

Proverbs 22 – Equipping the Next Generation

What is something someone taught you when you were young that you still remember? Maybe it was something simple like scrambling eggs or doing laundry. or a bigger task like driving a car or doing your taxes. It is often the "small stuff" that sticks with us the longest. The younger we learn, the more ingrained these things become as we get older. The same is true in relationship with the Lord.

The younger people are when they start learning God's wisdom, the more ready they are to walk in truth for a lifetime. And it is up to all of us to impart that wisdom to them.

Proverbs 22:6 indicates this is precisely why Proverbs was written. Solomon and others understood the responsibility of equipping future generations with the truth and knowledge of everlasting wisdom for everyday life. They wanted those who came after them to be filled with confidence in the Lord (w. 17-21).

Introducing someone to God, teaching them the truths of the gospel, and helping them be obedient to the work of the Spirit are high and holy responsibilities. And that wisdom goes beyond our words. The next generation is observant! They will watch to see how we live out God's wisdom in daily life. What we say should match what we do.

At the same time, Proverbs 22:6 isn't an assurance that if we invest in raising up the next generation in God's wisdom, they won't ever veer off course. Every person who is taught God's wisdom may not choose to follow that wisdom. Our job is to steward God's wisdom well to the next generation, and trust Him to do the work that only He can do in their hearts.

¹ A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold. ² Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all. ³ The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches: Wealth comes in many forms. The wealth of respect and recognized excellence in character. This good name comes from a good conscience, this honor from virtue.

Loving favor rather than silver and gold: The man or woman who appreciates the value of a good name, of favor with God and man, recognizes that it is worth more than silver and gold. Riches are enjoyed but till death; but a good name outlives the man, and is left behind him for a blessing. Our Lord carries this teaching a step further in Luke 10:20, to show that at a still higher level, not the power we wield, but the love in which we are held, is our proper joy.

The rich and the poor have this in common: The differences between rich and poor appear to be large in the present world. Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:20-31) highlights these differences. Yet rich and poor do have some things in common.

The LORD is maker of them all: Those who are rich and those who are poor share the same Creator. Yahweh has made them all. Both rich and poor tend to see each other through stereotypes and should remember this towards each other.

People often forget this and make value judgments; they would do well to treat all people with respect, for God can as easily reduce the rich as raise the poor. All are born into the world. All come into the world naked, helpless, unconscious beings. All stand before God. All are dependent on God for their birth. All are subject to the same sorrows, illnesses, and temptations. At the gate of the invisible world the distinction of riches and poverty is dropped.

A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself: Wisdom does not always engage in a fight; it knows there are times when the best response to evil is to hide and let the danger go past. Prevision is the best means of prevention. **The simple pass on and are punished:** The foolish and simple man doesn't have the ability to perceive danger and respond correctly. They must endure more evil because of this, and it is something of a punishment.

4 Humility is the fear of the Lord; its wages are riches and honor and life. 5 In the paths of the wicked are snares and pitfalls, but those who would preserve their life stay far from them. 6 Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it. 7 The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender. 8 Whoever sows injustice reaps calamity, and the rod they wield in fury will be broken. 9 The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor.

By humility and fear of the LORD: These two qualities are connected. Humility is a proper view of self; fear of the LORD is a proper view of God. The person who has these two qualities is well on their way on the path to wisdom. **Are riches and honor and life:** Blessing will come to the wise man or woman who has humility and the fear of the LORD. They can certainly expect spiritual riches and honor and life, and often those same things materially in this world. The most humble is the most triumphant Christian. He may be depressed, but he is highly exalted. He has the wealth of grace and of glory. Nobody can deprive him of these.

Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse: Proverbs 13:15 told us that the way of the unfaithful is hard. Thorns and snares symbolically describe the hard way of the perverse. The metaphor refers to temptations such as easy sex and easy money that tempt youth. The morally degenerate tread a dangerous road filled with them. If you want fewer temptations, change the road you're on. It would have been unkind to place us in the world without the warning signal of pain to show us where we are wrong, and to poke us when we go astray. **He who guards his soul will be far from them:** The wise man or woman, keeping watch over their life (guards his soul) will stay far from the way of the perverse and the thorns and snares associated with that way. Those who have the discipline of wisdom avoid life's dangers.

