



# PROVERBS

## Read Proverbs 1

The first seven verses of this chapter describe the contents of the entire book. Its series of instructions gleaned from life assures successful living. The first instruction warns about the dangers of evil companions. This is followed by a speech given by Wisdom personified. Rejecting Wisdom will lead to disaster and unhappiness.

**Reflect:** We all want to live happy, meaningful lives. Proverbs insists that this can be accomplished only if we discover life's possibilities and dangers and, having discovered them, choose the proper way to live. To do otherwise is to court disaster.

**Pray:** Pray for the insight to learn the lessons that life has to teach and for the wisdom and humility to follow the path that you uncover.

**Act:** Reflect on how your life has unfolded so that you can learn the lessons that it has to teach you.

**1** The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

## Prologue

- 2 For learning about wisdom and instruction,  
for understanding words of insight,
- 3 for gaining instruction in wise dealing,  
righteousness, justice, and equity;
- 4 to teach shrewdness to the simple,  
knowledge and prudence to the young—
- 5 let the wise also hear and gain in learning,  
and the discerning acquire skill,
- 6 to understand a proverb and a figure,  
the words of the wise and their riddles.
- 7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of  
knowledge;  
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

## Warnings against Evil Companions

- 8 Hear, my child, your father's instruction,  
and do not reject your mother's teaching;
- 9 for they are a fair garland for your head,  
and pendants for your neck.
- 10 My child, if sinners entice you,  
do not consent.
- 11 If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for  
blood;  
let us wantonly ambush the innocent;
- 12 like Sheol let us swallow them alive  
and whole, like those who go down to the Pit.
- 13 We shall find all kinds of costly things;  
we shall fill our houses with booty.

- 14 Throw in your lot among us;  
we will all have one purse”—  
15 my child, do not walk in their way,  
keep your foot from their paths;  
16 for their feet run to evil,  
and they hurry to shed blood.  
17 For in vain is the net baited  
while the bird is looking on;  
18 yet they lie in wait—to kill  
themselves!  
and set an ambush—for their own  
lives!  
19 Such is the end<sup>a</sup> of all who are  
greedy for gain;  
it takes away the life of its  
possessors.

### The Call of Wisdom

- 20 Wisdom cries out in the street;  
in the squares she raises her voice.  
21 At the busiest corner she cries out;  
at the entrance of the city gates  
she speaks:  
22 “How long, O simple ones, will you  
love being simple?  
How long will scoffers delight in their  
scoffing  
and fools hate knowledge?  
23 Give heed to my reproof;  
I will pour out my thoughts to you;  
I will make my words known to you.  
24 Because I have called and you  
refused,  
have stretched out my hand and  
no one heeded,  
25 and because you have ignored all  
my counsel  
and would have none of my  
reproof,  
26 I also will laugh at your calamity;  
I will mock when panic strikes you,  
27 when panic strikes you like a storm,  
and your calamity comes like a  
whirlwind,  
when distress and anguish come  
upon you.  
28 Then they will call upon me, but I  
will not answer;  
they will seek me diligently, but  
will not find me.  
29 Because they hated knowledge  
and did not choose the fear of the  
LORD,  
30 would have none of my counsel,  
and despised all my reproof,  
31 therefore they shall eat the fruit of  
their way  
and be sated with their own  
devices.  
32 For waywardness kills the simple,  
and the complacency of fools  
destroys them;  
33 but those who listen to me will be  
secure  
and will live at ease, without dread  
of disaster.”

### The Value of Wisdom

- 2** My child, if you accept my words  
and treasure up my commandments within you,  
2 making your ear attentive to wisdom  
and inclining your heart to understanding;  
3 if you indeed cry out for insight,  
and raise your voice for understanding;  
4 if you seek it like silver,  
and search for it as for hidden treasures—  
5 then you will understand the fear of the LORD  
and find the knowledge of God.  
6 For the LORD gives wisdom;  
from his mouth come knowledge and  
understanding;  
7 he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;  
he is a shield to those who walk blamelessly,

<sup>a</sup> Gk: Heb *are the ways*

## Read Proverbs 2

In a second instruction, Wisdom speaks of the openness and intelligence needed to acquire wisdom. She then announces some of the benefits of listening to her guidance. Chief among them are understanding and protection from evil. It is clear that these instructions are meant for young men, for the address is “my son,” and one of the warnings is against an “adulteress.”

**Reflect:** Unfortunately, many people in today’s society value material goods more than wisdom. Eventually they will discover the folly of such distorted priorities. Think of the times when you have acted in such a way.

**Pray:** Ask God to show you the value of true Wisdom and to grant you an appreciation for the blessings that will come from following her instruction.

**Act:** Call to mind the genuine satisfaction and deep peace you experienced when you made the right decisions.

- 8 guarding the paths of justice  
and preserving the way of his faithful ones.
- 9 Then you will understand righteousness and justice  
and equity, every good path;
- 10 for wisdom will come into your heart,  
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
- 11 prudence will watch over you;  
and understanding will guard you.
- 12 It will save you from the way of evil,  
from those who speak perversely,
- 13 who forsake the paths of uprightness  
to walk in the ways of darkness,
- 14 who rejoice in doing evil  
and delight in the perverseness of evil;
- 15 those whose paths are crooked,  
and who are devious in their ways.
- 16 You will be saved from the loose<sup>a</sup> woman,  
from the adulteress with her smooth words,
- 17 who forsakes the partner of her youth  
and forgets her sacred covenant;
- 18 for her way<sup>b</sup> leads down to death,  
and her paths to the shades;
- 19 those who go to her never come back,  
nor do they regain the paths of life.
- 20 Therefore walk in the way of the good,  
and keep to the paths of the just.
- 21 For the upright will abide in the land,  
and the innocent will remain in it;
- 22 but the wicked will be cut off from the land,  
and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.

### Admonition to Trust and Honor God

- 3** My child, do not forget my teaching,  
but let your heart keep my commandments;
- 2 for length of days and years of life  
and abundant welfare they will give you.
- 3 Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you;  
bind them around your neck,  
write them on the tablet of your heart.
- 4 So you will find favor and good repute  
in the sight of God and of people.
- 5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
and do not rely on your own insight.
- 6 In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make straight your paths.
- 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes;  
fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.
- 8 It will be a healing for your flesh  
and a refreshment for your body.

<sup>a</sup> Heb strange

<sup>b</sup> Cn: Heb house

### Read Proverbs 3

This chapter contains instruction on three topics. The first instruction describes the loyalty toward and trust in God that we should foster in our lives. The second outlines once again the blessings that will come from living wisely. The third provides directives for living peaceably with other people.

**Reflect:** A chief characteristic of real wisdom is the ability to live in right relationship with God, with oneself, and with other people. Living rightly with God is referred to as “fear of the Lord.” Living rightly with oneself is authentic maturity and with others is love of neighbor.

**Pray:** Since we often learn wisdom by trial-and-error, place yourself humbly before God and open yourself trustingly to the guiding insight that God will grant you. Ask for the courage needed to follow that insight.

**Act:** Practice the Golden Rule by doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.

- 9 Honor the LORD with your substance  
and with the first fruits of all your produce;  
10 then your barns will be filled with plenty,  
and your vats will be bursting with wine.  
11 My child, do not despise the LORD’s discipline  
or be weary of his reproof,  
12 for the LORD reproves the one he loves,  
as a father the son in whom he delights.

### The True Wealth

- 13 Happy are those who find wisdom,  
and those who get understanding,  
14 for her income is better than silver,  
and her revenue better than gold.  
15 She is more precious than jewels,  
and nothing you desire can compare with her.  
16 Long life is in her right hand;  
in her left hand are riches and honor.  
17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness,  
and all her paths are peace.  
18 She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;  
those who hold her fast are called happy.

### God’s Wisdom in Creation

- 19 The LORD by wisdom founded the earth;  
by understanding he established the heavens;  
20 by his knowledge the deeps broke open,  
and the clouds drop down the dew.

### The True Security

- 21 My child, do not let these escape from your sight:  
keep sound wisdom and prudence,  
22 and they will be life for your soul  
and adornment for your neck.  
23 Then you will walk on your way securely  
and your foot will not stumble.  
24 If you sit down,<sup>a</sup> you will not be afraid;  
when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.  
25 Do not be afraid of sudden panic,  
or of the storm that strikes the wicked;  
26 for the LORD will be your confidence  
and will keep your foot from being caught.  
27 Do not withhold good from those to whom it is  
due,<sup>b</sup>  
when it is in your power to do it.  
28 Do not say to your neighbor, “Go, and come  
again,  
tomorrow I will give it”—when you have it with  
you.

