

Proverbs 20 – One Job

"You had one job" yields millions of results on an internet search. It's a common response to someone's failure to correctly do the simple task they set out to do. For example, the words "Turn Left" painted in large block letters in a right turn only lane.

We know we need to pass on wisdom to those who come behind us. At the same time, we often feel inept and unable to do that. We worry that the epitaph of our lives might speak more of failure than wisdom. Parents and grandparents know their roles have the power to illuminate feelings of ineptitude and inability more than anything else in life. Our failures can impact generations to come.

As Proverbs 20:7 assures us, so can walking in wisdom. The fact is, we will fail, and so will our children. So the happiness, or blessedness as other translations express it, does not come from raising "good kids" who make good decisions and stay out of trouble. It's about raising kids who know and follow the Lord, wanting His wisdom to shine light on their lives, even the parts no one else can see (v. 27).

To do that, we must show the priority of relationship over rules. We must walk with the Lord in integrity, even when we mess up. To that end, we must trust God and join Him in opening the next generation's ears and eyes to wisdom (v. 11-12).

To pass on a legacy of wisdom for generations to come, you don't have to do everything right. The reality is that there is only one job you have that ultimately matters, and that is to daily follow Jesus with your whole heart. When Christ is at the center, everything else will work itself out.

¹ Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise.

² A king's wrath strikes terror like the roar of a lion; those who anger him forfeit their lives. ³ It is to one's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.

⁴ Sluggards do not plow in season; so at harvest time they look but find nothing.

Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise. Wine is a mocker, it makes a fool of the person. It promises satisfaction which it can never give. It is like the snake that promises pleasure but when the person picks him up and puts him in his pocket it bites him. Upon reflection, it causes a guilty conscience. The wine impacts the level of judgment and decision-making. Drunkenness, which pretends to be a sociable thing, ultimately makes men unfit for society. It makes them abusive with their language and outrageous in their behavior. The person has no sense of what is right. He is incapable of getting wisdom. A drunkard is a fool.

The wrath of a king is like the roaring of a lion. It is terrifying when kings are angry. It makes the people tremble so that they cannot escape from him. Those princes that rule by wisdom and love rule like God himself, and bear his image; but those that rule merely by terror, and with a high hand, rule like a lion in the forest, with a brutal power. Whoever provokes him to anger sins against his own life: It is unwise for those that quarrel with him, that are angry with him, and provokes him. They sin against their own lives. You also sin against your life when you provoke the King of kings to anger.

It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling. Men think it is wise to get into quarrels. He thinks himself a wise man that is quick in taking offence and that it is honorable and right. But he who meddles is a fool, and creates a great deal of needless annoyance to himself. Men think, when they are engaged in quarrels, that it would be a shame for them to retreat. But it really is an honor for a man to end strife, it is an honor to withdraw from action, to drop a controversy, to forgive an insult, and to be friends with those that we have fallen out with. It is the honor of a man, a wise man, a man of spirit, to show the self-control he has by yielding, and backing down even when he is right for peace-sake. [Genesis 13:5-9](#)

The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing. Slothfulness keeps men from taking care of business such as ploughing and sowing in season. The sluggard has ground to cover and the skills to do it. He can plough but will not. He always has some excuse or some reason to put it off until another time. But the real reason he does so is because of the cold weather. Though ploughing time is not in the heart of winter, the sluggard thinks it is too cold for him. Those that will not plough in seed-time cannot expect to reap in harvest; and therefore they must beg for their bread.

⁵ The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out. ⁶ Many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find? ⁷ The righteous lead blameless lives; blessed are their children after them.

Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water: Wisdom may lie deep within a man or woman, and not be immediately apparent. It may be a hidden reservoir, ready in the season of need. The metaphor is of a well whose waters are far beneath the surface of the ground so that one must use a bucket with a long rope to draw water to the surface. The person's real motives are 'deep' in that they are difficult to extract. The wise man - the man of understanding - knows how to draw wisdom out for practical and ready use. By prudent questions and a diligent observation of his words and actions. Those who are wise can discern the motives of the heart.

Most men will proclaim his own goodness but a faithful person who can find? It is easy to find those that will pretend to be kind. Many a man will call himself a man of mercy, will boast about good he has done and what good things he has planned. It is true that most everyone feels they are good in their own eyes. Many are happy to proclaim it, wanting others to know all their supposed goodness. True faithfulness in a man is different than self-advertised goodness. A faithful man doesn't want or need to proclaim his own goodness. The quiet satisfaction of faithfulness to God and man is enough. Look at yourself in the mirror of God's Word. Does your neighbor or your friend find that you are a faithful friend? Do you often speak what you know will be accepted rather than what is true?

