:23-24](#)). This is why nothing that happens is random chance, even if it appears that way. God is always in control ([Pr 16:33](#)).

The preparations of the heart belong to man: God plans and prepares, and because man is made in the image of God ([Genesis 1:27](#)), it is in the nature of man to make preparations of the heart. But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD: When wisdom is given voice (the answer of the tongue), it is from the LORD - beyond the preparations of man's heart.

All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes: By instinct, men and women justify themselves and see their own ways as pure. Some of the most criminal and violent people have thought themselves pure in their own eyes. Self-righteousness is not the peculiar sin of those who are virtuous. We deceive ourselves so easily and therefore cannot fully evaluate ourselves. God, by his Spirit and through his Word, provides the penetrating evaluation.

Commit your works to the LORD: Every man and woman should commit their works to the LORD. They should depend on God in their works and they should do those works as unto the LORD ([Colossians 3:23](#)).

Your thoughts will be established: Usually, we think of committing our thoughts or plans to the Lord, then committing our works to Him. Here Solomon reversed that order, and told us to first commit our works, then trust that our thoughts and plans will be established.

⁵ The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.

Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: God resists the proud ([James 4:6](#) and [1 Peter 5:5](#)) and regards them as an abomination. The proud man or woman imitates Satan in his proud rebellion against God ([Isaiah 14:12-15](#) *How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! ¹³ You said in your heart, "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount*

of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. ¹⁴ I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.” ¹⁵ But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit.

Though they join forces, none will go unpunished: One proud man or woman cannot succeed against God, but neither can many proud men or women. Even if they join forces against God as they did at Babel ([Genesis 11:1-9](#)), they will not go unpunished, even as at Babel.

⁶ Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the Lord evil is avoided.⁷ When the Lord takes pleasure in anyone's way, he causes their enemies to make peace with them. ⁸ Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice. ⁹ In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.

In mercy and truth atonement is provided: God in His mercy and truth has provided atonement for iniquity. God's mercy prompted the great sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, and His truth made it necessary to make atonement in a way that honored the righteousness of God. Mercy engages; truth fulfills. The ransom is provided by mercy and accepted by truth. Both sat together in the eternal council. In Jesus, both entered into the world together.

By the fear of the LORD one departs from evil: The great principle of the fear of the LORD is not only the beginning of wisdom ([Proverbs 1:7](#), [9:10](#)), it is also the foundation of a God-honoring life. To live in the fear of the LORD is to depart from evil.

When a man's ways please the LORD: It is possible for a man or woman to live a life that pleases God. This isn't the idea that we can be perfectly pleasing to God before our salvation is completed in resurrection and glorification. Instead, the idea is that in general, a man or woman can honor and please the LORD with their life. He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him: One of God's blessings on the man or woman who pleases Him is to give them peace with others, even extending to their enemies.

A man's heart plans his way: This is not a bad thing. We, as the God in whose image we are made, think about and plan our way. But the LORD directs his steps: We plan as we can and should, but we should never think that our ability to plan makes us lord over

our lives. It is the LORD who directs our steps. Every plan we make should be held in humility before God and in surrender to His ultimate will.

¹⁰ The lips of a king speak as an oracle, and his mouth does not betray justice.¹¹ Honest scales and balances belong to the Lord; all the weights in the bag are of his making.¹² Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness.¹³ Kings take pleasure in honest lips; they value the one who speaks what is right.¹⁴ A king's wrath is a messenger of death, but the wise will appease it.¹⁵ When a king's face brightens, it means life; his favor is like a rain cloud in spring. Wise guidance, the wisdom that should be on the lips of the king. In [Isaiah 3:2](#). A great understanding and piercing judgment to discern difficult cases. The same lips that must speak wisdom and discernment should not also be used to go beyond God's wisely appointed boundaries of judgment. James says *blessings and curses out of the same mouth should not be so.* [James 3:10](#) The Old Testament lends no support to the idea that the king can do no wrong; rather, he is a man under authority: [Deuteronomy 17:18-20](#).

Honest weights and scales are the LORD's: Fair business and measures are so pleasing to God that it can be said that honest measures belong to Him. All of God's measurements and assessments are fair and true. The proper measure does not come from the king, nor does it belong to the king. The right measure comes from God and belongs to Him.

It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness: Solomon admitted that it was possible for kings to commit wickedness. Some think that because someone is a king or leader all they do is justified. Sadly, Solomon became a king who committed wickedness ([1 Kings 11:1-10](#)). A throne is established by righteousness: The righteous life of a king invites God's blessing upon his life and reign. Because of this great potential and influence, it is an even greater sin for kings to commit wickedness.

