

Proverbs 25 – Promise Keeper

Proverbs 25 covers some weighty topics—justice in government (v. 5), the foolishness of pride (v. 6-7), what to do when you want to sue someone (w. 8-10), giving false testimony (v. 18), and how to respond to your enemies (w. 21-22), just to name a few. We might be tempted to take verse 14 less seriously when compared with the other issues in this chapter. After all, breaking a promise can't be as serious as wickedness in government or spreading lies about your neighbor, right?

If we tend to think that way, it is likely because we live in a low-commitment culture. We like to keep our options open, just in case something better comes along or our desires change. From event invites to relationships, we notoriously choose "maybe," wait until the last minute to decide, or we simply agree as a show of good intentions and then later back out on people.

This is no less common in the church. We might commit to a small group or area of service, but if we get too busy, those are often the first to go. We might commit to praying for someone, but the days get away from us and we forget. The thing is, we may live in a low-commitment culture, but we serve a high-commitment God. He wants us to say what we mean and mean what we say.

That's because when we overpromise and under-deliver, we do not honor God and others as we ought. Carelessness with words reveals, walking in wisdom. If we claim to know Jesus, and we claim to share that truth to our own word. We make our promise of integrity and a lack of attention to people before God.

1 These are more proverbs of Solomon, compiled by the men of Hezekiah king of Judah:

This collection of proverbs from [Proverbs 25:1](#) through [Proverbs 29:27](#), makes up five chapters of the book of Proverbs. These also were written by Solomon yet collected under the supervision of Hezekiah king of Judah – some 270 years after Solomon's death. [1 Kings 4:32](#) tells us that Solomon *spoke three thousand proverbs*. Even with Hezekiah's addition, not all of them are contained in the Book of Proverbs.

2 It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings. 3 As the heavens are high and the earth is deep, so the hearts of kings are unsearchable. 4 Remove the dross from the silver, and a silversmith can produce a vessel; 5 remove wicked officials from the king's presence, and his throne will be established through righteousness.

It is the glory of God to conceal a matter: There are many mysteries in the universe, both material and spiritual mysteries. There are many things God has concealed, and this is one expression of His glory. It is one of God's ways to say, "You are amazed by what you see; yet what you don't see, what I have concealed, is even greater." Those unsearchable secrets of his – such as are the union of the three persons into one nature, and of two natures into one person, his wonderful decrees, and the wonderful execution of them demonstrates his infinite wisdom and greatness.

The Book of God will not be fully opened until mortality is swallowed up. *For here we see through a glass darkly; but there, face to face: here we know in part; but there we shall know as we also are known.*" (1 Corinthians 13:12)

The glory of kings is to search out a matter: It is the glory of great men (kings) to search out what God has concealed. This speaks to our pursuit of God's mysteries in the spiritual world, but perhaps even more so to God's mysteries in the material world. When men and women seek out scientific knowledge, trying to understand the mystery and brilliance of what God has concealed in His creation, they express an aspect of the glory of humanity, even the glory of kings. Therefore, we say to the scientist, search on, and do so with all your strength. What we see is amazing, but God has concealed

even greater treasures of knowledge and wisdom in His creation ([Romans 1:19-20](#)). We must not arrogantly think that we can figure it all out.

As the heavens for height and the earth for depth: As the sky extends to apparently limitless heights above the surface of the earth, the reference to depth emphasizes the limitless extent of the earth far below humankind's feet.

The heart of kings is unsearchable: The king's decisions are beyond the knowledge of the people...many things cannot be made known, being 'unsearchable' because, perhaps, of his superior wisdom, his choice, or the necessity of maintaining confidentiality.

Take away the wicked man from before the king: Like dross should be removed from silver, so wicked counselors and associates should be removed from the presence of kings and rulers. Then will their leadership (throne) be established in righteousness.

6 Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence, and do not claim a place among his great men; 7 it is better for him to say to you, "Come up here," than for him to humiliate you before his nobles. What you have seen with your eyes

Do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king: We should always avoid self-exaltation. Even as we should humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord ([James 4:10](#)), we should also humble ourselves before others. Loving to be preeminent is the bane of godliness in the church. Each of us should tear down our conceit.