<sup>a</sup> Gk: Heb *lie down*

<sup>b</sup> Heb *from its owners*

- 29 Do not plan harm against your neighbor  
who lives trustingly beside you.
- 30 Do not quarrel with anyone without cause,  
when no harm has been done to you.
- 31 Do not envy the violent  
and do not choose any of their ways;
- 32 for the perverse are an abomination  
to the LORD,
- but the upright are in his confidence.
- 33 The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked,  
but he blesses the abode of the righteous.
- 34 Toward the scorners he is scornful,  
but to the humble he shows favor.
- 35 The wise will inherit honor,  
but stubborn fools, disgrace.

### Read Proverbs 4

A father or teacher instructs his students on the best way to acquire wisdom and on the differences between the manner of life of the wise person and that of the fool. A significant directive states: "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom." This is another way of saying: "Learn from experience."

**Reflect:** The wisdom tradition insists that it is reflection on actual life experience rather than the application of religious doctrine that leads to wisdom, and, therefore, to an understanding of God's will in our life. This very important teaching emphasizes the value of human experience itself.

**Pray:** Ask God to send you reliable guides who will share with you the wisdom they have gleaned from life.

**Act:** Go out of your way to show respect to those who have shared the wisdom they have learned from life. Let them know that you appreciate their insights.

### Parental Advice

- 4** Listen, children, to a father's instruction,  
and be attentive, that you may gain<sup>a</sup> insight;
- 2 for I give you good precepts:  
do not forsake my teaching.
- 3 When I was a son with my father,  
tender, and my mother's favorite,
- 4 he taught me, and said to me,  
"Let your heart hold fast my words;  
keep my commandments, and live.
- 5 Get wisdom; get insight: do not forget, nor turn  
away  
from the words of my mouth.
- 6 Do not forsake her, and she will keep you;  
love her, and she will guard you.
- 7 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom,  
and whatever else you get, get insight.
- 8 Prize her highly, and she will exalt you;  
she will honor you if you embrace her.
- 9 She will place on your head a fair garland;  
she will bestow on you a beautiful crown."

### Admonition to Keep to the Right Path

- 10 Hear, my child, and accept my words,  
that the years of your life may be many.
- 11 I have taught you the way of wisdom;  
I have led you in the paths of uprightness.
- 12 When you walk, your step will not be hampered;  
and if you run, you will not stumble.
- 13 Keep hold of instruction; do not let go;  
guard her, for she is your life.
- 14 Do not enter the path of the wicked,  
and do not walk in the way of evildoers.
- 15 Avoid it; do not go on it;  
turn away from it and pass on.
- 16 For they cannot sleep unless they have done  
wrong;  
they are robbed of sleep unless they have  
made someone stumble.

<sup>a</sup> Heb know

- 17 For they eat the bread of wickedness  
and drink the wine of violence.
- 18 But the path of the righteous is like  
the light of dawn,  
which shines brighter and brighter  
until full day.
- 19 The way of the wicked is like deep  
darkness;  
they do not know what they  
stumble over.
- 20 My child, be attentive to my words;  
incline your ear to my sayings.
- 21 Do not let them escape from your  
sight;  
keep them within your heart.
- 22 For they are life to those who find  
them,  
and healing to all their flesh.
- 23 Keep your heart with all vigilance,  
for from it flow the springs of life.
- 24 Put away from you crooked speech,  
and put devious talk far from you.
- 25 Let your eyes look directly forward,  
and your gaze be straight before  
you.
- 26 Keep straight the path of your feet,  
and all your ways will be sure.
- 27 Do not swerve to the right or to the  
left;  
turn your foot away from evil.

### Read Proverbs 5

The teacher warns against various forms of sexual impropriety, namely, interacting with loose women or those who are not constrained by the restrictions of patriarchal society; marital infidelity; and disregard for the marriage bonds of others. These directives both touch on matters of morality and safeguard the integrity of the kinship character of the society.

**Reflect:** Sexual intimacy not only affects the depths of an individual's identity, but it also establishes a bond that has an effect on society itself. Too frequently the sexual promiscuity of today's society distorts both these factors.

**Pray:** Thank God for the gift of human sexuality with its energy and joys, and pray for the grace you need to exercise this power in appropriate and life-giving ways.

**Act:** Discover ways to channel your sexual energy into productive and creative outlets that enhance your own personality and enrich the lives of others.

### Warning against Impurity and Infidelity

- 5** My child, be attentive to my wisdom;  
incline your ear to my understanding,  
2 so that you may hold on to prudence,  
and your lips may guard knowledge.
- 3 For the lips of a loose<sup>a</sup> woman drip honey,  
and her speech is smoother than oil;  
4 but in the end she is bitter as wormwood,  
sharp as a two-edged sword.
- 5 Her feet go down to death;  
her steps follow the path to Sheol.
- 6 She does not keep straight to the path of life;  
her ways wander, and she does not know it.
- 7 And now, my child,<sup>b</sup> listen to me,  
and do not depart from the words of my mouth.
- 8 Keep your way far from her,  
and do not go near the door of her house;  
9 or you will give your honor to others,  
and your years to the merciless,
- 10 and strangers will take their fill of your wealth,  
and your labors will go to the house of an alien;  
11 and at the end of your life you will groan,  
when your flesh and body are consumed,  
12 and you say, "Oh, how I hated discipline,  
and my heart despised reproof!
- 13 I did not listen to the voice of my teachers  
or incline my ear to my instructors.
- 14 Now I am at the point of utter ruin  
in the public assembly."
- 15 Drink water from your own cistern,  
flowing water from your own well.
- 16 Should your springs be scattered abroad,  
streams of water in the streets?

<sup>a</sup> Heb strange

<sup>b</sup> Gk Vg: Heb children

- 17 Let them be for yourself alone,  
and not for sharing with strangers.
- 18 Let your fountain be blessed,  
and rejoice in the wife of your  
youth,  
19 a lovely deer, a graceful doe.  
May her breasts satisfy you at all  
times;  
may you be intoxicated always by  
her love.
- 20 Why should you be intoxicated, my  
son, by another woman  
and embrace the bosom of an  
adulteress?
- 21 For human ways are under the eyes  
of the LORD,  
and he examines all their paths.
- 22 The iniquities of the wicked ensnare  
them,  
and they are caught in the toils of  
their sin.
- 23 They die for lack of discipline,  
and because of their great folly  
they are lost.

### Read Proverbs 6

The teacher issues a series of warnings. The student is counseled not to offer himself as surety for another's loan; not to succumb to sloth, but to learn industry from the assiduous ant; not to emulate dishonest people; not to misuse his bodily senses; not to fall victim to adultery.

**Reflect:** The warnings posed in this chapter are as relevant today as they were at the time of the writing of the book, because the evil inclinations they condemn plague women and men of every age and every culture. It is doubly hard to live a life of integrity when society seems to promote evil inclinations.

**Pray:** Be constantly vigilant lest you fall victim to your own evil inclinations, and ask God for the strength to stand firm against them.

**Act:** Use these admonitions to examine your own conscience.

### Practical Admonitions

- 6** My child, if you have given your pledge to your  
neighbor,  
if you have bound yourself to another,<sup>a</sup>  
2 you are snared by the utterance of your lips,<sup>b</sup>  
caught by the words of your mouth.  
3 So do this, my child, and save yourself,  
for you have come into your neighbor's power:  
go, hurry,<sup>c</sup> and plead with your neighbor.  
4 Give your eyes no sleep  
and your eyelids no slumber;  
5 save yourself like a gazelle from the hunter,<sup>d</sup>  
like a bird from the hand of the fowler.
- 6 Go to the ant, you lazybones;  
consider its ways, and be wise.  
7 Without having any chief  
or officer or ruler,  
8 it prepares its food in summer,  
and gathers its sustenance in harvest.  
9 How long will you lie there, O lazybones?  
When will you rise from your sleep?  
10 A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest,  
11 and poverty will come upon you like a robber,  
and want, like an armed warrior.
- 12 A scoundrel and a villain  
goes around with crooked speech,  
13 winking the eyes, shuffling the feet,  
pointing the fingers,  
14 with perverted mind devising evil,  
continually sowing discord;  
15 on such a one calamity will descend suddenly;  
in a moment, damage beyond repair.
- 16 There are six things that the LORD hates,  
seven that are an abomination to him:

<sup>a</sup> Or a stranger

<sup>b</sup> Cn Compare Gk Syr: Heb *the words of your mouth*

<sup>c</sup> Or *humble yourself*

<sup>d</sup> Cn: Heb *from the hand*



- 17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue,  
and hands that shed innocent  
blood,  
18 a heart that devises wicked plans,  
feet that hurry to run to evil,  
19 a lying witness who testifies falsely,  
and one who sows discord in a  
family.
- 20 My child, keep your father's  
commandment,  
and do not forsake your mother's  
teaching.  
21 Bind them upon your heart always;  
tie them around your neck.  
22 When you walk, they<sup>a</sup> will lead you;  
when you lie down, they<sup>a</sup> will  
watch over you;  
and when you awake, they<sup>a</sup> will  
talk with you.
- 23 For the commandment is a lamp  
and the teaching a light,  
and the reproofs of discipline are  
the way of life,  
24 to preserve you from the wife of  
another,<sup>b</sup>  
from the smooth tongue of the  
adulteress.
- 25 Do not desire her beauty in your  
heart,  
and do not let her capture you  
with her eyelashes;
- 26 for a prostitute's fee is only a loaf of  
bread,<sup>c</sup>  
but the wife of another stalks a  
man's very life.  
27 Can fire be carried in the bosom  
without burning one's clothes?  
28 Or can one walk on hot coals  
without scorching the feet?  
29 So is he who sleeps with his  
neighbor's wife;  
no one who touches her will go  
unpunished.  
30 Thieves are not despised who steal  
only  
to satisfy their appetite when they  
are hungry.  
31 Yet if they are caught, they will pay  
sevenfold;  
they will forfeit all the goods of  
their house.  
32 But he who commits adultery has no  
sense;  
he who does it destroys himself.  
33 He will get wounds and dishonor,  
and his disgrace will not be wiped  
away.  
34 For jealousy arouses a husband's fury,  
and he shows no restraint when  
he takes revenge.  
35 He will accept no compensation,  
and refuses a bribe no matter how  
great.

### The False Attractions of Adultery

- 7** My child, keep my words  
and store up my commandments with you;  
2 keep my commandments and live,  
keep my teachings as the apple of your eye;  
3 bind them on your fingers,  
write them on the tablet of your heart.  
4 Say to wisdom, "You are my sister,"  
and call insight your intimate friend,  
5 that they may keep you from the loose<sup>d</sup> woman,  
from the adulteress with her smooth words.
- 6 For at the window of my house  
I looked out through my lattice,  
7 and I saw among the simple ones,  
I observed among the youths,  
a young man without sense,

<sup>a</sup> Heb *it*

<sup>b</sup> Gk: MT *the evil woman*

<sup>c</sup> Cn Compare Gk Syr Vg Tg; Heb *for  
because of a harlot to a piece of bread*

<sup>d</sup> Heb *strange*



### Read Proverbs 7

In this warning against adultery, the teacher describes the wiles of the seductive woman. She entices the young man by means of alluring clothing, luxurious surroundings, abundant, delicious food and drink, and the promise of fulfillment of all of his desires. She is experienced in her beguiling ways, while the youth is innocent and inexperienced.

**Reflect:** We probably know from our own experience that it is easy to be taken in by the charms of another. This is particularly true in matters of the heart. Often emotion and sexual attraction lead us down paths we might not otherwise follow.

**Pray:** Ask God for the insight needed to understand your very natural sexual attractions and for the wisdom to respond to them in ways that are appropriate.

**Act:** Examine your sexual inclinations carefully. Admit when they are motivated purely by selfish desire and not love for another.

- 8 passing along the street near her corner,  
taking the road to her house
- 9 in the twilight, in the evening,  
at the time of night and darkness.
- 10 Then a woman comes toward him,  
decked out like a prostitute, wily of heart.<sup>a</sup>
- 11 She is loud and wayward;  
her feet do not stay at home;
- 12 now in the street, now in the squares,  
and at every corner she lies in wait.
- 13 She seizes him and kisses him,  
and with impudent face she says to him:
- 14 "I had to offer sacrifices,  
and today I have paid my vows;
- 15 so now I have come out to meet you,  
to seek you eagerly, and I have found you!
- 16 I have decked my couch with coverings,  
colored spreads of Egyptian linen;
- 17 I have perfumed my bed with myrrh,  
aloes, and cinnamon.
- 18 Come, let us take our fill of love until morning;  
let us delight ourselves with love.
- 19 For my husband is not at home;  
he has gone on a long journey.
- 20 He took a bag of money with him;  
he will not come home until full moon."
- 21 With much seductive speech she persuades  
him;  
with her smooth talk she compels him.
- 22 Right away he follows her,  
and goes like an ox to the slaughter,  
or bounds like a stag toward the trap<sup>b</sup>
- 23 until an arrow pierces its entrails.  
He is like a bird rushing into a snare,  
not knowing that it will cost him his life.
- 24 And now, my children, listen to me,  
and be attentive to the words of my mouth.
- 25 Do not let your hearts turn aside to her ways;  
do not stray into her paths.
- 26 For many are those she has laid low,  
and numerous are her victims.
- 27 Her house is the way to Sheol,  
going down to the chambers of death.

### The Gifts of Wisdom

- 8 Does not wisdom call,  
and does not understanding raise her voice?
- 2 On the heights, beside the way,  
at the crossroads she takes her stand;

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Cn Compare Gk: Meaning of Heb uncertain

### Read Proverbs 8

This chapter contains a description of Wisdom personified as a woman. It opens with her inviting inexperienced youth to enter the place where she dwells and to feast on the riches she offers. Her presence at the beginning and the role she played in creation are described. Having established her primordial importance, now the chapter encourages adherence to her instruction.

**Reflect:** We can now contrast the loose woman (Dame Folly) and Woman Wisdom. Though they both hold out hope for happiness and fulfillment to the inexperienced, only Wisdom is able to make good on her promises, because she came forth from God. Folly leads to disaster.

**Pray:** Praise God for the beauty and order evident in creation, and ask God for the grace to be able to distinguish between true Wisdom and Folly.

**Act:** Reflect on your own experience. Take note of the decisions that have led to peace and well-being.

- 3 beside the gates in front of the town,  
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:  
4 “To you, O people, I call,  
and my cry is to all that live.  
5 O simple ones, learn prudence;  
acquire intelligence, you who lack it.  
6 Hear, for I will speak noble things,  
and from my lips will come what is right;  
7 for my mouth will utter truth;  
wickedness is an abomination to my lips.  
8 All the words of my mouth are righteous;  
there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.  
9 They are all straight to one who understands  
and right to those who find knowledge.  
10 Take my instruction instead of silver,  
and knowledge rather than choice gold;  
11 for wisdom is better than jewels,  
and all that you may desire cannot compare  
with her.  
12 I, wisdom, live with prudence,<sup>a</sup>  
and I attain knowledge and discretion.  
13 The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.  
Pride and arrogance and the way of evil  
and perverted speech I hate.  
14 I have good advice and sound wisdom;  
I have insight, I have strength.  
15 By me kings reign,  
and rulers decree what is just;  
16 by me rulers rule,  
and nobles, all who govern rightly.  
17 I love those who love me,  
and those who seek me diligently find me.  
18 Riches and honor are with me,  
enduring wealth and prosperity.  
19 My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,  
and my yield than choice silver.  
20 I walk in the way of righteousness,  
along the paths of justice,  
21 endowing with wealth those who love me,  
and filling their treasuries.

### Wisdom’s Part in Creation

- 22 The LORD created me at the beginning<sup>b</sup> of his  
work,<sup>c</sup>  
the first of his acts of long ago.  
23 Ages ago I was set up,  
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.  
24 When there were no depths I was brought forth,  
when there were no springs abounding with  
water.  
25 Before the mountains had been shaped,

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Or *me as the beginning*

<sup>c</sup> Heb way

before the hills, I was brought forth—  
 26 when he had not yet made earth and  
 fields,<sup>a</sup>  
 or the world's first bits of soil.  
 27 When he established the heavens, I  
 was there,  
 when he drew a circle on the face  
 of the deep,  
 28 when he made firm the skies above,  
 when he established the fountains  
 of the deep,  
 29 when he assigned to the sea its limit,  
 so that the waters might not  
 transgress his command,  
 when he marked out the foundations  
 of the earth,  
 30 then I was beside him, like a  
 master worker;<sup>b</sup>

and I was daily his<sup>c</sup> delight,  
 rejoicing before him always,  
 31 rejoicing in his inhabited world  
 and delighting in the human race.  
 32 “And now, my children, listen to me:  
 happy are those who keep my  
 ways.  
 33 Hear instruction and be wise,  
 and do not neglect it.  
 34 Happy is the one who listens to me,  
 watching daily at my gates,  
 waiting beside my doors.  
 35 For whoever finds me finds life  
 and obtains favor from the LORD;  
 36 but those who miss me injure  
 themselves;  
 all who hate me love death.”