Righteous lips are the delight of kings: In their positions of authority, it is important for kings to hear from those who speak honestly and wisely. Therefore, they find delight in righteous lips. It is always important for kings and leaders to hear the truth from others and not mere flattery.

As messengers of death is the king's wrath: When a king or man of authority is angry, his reaction can bring death or a death-like fear to others. This is true of earthly kings; it is much truer of the King of Kings. To be the target of His wrath is to receive messengers of death. Solomon's kingdom is said to be established only after he rid his realm of the wrongdoers ([1 Kings 2:22-46](#)).

But a wise man will appease it: Wisdom can help us have the right reaction even in the difficult moments when a king or person of authority is angry and shows their wrath.

In the light of the king's face is life: The approval and favor of an earthly king could mean success or failure for anyone in his kingdom. To have his shining countenance give approval meant you were safe in the king's favor and had life.

His favor is like a cloud of the latter rain: The welcome and approval of a king is like life-giving rain, especially the latter rain which ensured a good harvest. This proverb is especially true regarding the King of Kings. The favor of His countenance is a blessing to receive ([Numbers 6:25](#)) and it gives light and life.

¹⁶ How much better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver!¹⁷ The highway of the upright avoids evil; those who guard their ways preserve their lives.

How much better to get wisdom than gold: The riches of this world have their uses, but it is better to have wisdom than gold. Wisdom is much more helpful and useful in this life, and it is far more profitable for the life to come.

To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver: One should make the main pursuit of one's life to gain wisdom and understanding in the fear of the Lord. This has value far more than gold or silver, but it also often leads to material prosperity as it did for Solomon ([1 Kings 3:5-15](#)). Wisdom and wealth are not incompatible; but this comparison is between wealth without wisdom and wisdom without wealth.

The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: The upright man or woman knows that the path of their life - their highway - should move away from evil, not towards it or with it. He who keeps his way preserves his soul: The one who walks well upon the

right way will find his life preserved. He will stay away from the evil way that may cost him his life, his soul.

¹⁸ Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.¹⁹ Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.²⁰ Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord.

Pride goes before destruction: God is opposed to the proud ([James 4:6](#) and [1 Peter 5:5](#)) and the proud man or woman is an abomination to God ([Proverbs 16:5](#)). With God so set against the proud, no wonder pride goes before destruction. The special evil of pride is that it opposes the first principle of wisdom (the fear of the Lord) and the two great commandments.

Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly: Because pride is an abomination to God ([Proverbs 16:5](#)) and leads to destruction ([Proverbs 16:18](#)), it isn't so bad to live among the lowly and to have a humble spirit. Than to divide the spoil with the proud: A humble life among the lowly is better than having reward (spoil) among the proud. This is because proud people are not pleasant company, and because it is never good to join those whom God is set against.

A humble man is worth his weight in gold: He who heeds the word wisely will find good: Obedience to God - to heed His word and to do it wisely- will always bring good. This thought also suggests that there are unwise or foolish ways to heed the word, perhaps as the religious leaders in Jesus' day could strain out a gnat and swallow a camel ([Matthew 23:24](#)).

Whoever trusts in the LORD, happy is he: The good that the obedient will find also comes because they have a true and confident trust in God. They can happily and calmly rest in the good God who loves and cares for them.

²¹ The wise in heart are called discerning, and gracious words promote instruction.

The wise in heart will be called prudent: Those who are wise in heart will demonstrate it in their life. Others will see it and call them prudent or wise. This is another reminder that true wisdom is demonstrated in life; it isn't only having good or true thoughts in one's mind.

The sweetness of the lips increases learning: The phrase sweetness of the lips doesn't have to do with good tasting food or pleasant kisses. Like many proverbs, it refers to wise and well-spoken words, perhaps with a touch of eloquence. Such speaking increases learning, both in the speaker and those who hear him or her.

²² Prudence is a fountain of life to the prudent, but folly brings punishment to fools.²³ The hearts of the wise make their mouths prudent, and their lips promote instruction. ²⁴ Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Understanding is a fountain of life to him who has it: Wisdom (understanding) brings life to the wise man or woman. It is like a continually flowing well of life. It is a gift. The correction of fools is folly: Wisdom brings life, but it is usually foolish to try to correct a fool. As soon as a fool decides to receive correction, they are on the path to not being a fool and turning away from folly.