Train up a child in the way he should go: A child needs training. The job of the parent is not to simply let him grow up in any particular way, but to train him, and that in the way he should go. The "way he should go" has at least two senses that complement each other. The way he should go speaks of the child's individual way and inclination. It speaks of discerning a child's strengths and weaknesses and parenting in a way that takes those into account. Here it means dedicate the child according to the physical and mental abilities of the developing youth. "The training prescribed is literally 'according to his (the child's) way', implying, it seems, respect for his individuality and vocation, though not for his self-will.

When he is old he will not depart from it: This is a wonderful principle that the Holy Spirit may quicken to a promise for parents troubled over their adult children. When a child is trained in the proper way, though they may depart for a season (and a long season), in principle they will return and not depart from it.

The rich rules over the poor: Proverbs 22:2 told us that there was one important respect in which rich and poor were the same; this proverb reminds us of a way they are very different. Rich people have more authority and voice in the community than the poor do. The point...is that one must regard indebtedness only as a last resort (wary of those who offer to lend money) and endeavor to get out of debt as rapidly as possible. Debt is debilitating and demoralizing. Too often the rich rule over the poor in a harsh way. Indeed, without submitting to God's rule over us, we can hardly be trusted with power over our fellowmen. **And the borrower is servant to the lender:** Those who borrow money are in a lower place than those who lend money. The obvious application of this proverb is that the wise man or woman will do all he or she can to walk in the path of godly prosperity; to be a lender and not a borrower.

The verse may be referring to the apparently common practice of Israelites selling themselves into slavery to pay off debts (see Exodus 21:2-7). It is not appreciably different from the modern debtor who is working to pay off bills.

He who sows iniquity will reap sorrow: A person's sins (iniquity) are like seeds that are sown. In time they will bring a harvest and the sinner will reap sorrow. The crop must be according to the seed. If a man sow thistle seed, is it likely he shall reap wheat? If he sow to the flesh, shall he not of the flesh reap destruction? **The rod of his anger will fail:** This mixing of metaphors (from the harvest to the shepherd's rod) probably has the idea that in the season when the sinner reaps his harvest from the seeds of iniquity, he will have no defense against it.

He who has a generous eye will be blessed: According to this principle God will bless the one who is generous to others. When people are generous to God and His work, God will not allow them to be more generous than He is. In contrast, the greedy loses his property and his power, and the one who gives liberally participates in a cycle of endless enrichment. **For he gives of his bread to the poor:** One important way to express our generosity is to give to the poor and needy. His generosity is simply sharing. He takes food out of his own mouth to give to the hungry. He voluntarily fasts every once in a while, so that he can give to the needy, and he shall not lose his reward. This person has a giving disposition, keen social conscience, and concern for the poor. The irony is that because he is not the prisoner of his selfish desires, he achieves the highest degree of self-fulfillment.

¹⁰ Drive out the mocker, and out goes strife; quarrels and insults are ended. ¹¹ One who loves a pure heart and who speaks with grace will have the king for a friend. ¹² The eyes of the Lord keep watch over knowledge, but he frustrates the words of the unfaithful. ¹³ The sluggard says, "There's a lion outside! I'll be killed in the public square!"¹⁴ The mouth of an adulterous woman is a deep pit; a man who is under the Lord's wrath falls into it.
Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave: The scoffer who spreads cynical discord causes contention. When that scoffer is cast out, then contention also leaves. He sows

discord and makes mischief wherever he goes. He disturbs the peace. **Strife and reproach will cease**: The atmosphere of strife and shameful insults (reproach) stops when the divisive scoffer is gone. This reminds us that an atmosphere of contention, strife, and reproach is caused by people.

He who loves purity of heart and has grace on his lips: Inner purity often shows itself through grace-filled words. These two are marks of godly, wise men and women. **The king will be his friend**: This true godliness and wisdom – both on the inside and in spoken words – will make friends in high places. It will certainly contribute to ongoing fellowship with God, for such a person walks in the light as God is in the light (1 John 1:6-7). The greatest men will, or should, desire and highly prize the acquaintance and advice of such persons, rather than of phonies and flatterers.

The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge: God sees, takes note of, and guards those with wisdom and **knowledge**. In this sense, it can be said that His eyes...preserve knowledge. **He overthrows the words of the faithless**: For the faithless fool, they can expect that God would turn over their words. He will not stand with or support their faithless words. God causes their distortions of the truth to be shown for what they are.

