

Proverbs 29 – A Key to Walking in Wisdom

If you were to give a "State of My Life" address today, what would be the main takeaway? No matter the specifics, your address would reveal you're either pursuing God's wisdom and vision or your own. Proverbs 29 teaches us that the pursuit of God's wisdom brings happiness, but the pursuit of our own wisdom sends us off the rails (v. 18).

True happiness in life is only found within God's plan, which is given to us in God's Word. When we entrust ourselves to God's Word, then we will live out God's wisdom for our lives. Wisdom is not simply understanding God's ways; it seeks to act in obedience to those ways. God's direction won't often make sense if we're looking at it from a worldly perspective. However, as the prompting of His Spirit matches the truth of His Word, we must act in obedience.

All of life is to be submitted to God's direction. When we continue to refuse God's wisdom, we'll eventually find ourselves utterly helpless (v. 1). But "the one who trusts in the Lord is protected" (v. 25). That's the key to walking in wisdom, isn't it? When we trust God completely, we will choose to walk in His wisdom in all areas of our lives—in our friendships, work, financial decisions, conflicts, crises, marriages, parenting—all of it! And walking in God's wisdom impacts the state of our lives. It doesn't mean we won't face any difficulty, but in those difficulties, we'll find rest and happiness in the Lord's everlasting protection. Think back on the past year of your life. How have you seen the truth of Proverbs 29:18?

¹Whoever remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy.² When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan.

He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck: As in many places in the Bible, the hard neck is used as a figure of speech to speak of the stubborn attitude that resists and disobeys God. This proverb speaks about the man who is often rebuked but doesn't listen to the rebuke; instead he hardens his neck. The opposite of the stiff neck would be a bending neck, i.e., submission. **Will suddenly be destroyed:** This stubborn, rebellious man continues in his disobedience for a long time, until he is suddenly...destroyed – and there will be no hope for him. This describes the kind of person who thinks little of God's merciful patience and assumes judgment will never come for his continual rejection of wisdom and stubborn heart against God. When the door of opportunity to repent finally shuts, probably at death, the fool is beyond all hope of a cure.

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: It is to the benefit of the community or nation when the righteous are in authority. This shows that when the righteous govern, it should be for the benefit of the entire community, not only their own interests. **When a wicked man rules, the people groan:** The community or the nation

suffers when the wicked rule. Lawlessness increases and freedoms diminish. The rule of the wicked is bad for both the righteous and the wicked in the community or nation. The people groan: “Both for the oppressions and mischiefs which they feel, and for the dreadful judgments of God which they justly fear.

³ A man who loves wisdom brings joy to his father, but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth.

Whoever loves wisdom makes his father rejoice: Children of any age bring happiness to their parents when they love and live wisdom. It gives the parents a justified pride in their children and gives peace about their children’s future. **A companion of harlots wastes his wealth**: This is one example of a foolish life, someone who chooses harlots and others of low character as their companions. This fool wastes his wealth on the harlots and other similar interests, showing they are the opposite of the one who loves wisdom.

⁴ By justice a king gives a country stability, but those who are greedy for bribes tear it down. ⁵ Those who flatter their neighbors are spreading nets for their feet. ⁶ Evildoers are snared by their own sin, but the righteous shout for joy and are glad. ⁷ The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern. ⁸ Mockers stir up a city, but the wise turn away anger.

The king establishes the land by justice: A nation can only expect strength and progress when it is ruled with justice. When a community or nation sees evildoers punished and restrained, fairness in the legal system, and agreements honored, there will be justice and a foundation for growth and blessing. **He who receives bribes overthrows it**: There are many ways that justice can be abused, but this is one of the worst ways. Bribes destroy the foundations of fairness and equality before the law. It means that the rich and devious prosper. The best laws are of little use when they are badly administered. Partiality and injustice make them null and void. And yet it requires great integrity and moral courage to withstand the temptations of worldly policy and self-interest.

A man who flatters his neighbor: In this sense, to flatter is to excessively praise or give attention to a neighbor with the hope of gaining influence or status. Such flattery is a trap. It is a trap that the wise man knows how to avoid, and that catches the fool. A flatterer does not flatter merely to please you, but to deceive you and profit himself.