### Read Proverbs 9

The contrast between Woman Wisdom and Dame Folly continues in this comparison of the banquet that each sets out and to which the inexperienced are invited. Wisdom lays out rich wine and succulent meat; Folly offers stolen bread and water. Separating the description of these banquets are adages describing the wise person's willingness and the fool's unwillingness to be taught.

**Reflect:** The image of a banquet is well chosen. Like food and drink that nourish the body, Wisdom enlivens the person who partakes of it. Conversely, Foolishness offers food and drink that sicken the body.

**Pray:** Thank God for the many opportunities placed before you each day, and pray that you will make choices that will lead to the fulfillment brought by wisdom rather than the destruction brought by folly.

**Act:** Think before you decide on a matter. Don't simply choose what appears to be most appealing.

### Wisdom's Feast

**9** Wisdom has built her house,  
 she has hewn her seven pillars.  
 2 She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed  
 her wine,  
 she has also set her table.  
 3 She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls  
 from the highest places in the town,  
 4 “You that are simple, turn in here!”  
 To those without sense she says,  
 5 “Come, eat of my bread  
 and drink of the wine I have mixed.  
 6 Lay aside immaturity,<sup>d</sup> and live,  
 and walk in the way of insight.”

### General Maxims

7 Whoever corrects a scoffer wins abuse;  
 whoever rebukes the wicked gets hurt.  
 8 A scoffer who is rebuked will only hate you;  
 the wise, when rebuked, will love you.  
 9 Give instruction<sup>e</sup> to the wise, and they will  
 become wiser still;  
 teach the righteous and they will gain in  
 learning.  
 10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,  
 and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.  
 11 For by me your days will be multiplied,  
 and years will be added to your life.  
 12 If you are wise, you are wise for yourself;  
 if you scoff, you alone will bear it.

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Another reading is *little child*

<sup>c</sup> Gk: Heb lacks *his*

<sup>d</sup> Or *simpleness*

<sup>e</sup> Heb lacks *instruction*

### Folly's Invitation and Promise

- 13 The foolish woman is loud;  
she is ignorant and knows nothing.
- 14 She sits at the door of her house,  
on a seat at the high places of the  
town,
- 15 calling to those who pass by,  
who are going straight on their way,
- 16 "You who are simple, turn in here!"  
And to those without sense she says,
- 17 "Stolen water is sweet,  
and bread eaten in secret is  
pleasant."
- 18 But they do not know that the dead<sup>a</sup>  
are there,  
that her guests are in the depths  
of Sheol.

### Read Proverbs 10

The entire book of Proverbs is a collection of collections of wise sayings. The first identifiable collection is called the Proverbs of Solomon. It consists of two-line proverbs characterized by antithetic parallelism (the thought of the first line is expressed in contrast in the second line). The primary contrast in this first chapter is between the wise person and the fool.

**Reflect:** Upon reflection, we will have to admit that the state in which we find ourselves is frequently the consequence of the decisions we have made. In other words, to a large extent, we determine our own good or bad fortune.

**Pray:** As you stand before God in prayer, you must take responsibility for many of the circumstances of your life.

**Act:** If you are not happy with the way your life is unfolding, do what you can to change your behavior.

### Wise Sayings of Solomon

**10** The proverbs of Solomon.

- A wise child makes a glad father,  
but a foolish child is a mother's grief.
- 2 Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit,  
but righteousness delivers from death.
- 3 The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry,  
but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.
- 4 A slack hand causes poverty,  
but the hand of the diligent makes rich.
- 5 A child who gathers in summer is prudent,  
but a child who sleeps in harvest brings shame.
- 6 Blessings are on the head of the righteous,  
but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.
- 7 The memory of the righteous is a blessing,  
but the name of the wicked will rot.
- 8 The wise of heart will heed commandments,  
but a babbling fool will come to ruin.
- 9 Whoever walks in integrity walks securely,  
but whoever follows perverse ways will be  
found out.
- 10 Whoever winks the eye causes trouble,  
but the one who rebukes boldly makes peace.<sup>b</sup>
- 11 The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,  
but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.
- 12 Hatred stirs up strife,  
but love covers all offenses.
- 13 On the lips of one who has understanding  
wisdom is found,  
but a rod is for the back of one who lacks  
sense.
- 14 The wise lay up knowledge,  
but the babbling of a fool brings ruin near.
- 15 The wealth of the rich is their fortress;  
the poverty of the poor is their ruin.
- 16 The wage of the righteous leads to life,  
the gain of the wicked to sin.
- 17 Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life,  
but one who rejects a rebuke goes astray.

<sup>a</sup> Heb shades

<sup>b</sup> Gk: Heb but a babbling fool will come to ruin

- 18 Lying lips conceal hatred,  
and whoever utters slander is a fool.
- 19 When words are many, transgression  
is not lacking,  
but the prudent are restrained in  
speech.
- 20 The tongue of the righteous is  
choice silver;  
the mind of the wicked is of little  
worth.
- 21 The lips of the righteous feed many,  
but fools die for lack of sense.
- 22 The blessing of the LORD makes rich,  
and he adds no sorrow with it.<sup>a</sup>
- 23 Doing wrong is like sport to a fool,  
but wise conduct is pleasure to a  
person of understanding.
- 24 What the wicked dread will come  
upon them,  
but the desire of the righteous will  
be granted.
- 25 When the tempest passes, the  
wicked are no more,  
but the righteous are established  
forever.
- 26 Like vinegar to the teeth, and smoke  
to the eyes,  
so are the lazy to their employers.
- 27 The fear of the LORD prolongs life,  
but the years of the wicked will be  
short.
- 28 The hope of the righteous ends in  
gladness,  
but the expectation of the wicked  
comes to nothing.
- 29 The way of the LORD is a stronghold  
for the upright,  
but destruction for evildoers.
- 30 The righteous will never be  
removed,  
but the wicked will not remain in  
the land.
- 31 The mouth of the righteous brings  
forth wisdom,  
but the perverse tongue will be  
cut off.
- 32 The lips of the righteous know what  
is acceptable,  
but the mouth of the wicked what  
is perverse.

- 11** A false balance is an abomination to the LORD,  
but an accurate weight is his delight.
- 2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace;  
but wisdom is with the humble.
- 3 The integrity of the upright guides them,  
but the crookedness of the treacherous  
destroys them.
- 4 Riches do not profit in the day of wrath,  
but righteousness delivers from death.
- 5 The righteousness of the blameless keeps their  
ways straight,  
but the wicked fall by their own wickedness.
- 6 The righteousness of the upright saves them,  
but the treacherous are taken captive by their  
schemes.
- 7 When the wicked die, their hope perishes,  
and the expectation of the godless comes to  
nothing.
- 8 The righteous are delivered from trouble,  
and the wicked get into it instead.
- 9 With their mouths the godless would destroy  
their neighbors,  
but by knowledge the righteous are delivered.
- 10 When it goes well with the righteous, the city  
rejoices;

<sup>a</sup> Or and toil adds nothing to it

### Read Proverbs 11

Though all antithetic proverbs contrast the lot of the righteous with that of the wicked, the proverbs in this chapter seem to concentrate on various forms of honesty and dishonesty, along with their social consequences. These proverbs remind us that we do not live in isolation from other people.

**Reflect:** Those who live in a society that promotes individualism may forget that the consequences of their actions affect other people as well as themselves. Sometimes our personal decisions enrich others, and sometimes they impoverish them. We must take our share of responsibility for the general state of society.

**Pray:** Enlarge the scope of your prayer. Don't just pray for yourself and your loved ones, but include the concerns of people whom you may not know but who are also affected by your decisions.

**Act:** Be conscious of the consequences of your actions today in the lives of others.

and when the wicked perish, there is jubilation.