There is a lion outside: These are the words of the lazy man. In his imagination, the outside world and the work required to function in it are so frightening that it is best avoided. His excuse is crazy and absurd, but such is the refuge of the lazy man. **The lazy man says**: Spurgeon spoke on Proverbs 22:13 and 26:13: “In both texts the slothful man is represented as having something to say, and I think that there are no people that have so much to say as those that have little to do.

Where nothing is done much is talked about. The sluggard is represented as finding fantastic and preposterous excuses to demonstrate that no idea is too odd or fantastic to him to keep him from work. His life and the community is not in danger from his phantom lion in the streets but from his lazy lifestyle.

This imaginary lion is not Satan nor is it the Messiah, Jesus. **I shall be slain in the streets**: The lazy man exaggerates the dangers and troubles outside his door, especially those connected with work. The lazy man or woman should look to the Lord for victory over their sin. If a lion is in the way, shout, then, for a friend to come and help you. Call the One who is a wonderful lion-killer - Christ our Lord.

The mouth of an immoral woman is a deep pit: The immoral woman often sets her seductive trap by the words she speaks. Therefore, her mouth is a trap leading to death. Solomon knew something of this danger because he saw his father David fall into the deep pit of immorality. A deep pit it is easy to fall, but hard, if not impossible, to get out of it. Unlike the sluggard's fantasy of a man-eating lion roaming the city streets, these harlots are very real deadly predators in the streets. **He who is abhorred by the LORD will fall there**: God's wise ones are discerning enough to stay clear of this deep pit. But the fool – he who is abhorred by the LORD – is likely to fall there.

¹⁵ Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away.

¹⁶ One who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth and one who gives gifts to the rich—both come to poverty.

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child: Children are not born as morally neutral beings. There is a moral problem (described here as foolishness) that is bound up in the heart of a child, evidenced by the fact that our children will naturally sin without being taught how to do it. This is our nature inherited from our ancient ancestors, Adam and Eve. The father must not underestimate the difficulty of his task, for he does battle with an innate resistance and willfulness. He must both tear down and build up; to eradicate and implant. *Note that what is being spoken about is foolishness, not childishness.* ‘A child is to be punished,’ ‘not for being a child, but for being a wicked child. **The rod of correction will drive it far from him:** Physical discipline is one important way that a child can be morally trained. When wisely and properly applied, physical correction can help drive away a child’s inborn foolishness.

He who oppresses the poor to increase his riches: There are always those who prey upon their unfortunate fellow man and will oppress the poor to increase his riches. **He who gives to the rich, will surely come to poverty:** The one who gives to the rich is like the one who oppresses the poor – he has no compassion for those in need. God’s blessing will not be on the life and wealth of a man lacking in compassion. **He who gives to the rich** is juxtaposition of one who takes money from the poor, who does not need it, points up the folly. For example, ‘It happens when executives are paid exorbitant sums...and overwork their employees.

Thirty Sayings of the Wise

Saying 1

¹⁷ Pay attention and turn your ear to the sayings of the wise; apply your heart to what I teach, ¹⁸ for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart and have all of them ready on your lips. ¹⁹ So that your trust may be in the Lord, I teach you today, even you. ²⁰ Have I not written thirty sayings for you, sayings of counsel and knowledge, ²¹ teaching you to be honest and to speak the truth, so that you bring back truthful reports to those you serve?

Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise: Another invitation to receive words of wisdom. Unless one’s heart and mind are ready to receive wisdom, it does little good to present it. There should be a conscious readying of mind and heart to receive. The ear is the exterior organ that receives the information and the heart is the interior organ that directs the whole body (Proverbs 4:20-27).

It is a pleasant thing if you keep them within you: The value of gaining and keeping wisdom is pleasant. Sometimes we feel the way of wisdom is a difficult path to walk, but it is much more pleasant than the way of the fool. **Keep them within you:** in thy belly. i.e. in thine heart, which implies receiving them in love, and retaining them in mind and memory.

So that your trust may be in the LORD: True wisdom makes us more dependent on God, not less. We grow in our trust in the LORD, realizing that the pursuit of wisdom begins and continues with a proper view of God.