Come up here: When a man or a woman properly humbles themselves before God and kings, they may be invited to a higher place. This is much better than arrogantly setting ourselves high and then being put lower in the presence of the prince. Jesus gave much the same lesson in [Luke 14:8-11](#). For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. ([Luke 14:11](#)).

8 do not bring hastily to court, for what will you do in the end if your neighbor puts you to shame? 9 If you take your neighbor to court, do not betray another's confidence, 10 or the one who hears it may shame you and the charge against you will stand.

Do not go hastily to court: Sometimes the court of law is necessary, but we should never go hastily to court. If it is possible to resolve a dispute any other way, we should do it that other way. This was Paul's later teaching to the Corinthian church ([1 Corinthians 6:1-8](#)).

After squandering your money away upon lawyers, both they and the judge will leave it to be settled by twelve of your fellow citizens! It is foolishness to go to the law! Jesus gave a similar teaching in [Luke 12:57-59](#).

When your neighbor has put you to shame: This is another strong reason why one should avoid court – you might lose and be put to shame. Many people who go to court have an unrealistic confidence that they will win. **Debate your case with your neighbor:** Solomon's wise advice is to settle it out of court. If you can debate your case outside the court, do it there. The debate may expose a secret that would be to your shame in open court and from that your reputation be ruined. To run to the law or to the neighbors is usually to run away from the duty of personal relationship—see [Matthew 18:15b](#). One should not smear another's name to clear his own or a defendant's.

11 Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a ruling rightly given. 12 Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is the rebuke of a wise judge to a listening ear.

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold: There is something special and powerful about a word appropriately spoken - the right word at the right time has power to heal and strengthen, to guide and

rescue. It is spoken at the right time and circumstances, spoken with a grace, and in due place. It is an excellent skill to be able to time a word. It is like an apple made of gold set on a beautiful silver platter.

13 Like a snow-cooled drink at harvest time is a trustworthy messenger to the one who sends him; he refreshes the spirit of his master.

Like the cold of snow in time of harvest: This speaks of a cold drink, cooled by the cold of snow, given to a hardworking man in time of harvest. The refreshing, invigorating nature of that cold drink illustrates the blessing of a faithful messenger to those who send him. The faithful messenger is beloved by the one who sends the message. God wants His people to be faithful messengers of His gospel and work. [Proverbs 25:13](#) does not mean that it snows at harvest time—that would be a disaster. It refers to bringing down snow from the mountains during the heat of harvest and the refreshment that gives to workers.

He refreshes the soul of his masters: The sender of the message is refreshed and comforted knowing that the message is being faithfully delivered. So, God is pleased with His faithful messengers today. The apostle Paul often acknowledged this refreshment to his anxious spirit when he was burdened with all the care of the churches.

14 Like clouds and wind without rain is one who boasts of gifts never given.

Whoever falsely boasts of giving: There are some who give nothing but want to be known as people who give; others give small gifts and want to be known as those who give great gifts (such as Ananias and Sapphira in [Acts 5:1-11](#)). They want the reputation of generosity without actually being generous. The lesson, of course, is not to make false promises. **Is like clouds and wind without rain:** When the clouds and wind of a storm come, we expect life-giving rain. When the clouds and wind are without rain, it is a disappointment – just like he who falsely boasts of giving.

15 Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone.

By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded: Our self-control and patience can persuade great men to our cause, even a ruler. William Wilberforce persuaded the leaders of the British Empire to outlaw slavery through long patience and dedication to his righteous cause. **A gentle tongue breaks a bone:** The patient, gentle words of a wise man or woman can have a great impact over a long period of time. It is a fine illustration of the power of gentleness above hardness and irritation.

16 If you find honey, eat just enough—too much of it, and you will vomit. 17 Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house—too much of you, and they will hate you.