- 11 By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.
- 12 Whoever belittles another lacks sense, but an intelligent person remains silent.
- 13 A gossip goes about telling secrets, but one who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a confidence.
- 14 Where there is no guidance, a nation<sup>a</sup> falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.
- 15 To guarantee loans for a stranger brings trouble, but there is safety in refusing to do so.
- 16 A gracious woman gets honor, but she who hates virtue is covered with shame.<sup>b</sup>  
The timid become destitute,<sup>c</sup>  
but the aggressive gain riches.
- 17 Those who are kind reward themselves, but the cruel do themselves harm.
- 18 The wicked earn no real gain, but those who sow righteousness get a true reward.
- 19 Whoever is steadfast in righteousness will live, but whoever pursues evil will die.
- 20 Crooked minds are an abomination to the LORD, but those of blameless ways are his delight.
- 21 Be assured, the wicked will not go unpunished, but those who are righteous will escape.
- 22 Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without good sense.
- 23 The desire of the righteous ends only in good; the expectation of the wicked in wrath.
- 24 Some give freely, yet grow all the richer; others withhold what is due, and only suffer want.
- 25 A generous person will be enriched, and one who gives water will get water.
- 26 The people curse those who hold back grain, but a blessing is on the head of those who sell it.
- 27 Whoever diligently seeks good seeks favor, but evil comes to the one who searches for it.
- 28 Those who trust in their riches will wither,<sup>d</sup> but the righteous will flourish like green leaves.
- 29 Those who trouble their households will inherit wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise.
- 30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, but violence<sup>e</sup> takes lives away.
- 31 If the righteous are repaid on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!

<sup>a</sup> Or an army

<sup>b</sup> Compare Gk Syr: Heb lacks *but she...shame*

<sup>c</sup> Gk: Heb lacks *The timid...destitute*

<sup>d</sup> Cn: Heb *fall*

<sup>e</sup> Cn Compare Gk Syr: Heb a *wise man*

## Read Proverbs 12

Many of the proverbs in this chapter have to do with some aspect of speech. They counsel us to speak honestly, to guard our words lest we harm others with what we say, to avoid endless and thoughtless gossip, and to be cautious in accepting the words of others.

**Reflect:** We may not always be aware of the power that our words possess. In many ways our words may be more influential than our actions. Our words present a picture of ourselves, of others, or of some aspect of the world. For this reason, our words should always be truthful and sincere, building up rather than tearing down.

**Pray:** Ask God for the insight to perceive circumstances as they really are and for the integrity to represent them honestly.

**Act:** Examine your manner of speech. Do your words really convey the truth as you see it?

- 12** Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge,  
but those who hate to be rebuked are stupid.
- 2** The good obtain favor from the LORD,  
but those who devise evil he condemns.
- 3** No one finds security by wickedness,  
but the root of the righteous will never be moved.
- 4** A good wife is the crown of her husband,  
but she who brings shame is like rotteness in his bones.
- 5** The thoughts of the righteous are just;  
the advice of the wicked is treacherous.
- 6** The words of the wicked are a deadly ambush,  
but the speech of the upright delivers them.
- 7** The wicked are overthrown and are no more,  
but the house of the righteous will stand.
- 8** One is commended for good sense,  
but a perverse mind is despised.
- 9** Better to be despised and have a servant,  
than to be self-important and lack food.
- 10** The righteous know the needs of their animals,  
but the mercy of the wicked is cruel.
- 11** Those who till their land will have plenty of food,  
but those who follow worthless pursuits have no sense.
- 12** The wicked covet the proceeds of wickedness,<sup>a</sup>  
but the root of the righteous bears fruit.
- 13** The evil are ensnared by the transgression of their lips,  
but the righteous escape from trouble.
- 14** From the fruit of the mouth one is filled with good things,  
and manual labor has its reward.
- 15** Fools think their own way is right,  
but the wise listen to advice.
- 16** Fools show their anger at once,  
but the prudent ignore an insult.
- 17** Whoever speaks the truth gives honest evidence,  
but a false witness speaks deceitfully.
- 18** Rash words are like sword thrusts,  
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.
- 19** Truthful lips endure forever,  
but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.
- 20** Deceit is in the mind of those who plan evil,  
but those who counsel peace have joy.
- 21** No harm happens to the righteous,  
but the wicked are filled with trouble.
- 22** Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD,  
but those who act faithfully are his delight.
- 23** One who is clever conceals knowledge,  
but the mind of a fool<sup>b</sup> broadcasts folly.

<sup>a</sup> Or covet the catch of the wicked

<sup>b</sup> Heb the heart of fools



- 24 The hand of the diligent will rule,  
while the lazy will be put to forced  
labor.
- 25 Anxiety weighs down the human  
heart,  
but a good word cheers it up.
- 26 The righteous gives good advice to  
friends,<sup>a</sup>

- but the way of the wicked leads  
astray.
- 27 The lazy do not roast<sup>b</sup> their game,  
but the diligent obtain precious  
wealth.<sup>b</sup>
- 28 In the path of righteousness there is  
life,  
in walking its path there is no death.

**Read Proverbs 13**

In this chapter, the contrast between wealth and poverty is a prominent theme. It is a variation on the theme of retribution, namely, that the good or wise person will experience good fortune, while misfortune will befall the wicked or fool. The lot of both is contrasted in the antithetic parallelism of the proverbs.

**Reflect:** The applicability of the theory of retribution, though found in much of our theology, both traditional and contemporary, is still questioned today. It may not always serve as an adequate explanation for one's lot in life, but it certainly can function as an incentive to righteous living.

**Pray:** Trust that you will experience the providence of God, and that you will be able to enjoy what you need to live a life of integrity and peace.

**Act:** Be grateful for the prosperity that you enjoy and share it with those less fortunate.

- 13** A wise child loves discipline,<sup>c</sup>  
but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.
- 2 From the fruit of their words good persons eat  
good things,  
but the desire of the treacherous is for  
wrongdoing.
  - 3 Those who guard their mouths preserve their  
lives;  
those who open wide their lips come to ruin.
  - 4 The appetite of the lazy craves, and gets nothing,  
while the appetite of the diligent is richly  
supplied.
  - 5 The righteous hate falsehood,  
but the wicked act shamefully and  
disgracefully.
  - 6 Righteousness guards one whose way is upright,  
but sin overthrows the wicked.
  - 7 Some pretend to be rich, yet have nothing;  
others pretend to be poor, yet have great  
wealth.
  - 8 Wealth is a ransom for a person's life,  
but the poor get no threats.
  - 9 The light of the righteous rejoices,  
but the lamp of the wicked goes out.
  - 10 By insolence the heedless make strife,  
but wisdom is with those who take advice.
  - 11 Wealth hastily gotten<sup>d</sup> will dwindle,  
but those who gather little by little will  
increase it.
  - 12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick,  
but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.
  - 13 Those who despise the word bring destruction on  
themselves,  
but those who respect the commandment will  
be rewarded.
  - 14 The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life,  
so that one may avoid the snares of death.
  - 15 Good sense wins favor,  
but the way of the faithless is their ruin.<sup>e</sup>
  - 16 The clever do all things intelligently,  
but the fool displays folly.

<sup>a</sup> Syr: Meaning of Heb uncertain  
<sup>b</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain  
<sup>c</sup> Cn: Heb *A wise child the discipline of his father*  
<sup>d</sup> Gk Vg: Heb *from vanity*  
<sup>e</sup> Cn Compare Gk Syr Vg Tg: Heb *is enduring*

- 17 A bad messenger brings trouble,  
but a faithful envoy, healing.
- 18 Poverty and disgrace are for the one  
who ignores instruction,  
but one who heeds reproof is  
honored.
- 19 A desire realized is sweet to the soul,  
but to turn away from evil is an  
abomination to fools.
- 20 Whoever walks with the wise  
becomes wise,  
but the companion of fools suffers  
harm.
- 21 Misfortune pursues sinners,  
but prosperity rewards the  
righteous.
- 22 The good leave an inheritance to  
their children's children,  
but the sinner's wealth is laid up  
for the righteous.
- 23 The field of the poor may yield  
much food,  
but it is swept away through  
injustice.
- 24 Those who spare the rod hate their  
children,  
but those who love them are  
diligent to discipline them.
- 25 The righteous have enough to satisfy  
their appetite,  
but the belly of the wicked is  
empty.

### Read Proverbs 14

Inner dispositions are what distinguish the wise person from the fool. They might be dispositions of heart or attitudes of the mind. The wise person is one who fears the Lord, while the fool is sometimes arrogant. The wise person is sometimes called shrewd; the fool is often reckless.

**Reflect:** The wise person is the one who fears the Lord. Fear of the Lord is more an attitude of reverence and respect than one of dread and terror. It recognizes the holiness and might of God and the insignificance of human beings. It is what makes a wise person humble. It is the foremost mark of wisdom.

**Pray:** Praise God for the divine power and might that you detect in the world and for God's graciousness reflected in the lives of others.