The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him: A man of integrity does well for himself. He governs himself with an even steady hand. He walks in his integrity. The "conscience" is the psychological faculty or internal capability that allows a person to distinguish between right and wrong. It is the inner judge written on the believer's heart (see [Jeremiah 31:33](#)) that accuses and convicts when we do wrong and approves when we do right (see [Romans 2:14-15](#)). The greatest gift a parent can give to a child is for that parent to be a righteous, upright person who walks in his integrity. That one will create a home and atmosphere that will be a blessing to the child. His children are blessed after him, and fare better for his sake.

⁸ When a king sits on his throne to judge, he winnows out all evil with his eyes.

⁹ Who can say, "I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin"? ¹⁰ Differing weights and differing measures—the Lord detests them both.

A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes. The character of a good governor is one who sits in the throne, not as a place of honor, or because it is easy but as a throne of judgment, so that he may do justice, make amends to the injured and punish the wrong. In the ancient world kings did not only govern, they were also the highest court and judge in their kingdom. A faithful king would carry out this responsibility and sit on his throne of judgment. It was his role to execute judgment and justice among his people. Righteousness at the top was necessary to undergird the whole judicial system. The presence alone of a king in judgment over his realm is enough to scatter all evil.

Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin? This question is not only a challenge to any man in the world to prove himself sinless, whatever he pretends, sin remains in the best of us. No person whatsoever can pretend to be without sin. Adam could say so in innocence, and saints can say so in heaven, but none in this life. Those that think themselves as good and those that are really good

cannot and will not, they are without sin. We cannot say, we have made our hearts clean.

Divers, weights, and divers measures: The various arts of deceiving that men use is because of the love of money. It is the root of all evil. God wants business and trading to be done fairly and justly. To have diverse weights and measures means that you will cheat both the buyer and the seller. God wants our weights and measures to be proper and consistent. They are both alike, an abomination to the LORD: God feels so strongly about deceptive business practices that He used the strong word abomination to describe them. God Himself has fair weights and measures; He expects humanity made in His image to have them also.

¹¹ Even small children are known by their actions, so is their conduct really pure and upright?¹² Ears that hear and eyes that see—the Lord has made them both. ¹³ Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare.

Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right. The tree is known by its fruits, a man by his doings, even a young tree by its first fruits, whether it be right, that is, really good. Especially in the realm of religion and faith, it is easy for us to think of ourselves only by what we believe, instead of also by what we do. We are more than what we do, but even a child is known by his deeds. We shouldn't deny that others see and understand us by the measure of our deeds. We may easily learn from the child what the man will be. The outside world, our own community, and God in heaven look at our deeds to see if they are pure and right.

The hearing ear and the seeing eye: God has given men and women remarkable capacity to see and understand the world around them. Our ability to hear and see should be for us gateways to wisdom. Listening and observing are important qualities of a good disciple and the sage regularly calls upon him to use them to read and hear his teaching. The LORD has made them both: Since our hearing and our sight are gifts from God, we should determine to use them for His honor and glory. It also reminds us that we can hear and see because we are made in God's image; the LORD has a hearing ear and a seeing eye. Since God made the eyes and ears, he is the infallible judge. No one can deceive him with appearances.

Do not love sleep, lest you come to poverty: To love sleep and the laziness connected to it is to bring one's self to poverty. Take sleep because it is necessary, not because you love it. The number of hours one sleeps per day is not the point here. Love of sleep refers to laziness, but one can be lazy although sleeping very little. Open your eyes, and you will be satisfied with bread: It takes some initiative and energy to open your eyes, to get out of bed and get to work. But the reward is worth it; you will avoid poverty and you will be satisfied with bread. In God's economic system, hard work is rewarded.

14 "It's no good, it's no good!" says the buyer—then goes off and boasts about the purchase. 15 Gold there is, and rubies in abundance, but lips that speak knowledge are a rare jewel. 16 Take the garment of one who puts up security for a stranger; hold it in pledge if it is done for an outsider. 17 Food gained by fraud tastes sweet, but one ends up with a mouth full of gravel.

It is good for nothing: This is what the buyer cries out. In the game and competition of bargaining, the buyer always wants to speak less of what he wants to buy, hoping to get a better price from the seller. This may simply reflect normal procedure in a world where haggling for prices was common, but it may also be a warning to the inexperienced on how things are done. When he has gone his way, then he boasts: The bargaining words of the buyer are empty. They are only a strategy for negotiation. This proverb reminds us that what people say isn't always what they believe, and people will speak falsehood for their own advantage.