By transgression an evil man is snared: A man may be evil in his character, yet it is his actual acts of transgression that ruin him. Most evil men think they are celebrating life and freedom through their transgression, but it will be a trap and a snare to them. We may be sure, that as Jezebel had a cold heart under a painted complexion, so many a man’s heart aches and quakes within him when his face has a fake smile. **The righteous sings and rejoices**: If transgression belongs to the evil man, then singing

and rejoicing belong to the righteous. The singing and rejoicing are an expression of what is inside them, just as much as the transgression is an expression of what is inside the evil man.

The righteous considers the cause of the poor: One mark of the righteous man or woman is that they care for the poor. It is more than the response of feelings of pity; he considers the cause of the poor. It is thoughtful compassion in action. **The wicked does not understand such knowledge:** Those who are wicked, rebellious against God and His wisdom, can't even understand such compassion. Since it doesn't directly serve their self-interest, they can't understand it. His ignorance and lack of understanding is not an intellectual defect but the expression of an evil perversion.

Scoffers set a city aflame: In the family of fools, the scoffers are some of the worst offenders. They are so settled in their combative, cynical rejection of God and His wisdom that they may bring the judgment of God and fury of man against their own city. Such scoffers make dangerous situations worse, whereas the wise calm things down and ensure peace in the community. **Wise men turn away wrath:** The opposite of the scoffer is the wise man. Collectively, wise men have the understanding, character, and righteousness that may turn away God's wrath.

⁹ If a wise person goes to court with a fool, the fool rages and scoffs, and there is no peace. ¹⁰ The bloodthirsty hate a person of integrity and seek to kill the upright. ¹¹ Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end.

If a wise man contends with a foolish man: Solomon considered some kind of argument or dispute between the wise and the foolish, likely set in a court of law. Since the two have different foundations and principles for living, it isn't a surprise that they would contend with each other. The recklessness of the fool is given full vent. **Whether the fool rages or laughs, there is no peace:** When two such different people contend, normally there will be no peace. The fool will respond with either anger or mocking, but neither will lead to peace. This should teach the wise man to be cautious about contending with the foolish man.

The bloodthirsty hate the blameless: There is a fundamental opposition between the bloodthirsty and the blameless. Those given to violence and brutality (the bloodthirsty) simply hate the blameless, both because the life and message of the blameless convicts the bloodthirsty and because the bloodthirsty hate all the blameless stand for. **The upright seek his well-being:** The upright men or women seek and care for the well-being of the blameless. This is a great contrast to the bloodthirsty.

A fool vents all his feelings: It is the nature of a fool to think that everyone is interested in all his feelings and that he has some obligation to inflict all his feelings on others. This is a foolish offense to self-respect, self-restraint, and courtesy towards others. **A wise man holds them back:** The wise man knows that there is a time and place to vent one's

feelings, but one should never imitate the fool in exposing all his feelings. The verb speaks of anger overcome, not merely checked.

¹² If a ruler listens to lies, all his officials become wicked. ¹³ The poor and the oppressor have this in common: The Lord gives sight to the eyes of both. ¹⁴ If a king judges the poor with fairness, his throne will be established forever.

If a ruler pays attention to lies: Anyone in authority will have many who want to use his or her power and position for their own advancement. Some of those may use lies to influence, frighten, manipulate, or simply deceive that ruler. The wise ruler pays no attention to lies. A king, a president, or any chief executive officer must set a high standard and rigorously maintain it or face the consequences of corruption running rampant in his administration. **All his servants become wicked:** When the servants see that the ruler can be influenced by lies, it encourages them to lie. Deception is rewarded and telling the truth is discouraged. The atmosphere around that ruler and his servants becomes poisonous and incompetent. Partly because he chooses only such for his service; and partly because they are either corrupted by his example, or engaged by their place and interest to please him, and comply with his base lusts. When they see that deception and court flattery win the day, they learn how the game is played.

The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: It is difficult to think of two greater contrasts than the poor man and the oppressor. Despite their great differences, they have something in common. **The LORD gives light to the eyes of both:** God gives some kind of light, some kind of revelation in creation and conscience, to every person ([Romans 1:19-21](#)). One may obey or reject God's message in that light, but God gives light to the eyes of both. That is to say, all intelligence is a divine gift, whether it be used in righteousness or in wickedness.