I have instructed you today: Even the most brilliant, moral sayings are powerless without personal application. Today refers to each day of the son's life, because he is to have all of them always ready on his tongue. **That I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth:** The pursuit of wisdom makes us more confident in the truth, not less. Certainly, wisdom discovers that some things are more complicated and doubtful, but in general it sees God and His truth with more clarity and certainty.

Saying 2

²² Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, ²³ for the Lord will take up their case and will exact life for life.

Do not rob the poor because he is poor: The poor among us deserve more protection and compassion. Even if one is poor because of their moral failings or foolish behavior, they still should not be taken advantage of and robbed. If those that do not help the poor shall be damned, surely they that rob them shall be double damned. Lacking financial resources to protect their legal rights they are a tempting target for the sharp practices and blatant injustices of their rich and powerful neighbors.

For the LORD will plead their cause: Even if the rich rob the poor, they still have a defender. God Himself will plead their cause and will ransack the soul of those who plunder the poor. Understanding God's concern for and protection of the poor, wisdom leads us to treat them honorably.

The poor can't defend themselves with great resources and influence. The rich man's treatment of the poor says a lot about the rich man's character. It shows how he treats those whom culture and the community may say are "beneath" him. This reveals one's heart in many ways. Concern for the poor is common in both biblical and pagan wisdom literature. The distinctive Israelite perspective, however, is that Yahweh is viewed as protector of the oppressed. *Woe therefore to them that oppress them, for they will have God, not the poor, to deal with*

Saying 3

²⁴ Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, ²⁵ or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared.

Make no friendship with an angry man: A person who often can't control their anger displays bad character and can be a dangerous companion. Wisdom chooses friends carefully and should make no friendship with an angry man. Anger is a short madness; it is a leprosy breaking out of a burning, [Leviticus 13:25] and renders a man unfit for civil society.

Lest you learn his ways: This is one of the important reasons why it is foolish to make a **friendship with an angry man**. His habits will influence yours, and as you become more of an angry person you will set a snare for your soul. Being friends of a hot-tempered man is like living in a house that is on fire. How quickly does a young person, living with a proud man, become like him and turn into an overbearing person.

Saying 4

²⁶ Do not be one who shakes hands in pledge or puts up security for debts; ²⁷ if you lack the means to pay, your very bed will be snatched from under you.

Do not be one of those who shakes hands in a pledge: As mentioned in other proverbs, it is a dangerous thing to become responsible for the debts of other people. Personal debt is to be avoided (Proverbs 22:7), so how much more becoming surety for debts of another person.

Why should he take away your bed from under you? Under the laws and customs regarding the failure to pay debts in the world of the Bible, property could be easily seized and even people made forced servants for the repayment of debts. Don't take on the debts of other people. The risk is that if someone lacks the means to pay, his creditors may take his bed, i.e., his last possession (cf. our expressions 'the shirt off his back' or 'the kitchen sink').

Saying 5

²⁸ *Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your ancestors.*

Do not remove the ancient landmark: From the days when Joshua divided the promised land for the people of Israel, there were landmarks showing the boundaries of property. It was a great crime and scandal to remove these landmarks. Private land boundaries were marked out by stone pillars or cairns erected between property to mark legal ownership. Do not take the advantage, in ploughing or breaking up a field adjacent to your neighbor, to move the dividing stones farther into his field so you can enlarge your property. Do not take what is not yours. Let all ancient divisions, and the usages connected with them, be held sacred.

The boundaries were sacred because God owned the land and had given it to the fathers as their inheritance. **Which your fathers have set:** We also understand this proverb in a spiritual sense. A landmark – a custom, a tradition, or a value – should not be removed lightly. We should never assume that our fathers set such landmarks for no reason or bad reason. We should not defend tradition for the sake of tradition, but neither should we destroy tradition just for the sake of destroying it.

Saying 6

²⁹ *Do you see someone skilled in their work? They will serve before kings; they will not serve before officials of low rank.*

Do you see a man who excels in his work? Wisdom pushes us toward excellence. God has given every man and woman work to do, and they should do that work with excellence as unto God and not only to men (Colossians 3:23). **A man who excels:** is who is improving his talents all the time and is making the most of his opportunities. **He will stand before kings:** The excellence of a man or woman's work can give them great standing in the world. More importantly, it gives them standing before the King of Kings, who promises to reward the one who works diligently unto Him. Jesus taught that the one who is trustworthy in the small matters of this world will be entrusted with ten cities in his coming kingdom (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27; cf. John 12:26).