**Act:** Spend time with and learn from someone you consider truly wise.

- 14** The wise woman<sup>a</sup> builds her house,  
but the foolish tears it down with her own  
hands.
- 2 Those who walk uprightly fear the LORD,  
but one who is devious in conduct despises  
him.
- 3 The talk of fools is a rod for their backs,<sup>b</sup>  
but the lips of the wise preserve them.
- 4 Where there are no oxen, there is no grain;  
abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.
- 5 A faithful witness does not lie,  
but a false witness breathes out lies.
- 6 A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain,  
but knowledge is easy for one who  
understands.
- 7 Leave the presence of a fool,  
for there you do not find words of knowledge.
- 8 It is the wisdom of the clever to understand  
where they go,  
but the folly of fools misleads.
- 9 Fools mock at the guilt offering,<sup>c</sup>  
but the upright enjoy God's favor.
- 10 The heart knows its own bitterness,  
and no stranger shares its joy.
- 11 The house of the wicked is destroyed,  
but the tent of the upright flourishes.
- 12 There is a way that seems right to a person,  
but its end is the way to death.<sup>d</sup>
- 13 Even in laughter the heart is sad,  
and the end of joy is grief.
- 14 The perverse get what their ways deserve,  
and the good, what their deeds deserve.<sup>e</sup>
- 15 The simple believe everything,  
but the clever consider their steps.

<sup>a</sup> Heb *Wisdom of women*

<sup>b</sup> Cn: Heb *a rod of pride*

<sup>c</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>d</sup> Heb *ways of death*

<sup>e</sup> Cn: Heb *from upon him*

- 16 The wise are cautious and turn away from evil,  
but the fool throws off restraint and is careless.
- 17 One who is quick-tempered acts foolishly,  
and the schemer is hated.
- 18 The simple are adorned with<sup>a</sup> folly,  
but the clever are crowned with knowledge.
- 19 The evil bow down before the good,  
the wicked at the gates of the righteous.
- 20 The poor are disliked even by their neighbors,  
but the rich have many friends.
- 21 Those who despise their neighbors are sinners,  
but happy are those who are kind to the poor.
- 22 Do they not err that plan evil?  
Those who plan good find loyalty and faithfulness.
- 23 In all toil there is profit,  
but mere talk leads only to poverty.
- 24 The crown of the wise is their wisdom,<sup>b</sup>  
but folly is the garland<sup>c</sup> of fools.
- 25 A truthful witness saves lives,  
but one who utters lies is a betrayer.
- 26 In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence,

- and one's children will have a refuge.
- 27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,  
so that one may avoid the snares of death.
- 28 The glory of a king is a multitude of people;  
without people a prince is ruined.
- 29 Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding,  
but one who has a hasty temper exalts folly.
- 30 A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh,  
but passion makes the bones rot.
- 31 Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker,  
but those who are kind to the needy honor him.
- 32 The wicked are overthrown by their evildoing,  
but the righteous find a refuge in their integrity.<sup>d</sup>
- 33 Wisdom is at home in the mind of one who has understanding,  
but it is not<sup>e</sup> known in the heart of fools.
- 34 Righteousness exalts a nation,  
but sin is a reproach to any people.
- 35 A servant who deals wisely has the king's favor,  
but his wrath falls on one who acts shamefully.

**15** A soft answer turns away wrath,  
but a harsh word stirs up anger.

- 2 The tongue of the wise dispenses knowledge,<sup>f</sup>  
but the mouths of fools pour out folly.
- 3 The eyes of the LORD are in every place,  
keeping watch on the evil and the good.
- 4 A gentle tongue is a tree of life,  
but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.
- 5 A fool despises a parent's instruction,  
but the one who heeds admonition is prudent.
- 6 In the house of the righteous there is much treasure,  
but trouble befalls the income of the wicked.
- 7 The lips of the wise spread knowledge;  
not so the minds of fools.
- 8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,  
but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

<sup>a</sup> Or *inherit*  
<sup>b</sup> Cn Compare Gk: Heb *riches*  
<sup>c</sup> Cn: Heb *is the folly*  
<sup>d</sup> Gk Syr: Heb *in their death*  
<sup>e</sup> Gk Syr: Heb *lacks not*  
<sup>f</sup> Cn: Heb *makes knowledge good*

### Read Proverbs 15

This last collection of antithetic comparisons includes various proverbs that contrast the behavior of the wise with that of the foolish. In several places this wisdom language is replaced by language that contains moral judgment: righteous versus wicked. The notion of “path” or “way,” another much-used wisdom concept, is also found. It suggests that there are only two possible courses of action, that of the wise/righteous or that of the foolish/wicked.

**Reflect:** Though wisdom classifications are generally accurate descriptions of human behavior, we must allow for exceptions. It has been said that wise/righteous people do sometimes make mistakes, and on occasion foolish/wicked people act honorably.

**Pray:** Pray for the grace to develop habits of behavior that will lead you along the path of wisdom and righteousness.

**Act:** When faced with important decisions, take time to weigh all of the circumstances so that you might make the best choice possible.

- 9 The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,  
but he loves the one who pursues righteousness.
- 10 There is severe discipline for one who forsakes the way,  
but one who hates a rebuke will die.
- 11 Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD,  
how much more human hearts!
- 12 Scoffers do not like to be rebuked;  
they will not go to the wise.
- 13 A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance,  
but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken.
- 14 The mind of one who has understanding seeks knowledge,  
but the mouths of fools feed on folly.
- 15 All the days of the poor are hard,  
but a cheerful heart has a continual feast.
- 16 Better is a little with the fear of the LORD  
than great treasure and trouble with it.
- 17 Better is a dinner of vegetables where love is  
than a fattened ox and hatred with it.
- 18 Those who are hot-tempered stir up strife,  
but those who are slow to anger calm contention.
- 19 The way of the lazy is overgrown with thorns,  
but the path of the upright is a level highway.
- 20 A wise child makes a glad father,  
but the foolish despise their mothers.
- 21 Folly is a joy to one who has no sense,  
but a person of understanding walks straight ahead.
- 22 Without counsel, plans go wrong,  
but with many advisers they succeed.
- 23 To make an apt answer is a joy to anyone,  
and a word in season, how good it is!
- 24 For the wise the path of life leads upward,  
in order to avoid Sheol below.
- 25 The LORD tears down the house of the proud,  
but maintains the widow’s boundaries.
- 26 Evil plans are an abomination to the LORD,  
but gracious words are pure.
- 27 Those who are greedy for unjust gain make  
trouble for their households,  
but those who hate bribes will live.
- 28 The mind of the righteous ponders how to answer,  
but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil.
- 29 The LORD is far from the wicked,  
but he hears the prayer of the righteous.
- 30 The light of the eyes rejoices the heart,  
and good news refreshes the body.

- 31 The ear that heeds wholesome  
admonition  
will lodge among the wise.
- 32 Those who ignore instruction  
despise themselves,

- but those who heed admonition  
gain understanding.
- 33 The fear of the LORD is instruction in  
wisdom,  
and humility goes before honor.

**Read Proverbs 16**

Though wisdom is gleaned from reflection on human experience, direction for right behavior is often provided by the religious tradition. Many proverbs in this chapter describe the role played by the Lord. Other proverbs emphasize the importance of respect for political authority (the king).

**Reflect:** Wisdom is insight into and conformity to the workings of the world. The wise person learns to live in accord with the way God created the world and in accord with the rules and customs of society. The goal of most proverbs is some form of social harmony.

**Pray:** Thank God for your time-tested religious tradition, which provides direction for finding peace and fulfillment in life.

**Act:** Reflect on the tenets of your religious tradition, not as restrictions but as sign posts that direct you along the path of life and warn you of possible obstacles on the way.