The king who judges the poor with truth: Part of the responsibility of a king or any leader is to make judgments, and sometimes those regarding the poor and disadvantaged. That king or leader must be careful to not show partiality against (or for) the poor, but to make judgment according to truth. **His throne will be established forever:** That king who refuses to show partiality and judges the poor according to truth can expect to have a long reign. Their reign will be blessed by God and received by the people. The poor are no less created in the image of God than the rich, and they have God as their avenger should the rich fail in their duty. For this reason the security of a king's reign depends on equitably dispensing justice.

¹⁵ A rod and a reprimand impart wisdom, but a child left undisciplined disgraces its mother. ¹⁶ When the wicked thrive, so does sin, but the righteous will see their downfall. ¹⁷ Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire. ¹⁸ Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom's instruction. ¹⁹ Servants cannot be corrected by mere words; though they understand, they will not respond.

The rod and rebuke give wisdom: We learn through correction. Jesus Himself learned through suffering ([Hebrews 5:8](#)) so we should not despise God's use of either the rod or the rebuke. No one is above learning through discipline. Discipline is the order of God's government. Parents are his dispensers of it to their children. Let correction be first tried, and if it succeeds, let the rod be spared. If not, let the rod do its work. **A child left to himself brings shame to his mother:** The principle of the first line of this proverb is especially true regarding children. Children who are never trained with loving correction often bring shame to their parents.

When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increases: There is something of a multiplication effect in the advance of wickedness. In some way, when the number of wicked people is doubled, then it seems transgression increases four or five times over. **The righteous will see their fall:** This is welcome assurance when it seems that transgression increases. The righteous must not despair; God is still in control. Though the wicked are multiplied, God will not allow them to triumph in the end and they will fall.

Correct your son, and he will give you rest: Many proverbs speak of the importance of correcting and training our children. If we leave them to themselves, to their peers, or to the culture around them and fail to correct them, they will be an ongoing source of trouble and strife, giving us no rest. Yes, he will give delight to your soul: Every parent wants this delight of soul. There is a sense in which God appeals to our own self-interest. If you won't correct your son because it is good for him, then do it because it is good for you!

Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint: The revelation in mind here is not the spontaneous word from a purported prophet. It is God's great revelation, His revealed word through the Hebrew prophets and later the apostles and prophets who gave us the New Testament. When God's word is unavailable or rejected, the people cast off restraint. They no longer have a standard greater than their own feelings or current opinions. No greater calamity, therefore, can there be than the removal of the revelation.... Where revelation is withdrawn from a church, the people perish in ignorance and delusion. This principle was lived out in Israel's history. [Judges 17:6, 21:25](#), and [1 Samuel 3:1](#) all describe such times when God's word was abandoned, and the people lived with no restraint.

Happy is he who keeps the law: In contrast, there is happiness and contentment for the one who keeps the law. In this sense, the Bible is something like a guide given to us by our owner and creator, telling us how to live a wise and blessed life. It is within restraint, but not in an oppressive sense. Only a fool thinks that all restraint is oppressive. Although the want of God's word be sufficient for men's destruction, yet the having, and hearing, or reading of it is not sufficient for their salvation, except they also keep or obey it.

A servant will not be corrected by mere words: The idea is not of someone who has an honorable, servant-like heart. That person is unlikely to be corrected by mere words. Tough life experience and discipline will be more likely to teach them. In this democratic age the idea that one should have this kind of authority over someone is perhaps offensive, but in any age, workers can become undisciplined and unreliable if some kind of authority and discipline procedure is not established.

Though he understands, he will not respond: This shows that the problem with such a one is not mental or intellectual. He understands well enough; the problem is that he will not respond. It will take more than words to get him or her to respond and learn wisdom.

²⁰ Do you see someone who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for them.²¹ A servant pampered from youth will turn out to be insolent. ²² An angry person stirs up conflict, and a hot-tempered person commits many sins.

²³ Pride brings a person low, but the lowly in spirit gain honor.

Do you see a man hasty in his words? Proverbs often teaches us that a mark of a fool is that they don't have control over what they say. They are hasty in their words. **There is more hope for a fool than for him:** To Solomon, the man hasty in his words was a special kind of a fool, a super-fool. Lacking wisdom, his impulsive speech sets him beyond the hope of even the normal fool.