There is gold, and a multitude of rubies: but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel. The lips of knowledge (a good understanding to guide the lips and a good delivery to spread the knowledge) are to be preferred far before gold, and pearl, and rubies; for, they are more rare in themselves, more scarce and hard to get. There is gold in many a man's pocket that has no grace in his heart. There is gold and a multitude of rubies: But the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel: Now Solomon presented another treasure, the precious jewel of wise words (lips of knowledge). We immediately see the value of the pile of gold and rubies, but we need to better appreciate the value of wise words.

Take the garment of one who is surety for a stranger: [Exodus 22:26-27](#) says an Israelite could take someone's outer garment as a deposit or a guarantee for a loan as long as they returned it each evening, so it could be used as a night covering or blanket. Solomon's advice here is that if you loan to someone who has already foolishly agreed to be surety for a stranger, make sure you get the deposit or guarantee. If they were foolish enough to be surety for a stranger, they should be regarded as a credit risk. Two synonymous lines teach that a person who foolishly becomes responsible for another person's debts should be made to keep his word.

Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man: Sin and transgression have their attraction. There is something in the nature of rebellion that can make bread gained by deceit even sweeter. It satisfied our desire to rebel, our desire for adventure, and our love of forbidden thrills. We might imagine that the forbidden fruit of Eden was delicious. Afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel: The sweetness of forbidden bread (or fruit) is short-lived. There is nothing sweet or pleasant about a mouth filled with gravel. If we really desire pleasure in a lasting, ultimate sense, then obedience is the pathway to it ([Psalm 16:11](#)).

¹⁸ Plans are established by seeking advice; so if you wage war, obtain guidance.

¹⁹ A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid anyone who talks too much. ²⁰ If someone curses their father or mother, their lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness. ²¹ An inheritance claimed too soon will not be blessed at the end.

Plans are established by counsel: There is help and wisdom in realizing our own limitations and seeking counsel. This often leads to our plans being established in the sense of coming to fulfillment. By wise counsel wage war: This shows that wise counsel is even more important when great matters are involved – life and death matters. By spiritual analogy, we wage the spiritual warfare we must fight as believers with the wise counsel of God’s word and other believers ([Ephesians 6:10-18](#)). This is necessary in every common undertaking, and much more in a thing of such high importance as war is. Most of the wars that are undertaken are wars of injustice, ambition, aggrandizement, and impulse, which can have had no previous good counsel.

He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets: The man or woman who is a talebearer or gossip loves to reveal things that should more properly be concealed. There are certainly some things that should be revealed ([Ephesians 5:11](#)), but many things should be concealed out of love ([1 Peter 4:8](#)). Wisdom will know which approach is appropriate in each situation. Therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips: The person who flatters with his lips will often speak against you as quickly as they speak for you. It is better to stay clear of such people (do not associate).

Whoever curses his father or his mother: The Bible commands us to honor our father and mother ([Exodus 20:12](#)). To curse one’s parents is to do the opposite of this command. His lamp will be put out in deep darkness: God promised to bless those who keep the command to honor father and mother ([Exodus 20:12](#), [Ephesians 6:2](#)). There is a corresponding principle that those who disobey and curse their father or mother will face the judgment of God.

An inheritance gained hastily at the beginning: When we get too much too soon, it often isn’t helpful for us. So, a large inheritance that comes hastily and towards the beginning of our life is a dangerous blessing. All such inheritances are short-lived; God’s blessing is not in them, because they are not the produce of industry; and they lead to idleness, pride, fraud, and dishonesty. The implication is that what is ‘quickly gained’ is either unlawful or unrighteous. The verb describes a hurried or hastened activity; perhaps a wayward son seizes the inheritance quickly (cf. [Luke 15:12](#)) or even drives out his parents (cf. [Proverbs 19:26](#)). Will not be blessed at the end: This is often how it ends when someone gains too much, too soon, apart from their own work and initiative. When large amounts are freely received, it can work against blessing at the end.

22 Do not say, "I'll pay you back for this wrong!" Wait for the Lord, and he will avenge you. 23 The Lord detests differing weights, and dishonest scales do not please him. 24 A person's steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand their own way?

I will recompense evil: This is what the wise man or woman should not say. Wisdom and obedience to God teach us that vengeance belongs to the LORD ([Romans 12:19](#)). Vengeance belongs to God. Nobody else is fit to wield this. God is omniscient; our knowledge is at most partial. God's judgment is perfect, while we are blinded by our prejudices and evil desires. Wait for the LORD, and He will save you: Wisdom teaches us to rely on God and trust in Him to recompense evil. This does not mean that wisdom is indifferent to evil and will never oppose it; it means that wisdom recognizes that there are many times – more than we think – when we should let go of any kind of recompense towards evil and wait for the LORD to save us.