- 16 The plans of the mind belong to mortals,  
but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.
- 2 All one's ways may be pure in one's own eyes,  
but the LORD weighs the spirit.
- 3 Commit your work to the LORD,  
and your plans will be established.
- 4 The LORD has made everything for its purpose,  
even the wicked for the day of trouble.
- 5 All those who are arrogant are an abomination  
to the LORD;  
be assured, they will not go unpunished.
- 6 By loyalty and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for,  
and by the fear of the LORD one avoids evil.
- 7 When the ways of people please the LORD,  
he causes even their enemies to be at peace  
with them.
- 8 Better is a little with righteousness  
than large income with injustice.
- 9 The human mind plans the way,  
but the LORD directs the steps.
- 10 Inspired decisions are on the lips of a king;  
his mouth does not sin in judgment.
- 11 Honest balances and scales are the LORD's;  
all the weights in the bag are his work.
- 12 It is an abomination to kings to do evil,  
for the throne is established by righteousness.
- 13 Righteous lips are the delight of a king,  
and he loves those who speak what is right.
- 14 A king's wrath is a messenger of death,  
and whoever is wise will appease it.
- 15 In the light of a king's face there is life,  
and his favor is like the clouds that bring the  
spring rain.
- 16 How much better to get wisdom than gold!  
To get understanding is to be chosen rather  
than silver.
- 17 The highway of the upright avoids evil;  
those who guard their way preserve their lives.
- 18 Pride goes before destruction,  
and a haughty spirit before a fall.
- 19 It is better to be of a lowly spirit among the poor  
than to divide the spoil with the proud.
- 20 Those who are attentive to a matter will prosper,  
and happy are those who trust in the LORD.
- 21 The wise of heart is called perceptive,

- and pleasant speech increases persuasiveness.
- 22 Wisdom is a fountain of life to one who has it,  
but folly is the punishment of fools.
- 23 The mind of the wise makes their speech judicious,  
and adds persuasiveness to their lips.
- 24 Pleasant words are like a honeycomb,  
sweetness to the soul and health to the body.
- 25 Sometimes there is a way that seems to be right,  
but in the end it is the way to death.
- 26 The appetite of workers works for them;  
their hunger urges them on.
- 27 Scoundrels concoct evil,  
and their speech is like a scorching fire.
- 28 A perverse person spreads strife,  
and a whisperer separates close friends.
- 29 The violent entice their neighbors,  
and lead them in a way that is not good.
- 30 One who winks the eyes plans<sup>a</sup> perverse things;  
one who compresses the lips brings evil to pass.
- 31 Gray hair is a crown of glory;  
it is gained in a righteous life.
- 32 One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,  
and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city.
- 33 The lot is cast into the lap,  
but the decision is the LORD's alone.

- 17** Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.
- 2 A slave who deals wisely will rule over a child who acts shamefully,  
and will share the inheritance as one of the family.
- 3 The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold,  
but the LORD tests the heart.
- 4 An evildoer listens to wicked lips;  
and a liar gives heed to a mischievous tongue.
- 5 Those who mock the poor insult their Maker;  
those who are glad at calamity will not go unpunished.
- 6 Grandchildren are the crown of the aged,  
and the glory of children is their parents.
- 7 Fine speech is not becoming to a fool;  
still less is false speech to a ruler.<sup>b</sup>
- 8 A bribe is like a magic stone in the eyes of those who give it;  
wherever they turn they prosper.
- 9 One who forgives an affront fosters friendship,  
but one who dwells on disputes will alienate a friend.
- 10 A rebuke strikes deeper into a discerning person than a hundred blows into a fool.
- 11 Evil people seek only rebellion,  
but a cruel messenger will be sent against them.

<sup>a</sup> Gk Syr Vg Tg: Heb *to plan*

<sup>b</sup> Or a noble person

### Read Proverbs 17

This chapter contains, in addition to proverbs that warn against greed and dishonesty, several sayings describing proper family behavior. Well-behaved children and grandchildren are evidence of good parenting and enhance the honor in which elders are esteemed. Conversely, undisciplined children bring shame to the family.

**Reflect:** The stress on good behavior reflects ancient Israel's concern for matters that touch on honor and shame. In a society like that of Israel, which was group-rather than individual-oriented, a person's status in the community was very important. Behavior of members of one's family could threaten that status.

**Pray:** When you stand before God in prayer, remember that, while you are a unique individual, you are also a member of a family. Thank God for the members of your family, pray for them, and be conscious of your familial obligations.

**Act:** Make an effort today to reach out with love and concern to your family.

- 12 Better to meet a she-bear robbed of its cubs than to confront a fool immersed in folly.
- 13 Evil will not depart from the house of one who returns evil for good.
- 14 The beginning of strife is like letting out water; so stop before the quarrel breaks out.
- 15 One who justifies the wicked and one who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD.
- 16 Why should fools have a price in hand to buy wisdom, when they have no mind to learn?
- 17 A friend loves at all times, and kinsfolk are born to share adversity.
- 18 It is senseless to give a pledge, to become surety for a neighbor.
- 19 One who loves transgression loves strife; one who builds a high threshold invites broken bones.
- 20 The crooked of mind do not prosper, and the perverse of tongue fall into calamity.
- 21 The one who begets a fool gets trouble; the parent of a fool has no joy.
- 22 A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.
- 23 The wicked accept a concealed bribe to pervert the ways of justice.
- 24 The discerning person looks to wisdom, but the eyes of a fool to the ends of the earth.
- 25 Foolish children are a grief to their father and bitterness to her who bore them.
- 26 To impose a fine on the innocent is not right, or to flog the noble for their integrity.
- 27 One who spares words is knowledgeable; one who is cool in spirit has understanding.
- 28 Even fools who keep silent are considered wise; when they close their lips, they are deemed intelligent.

**18** The one who lives alone is self-indulgent, showing contempt for all who have sound judgment.<sup>a</sup>

- 2 A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing personal opinion.
- 3 When wickedness comes, contempt comes also; and with dishonor comes disgrace.
- 4 The words of the mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a gushing stream.
- 5 It is not right to be partial to the guilty, or to subvert the innocent in judgment.
- 6 A fool's lips bring strife, and a fool's mouth invites a flogging.

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain



## Read Proverbs 18

Proper speech is a major theme of this chapter. The words of a fool are deceitful and ruinous, provoke strife and bring shame, while the wise person calls on the name of the Lord. Other proverbs underscore the assurance one finds in a loyal brother, a faithful friend, and a loving wife.

**Reflect:** Once again the proverbs describe the blessings of social harmony. The unqualified order in life as described in Proverbs suggests that this book reflects the life of the comfortable, those for whom the dynamics of society appear to work. There is no prophetic challenge in this tradition.

**Pray:** Thank God for the peace and security that you enjoy, and remember that there are many wise and righteous people who struggle without peace and experience great insecurity.

**Act:** What might you do to further a sense of peace and security for others?

- 7 The mouths of fools are their ruin,  
and their lips a snare to themselves.
- 8 The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels;  
they go down into the inner parts of the body.
- 9 One who is slack in work  
is close kin to a vandal.
- 10 The name of the LORD is a strong tower;  
the righteous run into it and are safe.
- 11 The wealth of the rich is their strong city;  
in their imagination it is like a high wall.
- 12 Before destruction one's heart is haughty,  
but humility goes before honor.
- 13 If one gives answer before hearing,  
it is folly and shame.
- 14 The human spirit will endure sickness;  
but a broken spirit—who can bear?
- 15 An intelligent mind acquires knowledge,  
and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.
- 16 A gift opens doors;  
it gives access to the great.
- 17 The one who first states a case seems right,  
until the other comes and cross-examines.
- 18 Casting the lot puts an end to disputes  
and decides between powerful contenders.
- 19 An ally offended is stronger than a city;<sup>a</sup>  
such quarreling is like the bars of a castle.
- 20 From the fruit of the mouth one's stomach is satisfied;  
the yield of the lips brings satisfaction.
- 21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue,  
and those who love it will eat its fruits.
- 22 He who finds a wife finds a good thing,  
and obtains favor from the LORD.
- 23 The poor use entreaties,  
but the rich answer roughly.
- 24 Some<sup>b</sup> friends play at friendship<sup>c</sup>  
but a true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin.
- 19** Better the poor walking in integrity  
than one perverse of speech who is a fool.
- 2 Desire without knowledge is not good,  
and one who moves too hurriedly misses the way.
- 3 One's own folly leads to ruin,  
yet the heart rages against the LORD.
- 4 Wealth brings many friends,  
but the poor are left friendless.
- 5 A false witness will not go unpunished,  
and a liar will not escape.

<sup>a</sup> Gk Syr Vg Tg: Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Syr Tg: Heb *A man of*

<sup>c</sup> Cn Compare Syr Vg Tg: Meaning of Heb uncertain

### Read Proverbs 19

These proverbs concentrate on two major themes: the role played by money, and the importance of discipline. While money is usually seen as evidence of wise living, a poor man's integrity is considered of greater value. Furthermore, money can also generate false friends. The need to be corrected when in error is also stressed.

**Reflect:** Money can affect us in opposing ways. It can be the fruit of wise decisions, but it can also be gained in dishonest ways. Money and the power that often comes with it can also attract fair-weather friends. It is clear that with money comes responsibility to use it in ways that benefit others as well.

**Pray:** Thank God for the prosperity that you enjoy, realizing that much of it is really the fruit of the industry of those who have gone before you.