Eat only as much as you need: If someone has found honey – something good and wonderful to find – the honey should be enjoyed, but one should eat only as much as you need. **Lest you be filled with it and vomit:** If something good (honey) is eaten beyond what one needs, if we fill ourselves with it, then it may cause an unpleasant reaction (vomit) and we lose the good thing we thought we gained. Overindulgence in good things is harmful and counterproductive.

Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house: It is expected that neighbors would visit neighbors, but such hospitality should not be abused. Blessed be God, there is no need of this caution and reserve in our approach to him. Once acquainted with the way of access, there is no wall of separation. But our earthly friend's kindness may be pressed too far; kindness may be worn out by frequent use.

Lest he become weary of you and hate you: The wise man or woman will be sensitive to the sense that a neighbor may become weary of their presence. Since good neighborly relationships make life much better, this is an important principle of wisdom.

18 Like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow is one who gives false testimony against a neighbor. 19 Like a broken tooth or a lame foot is reliance on the unfaithful in a time of trouble.

A man who bears false witness against his neighbor: Many proverbs speak against the man who bears false witness. This liar, whether in the court of law or common conversation, does great damage. He is like a club, a sword, and a sharp arrow. It is not a small sin to bear false witness against a neighbor.

The design of the proverb is to show the wickedness of slander, and that a false witness is in some respect as bad as a murderer. The tongue wounds four people at one stroke. The person harms himself, the object of his attack, anyone who listens to his words, and the name of God. Flee from this deadly disease.

Like a bad tooth and a foot out of joint: These two proverbs are connected because the man who bears false witness is often also the unfaithful man in time of trouble. In one aspect he brings pain, in the other aspect he is a pain. The unfaithful man is useless and like a persistent, debilitating pain.

20 Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on a wound, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

Like one who takes away a garment in cold weather: Some people and their actions are especially troublesome. They bring discomfort (like leaving one without a garment in cold weather) and constant agitation (like vinegar on soda). To pour acid on this alkali is 'first of all to make it effervesce, and, secondly, to destroy its specific qualities'

Is one who sings songs to a heavy heart: The one who treats the heavy heart without sensitivity brings discomfort and agitation. If songs are sung to a heavy heart, they should be sung in a minor key. The proverb indicates the impropriety of making merry in the presence of sorrow. It increases distress rather than to soothe it.

21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. 22 In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.

If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat: The Bible commands us to have love giving and care even to our enemy. Human nature would tell us to hate our enemy, but the Bible tells us to love our enemies and to do it practically (Matthew 5:44-47). The implication that one should refrain from extracting vengeance is obvious. Paul quoted this proverb in his discussion of 'love' in [Romans 12:9-21](#).

For so you will heap coals of fire on his head: Commentators debate if this is a good thing or a harsh thing; if this is something good in the eyes of your enemy or not. Most likely it refers to a burning conviction that our kindness places on our enemy. Or, some think it refers to the practice of lending coals from a fire to help a neighbor start his or her own – an appreciated act of kindness. Either way, we can destroy our enemy by making him our friend, and the LORD will reward you.

Most commentators agree that the 'coals of fire' refers to 'burning pangs of shame' which a man will feel when good is returned for evil, his shame producing remorse and contrition. By heaping courtesies upon him, thou shalt win him over to thyself.... In doing some good to our enemies, we do most to ourselves.

Do you think that others have wronged you? Pity them pray for them; seek them out; show them their fault, humbly and meekly; wash their feet; take the log out of their eye; seek to restore them in a spirit of meekness, remembering that you may be tempted; heap coals of loving-kindness on their heads; bring them if possible into such a broken and tender frame of mind, that they may seek

forgiveness at your hand and God's. If you cannot act thus with all the emotion you would feel, do it because it is right, and the emotion will inevitably follow.

23 Like a north wind that brings unexpected rain is a sly tongue—which provokes a horrified look.

The north wind brings forth rain: Solomon mentioned this as an example of cause and effect. The north wind blows, and it brings forth rain. **A backbiting tongue an angry countenance**: Those who speak ill of others with a backbiting tongue will provoke an angry face or expression in others. This is a matter of cause and effect, just like the north wind bringing forth rain.