Diverse weights are an abomination to the LORD: God is righteous in all His measurements. When He measures something in the physical or moral realm, His measurement is always true. God tells us to imitate Him in this aspect and to understand that He regards dishonest, diverse weights as an abomination. Dishonest scales are not good: God cares that we do business honestly. The world often tells us that it doesn't matter how we make our money, but God warns us that dishonest scales are not good.

A man's steps are of the LORD: Men and women rightly make their plans, but God guides steps according to His own will and wisdom. He certainly doesn't leave it all up to the choices and plans of men and women. How then can a man understand his own way? This proverb teaches us humility in regard to our life choices and path. We should not think or act as if it were all in our control or all according to our planned steps.

25 It is a trap to dedicate something rashly and only later to consider one's vows.

26 A wise king winnows out the wicked; he drives the threshing wheel over them.

27 The human spirit is the lamp of the Lord that sheds light on one's inmost being.

It is a snare for a man to devote rashly something as holy: This has in mind the practice of dedicating things to God for His use alone. When it comes to promises of dedication to God, we should avoid the snare of emotional, rash promises. To pronounce a thing sacred is to dedicate it. Here, then, is an impulsive man, pledging more than he seriously intends. Solomon also dealt with this matter in [Ecclesiastes 5:4-7](#). These passages show us that a commonly overlooked and unappreciated sin among God's people is the sin of broken vows – promising things to God and failing to live up to the vow. And afterward

to reconsider his vows: When a promise to God is made foolishly, it forces us to reconsider our vows – something wisdom would have protected us from to begin with.

A wise king sifts out the wicked: An earthly ruler understands how important it is to administer justice, and part of that is to carefully examine (sifts out) the wicked. If it is wise for an earthly ruler to do this, we can expect that God also does it, and does it perfectly. And brings the threshing wheel over them: A wise earthly ruler not only knows how to carefully examine the wicked, but then also to bring whatever punishment is appropriate, to use what is wise and necessary to separate the evil from the good (as a threshing wheel separates the chaff from the wheat grain).

The spirit of a man is the lamp of the LORD: There are mysteries and truths of the inner man (the spirit of a man) that only the lamp of the LORD can expose. In this respect, we can think of God's word as a lamp and a light ([Psalm 119:105](#)). The inner spiritual part of human life that was inbreathed at the Creation ([Genesis 2:7](#)) and that constitutes humans as spiritual beings with moral, intellectual, and spiritual capacities. Within the mystery of the spirit-nature of every man there is light. It is the instrument of God. It illuminates life. It is that by which man is constantly kept face to face with truth. Let us make no mistake about it: the most evil men know that their works are evil. Searching all the inner depths of his heart: The lamp of the LORD – God's word – can search the depths of a man's heart like nothing else. This is because God's word is living and active ([Hebrews 4:12](#)). God has given to every man a mind, which he so enlightens by his own Spirit, that the man knows how to distinguish good from evil; and conscience, which springs from this, searches the inmost recesses of the soul.

²⁸ Love and faithfulness keep a king safe; through love his throne is made secure. ²⁹ The glory of young men is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old. ³⁰ Blows and wounds scrub away evil, and beatings purge the inmost being.

Mercy and truth preserve the king: Any earthly king may be preserved by God's mercy and truth shown to the king, and by the mercy and truth the king shows to others. By lovingkindness he upholds his throne: The great covenant love God shows to His people and they should show to others. Men often assume that thrones are upheld by armies and raw power, but God has a better way to establish and uphold a king and his kingdom.

The glory of young men is their strength: God has so designed human development that young men excel in physical strength, and this is a glory to them. It is wise and suitable for young men to take on tasks that fit this glory. The splendor of old men is their gray head: What the old men lack in physical strength, they should make up for in wisdom that is appropriate for those who have a gray head.

Each age has its appointed excellence, to be respected and enjoyed in its time. Each takes the precedence in some things and gives way in others. Let them not, therefore,

envy or despise each other's prerogatives. The world, the state, and the church needs them both, the strength of youth for energy and the maturity of the old for wisdom.

Blows that hurt cleanse away evil: Pain is a burden, but it can bring a benefit. If we allow the unpleasant fire of pain to refine and cleanse away evil, then our sorrow and pain were not wasted. Something was gained. As do stripes the inner depths of the heart: Solomon probably used stripes here in a symbolic sense for the chastening that comes in life. If we receive such discipline with wisdom, it will purify us in the inner depths of the heart.