He who pampers his servant from childhood: The idea is of a man who is overly soft and generous towards his servant. He worries too much about making life easy and pleasant for his servant. **Will have him as a son in the end:** This isn't always in a good sense. The one who pampers his servant will make the servant so attached to him that he will end up with another obligation and another person who expects an inheritance.

This is a simple statement of a fact. Whether it be one of blessing or of evil depends on the Christian's servant. An evil servant treated well assumes the position of a son in arrogance. A good servant treated well assumes the position of a son in devotion.

An angry man stirs up strife: It is in the nature of the angry man to spread his strife to others. With peace lacking in his own soul, it's easy to put his inner strife upon others. 'Anger' describes his outward appearance, and 'wrath' [furious], his inner heat of boiling emotions of resentment. When the angry or furious man spreads his strife, it makes wrongdoing increase. Sin abounds and the atmosphere is marked by a lack of self-control.

A man's pride will bring him low: Because God resists the proud ([James 4:6](#) and [1 Peter 5:5](#)), pride will naturally bring a man low. Like Satan, the one who hoped to rise higher through his pride will fall ([Isaiah 14:13-15](#)). **The humble in spirit will retain honor:** Just as much as God resists the proud, He also gives grace to the humble. God's gracious blessing to the humble in spirit means they will gain and retain honor.

²⁴ The accomplices of thieves are their own enemies; they are put under oath and dare not testify. ²⁵ Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe. ²⁶ Many seek an audience with a ruler, but it is from the Lord that one gets justice.

Whoever is a partner with a thief hates his own life: To partner with a thief is to reject wisdom and embrace folly. The one who steals from others will steal from you, and perhaps with violence threatening your own life. The law makes no distinction between the thief and the accomplice. Consenting to sin, receiving the stolen goods, involves us in the guilt and punishment. **He swears to tell the truth, but reveals nothing:** The partner to the thief is the kind of man who will repeatedly vow to tell the truth, but reveals nothing about his partner's criminal activity. He places loyalty to his friend above his loyalty to God. The call to testify is actually a curse pronounced on anyone who will not testify. This proverb, using the same word for oath or curse, describes someone who has befriended a thief, becomes aware of his wrongdoing, but remains silent when he hears a call to come forward and give evidence. He has brought a curse down on his own head.

The fear of man brings a snare: Many people of good heart but not enough courage live in bondage to the fear of man. They worry far too much about what people think, instead of first being concerned about what God and wisdom say, and what integrity would lead them to do. This is a snare that traps many people. The 'fear of man' describes any situation in which one is anxious about not offending another person. For example, someone might be afraid to oppose the unethical actions of a superior out of fear of losing a job. This verse tells the reader to do what is right and trust the outcome to God.

It was the fear of man that caused Pilate's name to become infamous in the history of the world and of the Church of God, and it will be infamous to all eternity. The fear of man led him to slay the Savior; take care that it does not lead you to do something of the same kind. **But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe:** The contrast to the fear of man is he who trusts in the LORD. That person will be in the safest place imaginable – safe in the care of a loving, powerful God.

Many seek the ruler's favor: This is presented as a simple fact. There are many who long for the benefit that a ruler may give them. This relates to the fear of man mentioned in the previous verse; those who depend on the ruler's favor for their security and prosperity must fear and seek the ruler's favor. **But justice for man comes from the LORD:** When we depend upon man for our justice, our security, or our prosperity, we will be disappointed. Such justice and its benefits come from the LORD, not primarily through even the mightiest ruler. If the ruler does give out justice, he does it as God's agent. This does not forbid seeking relief from injustice through the legal system, but it does state that one should place more faith in God than in human institutions.

²⁷ The righteous detest the dishonest; the wicked detest the upright.

An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous: An unjust man does not please those among God's righteous. They share God's regard of the wicked, seeing them as an abomination for their sins against God and man.

He who is upright in the way is an abomination to the wicked: It works both ways. The upright man or woman is seen as an abomination to the wicked. Their righteous life is an unwelcome rebuke to the wicked. Here is the oldest, the most rooted, the most universal quarrel in the world. It was the first fruit of the Fall ([Genesis 3:15](#)). It has continued ever since and will last to the end of the world. Righteousness and immorality are mutually exclusive. One must follow one path or the other.