The heart of the wise teaches his mouth: Our wisdom is shown by what we speak, and by the control we have over the words that come from our mouths. Godliness and wisdom are evident when they teach the mouth what to say and not say. And adds learning to his lips: Wisdom is shown by a heart and mind that are continually learning. When learning is added to the lips (the words one says), then a person truly has wisdom and is growing in it.

Pleasant words are like a honeycomb: There is wonderful power in our words to bring blessing and pleasantness to others.

²⁵ There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.

There is a way that seems right to a man: Some people walk a path of life that they know is wrong, and many proverbs speak to that person. Others walk a path of life that seems right to them, and they are mistaken. It isn't enough to feel good about our path or to follow our heart on life's way. [Proverbs 3:5-6](#)

But its end is the way of death: Taking the wrong way - even if it seems right to a man - isn't an innocent mistake. This is because the wrong path ends in death.

²⁶ The appetite of laborers works for them; their hunger drives them on.²⁷ A scoundrel plots evil, and on their lips it is like a

scorching fire.²⁸ A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends.

The person who labors, labors for himself: The Bible recognizes the principle of personal property ([Exodus 20:15](#)) and that the reward of work properly belongs to the worker. This argues against schemes of forced labor, either on a small or national scale. It also argues against excessive taxation, because it does not say the person who labors, labors for his government. For his hungry mouth drives him on: When people are rewarded with the benefit of their own work, they know that their work can fill their hungry mouths. When it isn't necessary to work in order to fill a hungry mouth, much less work will be done.

That is to say that hunger will make a man work when nothing else will. This is in harmony with the apostolic principle, 'If a man will not work, neither let him eat.'

An ungodly man digs up evil: For the ungodly man, the evil he casually finds isn't enough to satisfy his desire. He digs up evil, finding the effort to pursue evil. He works to bring about an evil purpose.

It is on his lips like a burning fire: When an ungodly man digs up evil, he can't keep it to himself. He has to spread it to others.

A perverse man sows strife: Twisted, perverse people love to sow strife the way a farmer sows seeds. When there is much strife, there is some perverse person in the mix. [Judges 15:5](#).

²⁹ A violent person entices their neighbor and leads them down a path that is not good.³⁰ Whoever winks with their eye is plotting perversity; whoever purses their lips is bent on evil.

A violent man entices his neighbor: The violent man may do this by encouraging partnership in his violent works, or by inviting a violent response from his neighbor. Violence often leads to a way that is not good. Sometimes the threat or presence of strength is necessary to prevent violence, but often violence leads to a way that is not good.

He winks his eye to devise perverse things: This is likely connected to the previous verse. The *violent man* of [Proverbs 16:29](#) may entice his neighbor as he winks his eye, treating it as a light and clever thing to devise perverse things.

The winking eye and pursed lips of [Proverbs 16:30](#) may be taken either as signals among conspirators or as a general statement of

shiftiness in the facial mannerisms of scheming people. He purses his lips and brings about evil: With expressions of contempt, the violent man brings about evil. He does not seriously consider the bad effects of his actions.

³¹ Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained in the way of righteousness.

The silver-haired head is a crown of glory: Ancient cultures were sensible enough to honor and value the wisdom and experience of old age. They saw the white hair of the elderly as a crown of glory. [Psalms 90:10](#)

If it is found in the way of righteousness: This is a helpful and necessary follow-up statement to the first line of this proverb. It isn't age itself that brings a crown of glory to a person, but age in the way of righteousness. The sad truth is that age itself does not make all people better and certainly not godlier.

³² Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city. ³³ The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty: There is someone better than the mighty man who can defeat many others on the field of combat. It is the man (or woman) who has control over his own anger, who can (when it is wise and necessary) be slow to anger. There have been many kings who had conquered nations, and could not control their own passions.

And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city: Under God's wisdom and strength, to rule one's own spirit is a greater accomplishment than to conquer a city. Some who can conquer cities should first be concerned with conquering self.

The lot is cast into the lap: This was something similar to the rolling of dice. To cast the lot was to use some tool of chance to make a choice. The lot was used to divide the land of Israel among the tribes ([Numbers 26:55](#), [Joshua 14:2](#)) and to arrange the workers for the temple ([1 Chronicles 24:5](#)). The disciples used lots to fill the vacancy left by Judas ([Acts 1:26](#)). Its every decision is from the LORD: The idea is not that every single event in life is a message from God, nor is it that we should use games of chance to determine God's will. To cast the lot was a way to commit the decision to God, and when we commit our decisions to Him, God guides us ([Proverbs 3:5-6](#)).