24 Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.

Better to dwell in the corner of a housetop: The corner of a housetop is not a great place to live. It is small, confined, and exposed to the elements because it is on the roof. Yet in some circumstances, the corner of a housetop is a better place to live. Hostile speech from the wife is as unexpected and unwelcome as the rain from the north wind and as from a sly tongue.

Than in a house shared with a contentious woman: To have the whole house but live in constant conflict with a contentious woman is misery. The same principle would be true of the contentious man. One would be better off in a humbler living situation and have peace in the home. For emphasis, this proverb is repeated from [Proverbs 21:9](#). Christian women do not think these proverbs are unworthy of your attention. Be sure you do not fit the description of this dreadful picture.

25 Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land.

As cold water to a weary soul: When a person is weary, a gift of cold water is greatly refreshing. Soul in this proverb is used in the same sense as most other proverbs, as a reference to the whole person and life, not only the inner spiritual aspect of a person. Water could be cooled in porous containers made out of clay, for they were able to keep its content at a temperature at least five degrees below that of the storage place.

So is good news from a far country: When we receive good news, especially from a far country, it brings great and life-giving refreshment. This applies to good news of many types, not the least is the gospel, that good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ to rescue all who put their trust in Him.

The fact that someone travels from a far country to deliver good and important news makes the news all the more important. Many are willing to listen to the good news of Jesus Christ from someone who comes from a distance, just because the trouble they went to in bringing the message adds to its importance.

In the Biblical world news traveled agonizingly slow and was delivered with great difficulty, so that extending the distance to a far-off land heightens the refreshment.

26 Like a muddied spring or a polluted well are the righteous who give way to the wicked.

A righteous man who falters before the wicked: Sometimes it is true that a righteous man stumbles and falters. This is always sad, but even more so when it happens before the wicked, in the view of those who reject God and His wisdom. What a blemish was it for Abraham to fall under the reproof of Abimelech! for Samson to be taken by the Philistines in a whorehouse! for Josiah to be minded of his duty by Pharaoh Necho! for Peter to be drawn by a woman to deny his master! The gross wickedness of the ungodly passes in silence. But Satan makes the neighborhood ring with the failings of those who profess to be Christians.

Is like a murky spring and polluted well: Instead of the clarity and life-giving property of clean, clear water, a compromised life is like a dirty pool. It gives no life, no clarity, no refreshment, and no help.

His despicable compromise disappoints, deprives and imperils the many who have learned to rely on him for their spiritual life.

For a thirsty traveler expecting relief, the effect of coming upon a polluted well is disbelief and disappointment, and it serves as an apt metaphor for the profound disillusionment one feels when the righteous yield to evil.

27 It is not good to eat too much honey, nor is it honorable to search out matters that are too deep.

It is not good to eat too much honey: Honey is an example of one of God's great gifts. In the world of Solomon's day sweets were rare and nothing was sweeter than honey. Yet, overindulgence in even a good gift like honey is not good. Self-control must be practiced even with good things.

So to seek one's own glory is not glory: Glory can be a good thing, and it is part of God's promise to the believer ([Romans 8:18](#)). Yet to seek one's own glory is not good; it is not glory at all. We should seek God's glory and not worry about our own glory. Much honey produces nausea. So eventually does self-glorification.

28 Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.

Whoever has no rule over his own spirit: There are many who have so little self-control that it can be said that they have no rule over their own spirit. The world, the flesh, or the devil rule over such people, and not the spirit of self-control that is part of the fruit of the Spirit ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)).

Is like a city broken down, without walls: A city broken down, a city without walls has no defense and is vulnerable to every attack. It has no security, stability, and can protect nothing really valuable. This shows some of the terrible cost of having no rule over one's own spirit. Certainly the noblest conquests are gained or lost over ourselves. The first outbreak of anger resulted in murder. A king's lack of watchfulness about lust resulted in adultery.