**Act:** Be generous with what you have.

- 6 Many seek the favor of the generous,  
and everyone is a friend to a giver of gifts.
- 7 If the poor are hated even by their kin,  
how much more are they shunned by their  
friends!  
When they call after them, they are not there.<sup>a</sup>
- 8 To get wisdom is to love oneself;  
to keep understanding is to prosper.
- 9 A false witness will not go unpunished,  
and the liar will perish.
- 10 It is not fitting for a fool to live in luxury,  
much less for a slave to rule over princes.
- 11 Those with good sense are slow to anger,  
and it is their glory to overlook an offense.
- 12 A king's anger is like the growling of a lion,  
but his favor is like dew on the grass.
- 13 A stupid child is ruin to a father,  
and a wife's quarreling is a continual dripping  
of rain.
- 14 House and wealth are inherited from parents,  
but a prudent wife is from the LORD.
- 15 Laziness brings on deep sleep;  
an idle person will suffer hunger.
- 16 Those who keep the commandment will live;  
those who are heedless of their ways will die.
- 17 Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD,  
and will be repaid in full.
- 18 Discipline your children while there is hope;  
do not set your heart on their destruction.
- 19 A violent tempered person will pay the penalty;  
if you effect a rescue, you will only have to do  
it again.<sup>a</sup>
- 20 Listen to advice and accept instruction,  
that you may gain wisdom for the future.
- 21 The human mind may devise many plans,  
but it is the purpose of the LORD that will be  
established.
- 22 What is desirable in a person is loyalty,  
and it is better to be poor than a liar.
- 23 The fear of the LORD is life indeed;  
filled with it one rests secure  
and suffers no harm.
- 24 The lazy person buries a hand in the dish,  
and will not even bring it back to the mouth.
- 25 Strike a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence;  
reprove the intelligent, and they will gain  
knowledge.
- 26 Those who do violence to their father and chase  
away their mother  
are children who cause shame and bring  
reproach.

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

27 Cease straying, my child, from the words of knowledge, in order that you may hear instruction.

28 A worthless witness mocks at justice,

and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity.

29 Condemnation is ready for scoffers, and flogging for the backs of fools.

### Read Proverbs 20

This collection of diverse proverbs contains several powerful metaphors. Among them we find anger of a king compared to the growling of a lion, the intention of the human mind likened to deep water, wise speech said to be precious like gold, and the wicked compared to chaff that is winnowed.

**Reflect:** The metaphors used in these proverbs are all taken from material creation, showing that knowledge of the natural world can provide insight into human behavior. This exemplifies the ancient belief that natural creation and human behavior are governed by the same laws established in the beginning by God.

**Pray:** Pray Psalm 8 slowly and thoughtfully, giving praise to God for the marvels of creation, particularly for the wonders of humankind.

**Act:** Spend some time reflecting on the natural world—the movement of clouds or the flight of birds. What might they tell you of God?

**20** Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

2 The dread anger of a king is like the growling of a lion; anyone who provokes him to anger forfeits life itself.

3 It is honorable to refrain from strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.

4 The lazy person does not plow in season; harvest comes, and there is nothing to be found.

5 The purposes in the human mind are like deep water, but the intelligent will draw them out.

6 Many proclaim themselves loyal, but who can find one worthy of trust?

7 The righteous walk in integrity—happy are the children who follow them!

8 A king who sits on the throne of judgment winnows all evil with his eyes.

9 Who can say, “I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin”?

10 Diverse weights and diverse measures are both alike an abomination to the LORD.

11 Even children make themselves known by their acts, by whether what they do is pure and right.

12 The hearing ear and the seeing eye—the LORD has made them both.

13 Do not love sleep, or else you will come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread.

14 “Bad, bad,” says the buyer, then goes away and boasts.

15 There is gold, and abundance of costly stones; but the lips informed by knowledge are a precious jewel.

16 Take the garment of one who has given surety for a stranger; seize the pledge given as surety for foreigners.

17 Bread gained by deceit is sweet, but afterward the mouth will be full of gravel.

18 Plans are established by taking advice; wage war by following wise guidance.

- 19 A gossip reveals secrets;  
therefore do not associate with a  
babblor.
- 20 If you curse father or mother,  
your lamp will go out in utter  
darkness.
- 21 An estate quickly acquired in the  
beginning  
will not be blessed in the end.
- 22 Do not say, "I will repay evil";  
wait for the LORD, and he will help  
you.
- 23 Differing weights are an abomination  
to the LORD,  
and false scales are not good.
- 24 All our steps are ordered by the  
LORD;  
how then can we understand our  
own ways?
- 25 It is a snare for one to say rashly, "It  
is holy,"  
and begin to reflect only after  
making a vow.
- 26 A wise king winnows the wicked,  
and drives the wheel over them.
- 27 The human spirit is the lamp of the  
LORD,  
searching every inmost part.
- 28 Loyalty and faithfulness preserve the  
king,  
and his throne is upheld by  
righteousness.<sup>a</sup>
- 29 The glory of youths is their strength,  
but the beauty of the aged is their  
gray hair.
- 30 Blows that wound cleanse away evil;  
beatings make clean the  
innermost parts.

### Read Proverbs 21

The fate of the wicked is addressed by most of the proverbs in this chapter. They denounce haughty eyes and a proud heart, a lying tongue, oppressive and crooked ways, arrogance, disregard for the poor, inordinate love of pleasure, sloth, false witness, and a brazen attitude. Such behavior is contrasted with fidelity to the ways of the Lord.

**Reflect:** Much of the behavior condemned by the sages is not only accepted but also encouraged by some of the standards of today's society. Such standards suggest that any means that will advance one's desires should be pursued, regardless of the morality of those means.

**Pray:** Ask God for the courage to be faithful to religious principles even when these principles are disregarded or even scorned by others.

**Act:** Act with integrity in less significant matters so that you will have the strength of character to be faithful in more important matters.

- 21** The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand  
of the LORD;  
he turns it wherever he will.
- 2 All deeds are right in the sight of the doer,  
but the LORD weighs the heart.
- 3 To do righteousness and justice  
is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.
- 4 Haughty eyes and a proud heart—  
the lamp of the wicked—are sin.
- 5 The plans of the diligent lead surely to  
abundance,  
but everyone who is hasty comes only to want.
- 6 The getting of treasures by a lying tongue  
is a fleeting vapor and a snare<sup>b</sup> of death.
- 7 The violence of the wicked will sweep them away,  
because they refuse to do what is just.
- 8 The way of the guilty is crooked,  
but the conduct of the pure is right.
- 9 It is better to live in a corner of the housetop  
than in a house shared with a contentious wife.
- 10 The souls of the wicked desire evil;  
their neighbors find no mercy in their eyes.
- 11 When a scoffer is punished, the simple become  
wiser;  
when the wise are instructed, they increase in  
knowledge.
- 12 The Righteous One observes the house of the  
wicked;  
he casts the wicked down to ruin.
- 13 If you close your ear to the cry of the poor,  
you will cry out and not be heard.

<sup>a</sup> Gk: Heb *loyalty*

<sup>b</sup> Gk: Heb *seekers*

- 14 A gift in secret averts anger;  
and a concealed bribe in the  
bosom, strong wrath.
- 15 When justice is done, it is a joy to  
the righteous,  
but dismay to evildoers.
- 16 Whoever wanders from the way of  
understanding  
will rest in the assembly of the  
dead.
- 17 Whoever loves pleasure will suffer  
want;  
whoever loves wine and oil will  
not be rich.
- 18 The wicked is a ransom for the  
righteous,  
and the faithless for the upright.
- 19 It is better to live in a desert land  
than with a contentious and fretful  
wife.
- 20 Precious treasure remains<sup>a</sup> in the  
house of the wise,  
but the fool devours it.
- 21 Whoever pursues righteousness and  
kindness  
will find life<sup>b</sup> and honor.
- 22 One wise person went up against a  
city of warriors  
and brought down the stronghold  
in which they trusted.
- 23 To watch over mouth and tongue  
is to keep out of trouble.
- 24 The proud, haughty person, named  
“Scoffer,”  
acts with arrogant pride.
- 25 The craving of the lazy person is fatal,  
for lazy hands refuse to labor.
- 26 All day long the wicked covet,<sup>c</sup>  
but the righteous give and do not  
hold back.
- 27 The sacrifice of the wicked is an  
abomination;  
how much more when brought  
with evil intent.
- 28 A false witness will perish,  
but a good listener will testify  
successfully.
- 29 The wicked put on a bold face,  
but the upright give thought to<sup>d</sup>  
their ways.
- 30 No wisdom, no understanding, no  
counsel,  
can avail against the LORD.
- 31 The horse is made ready for the day  
of battle,  
but the victory belongs to the LORD.

**22** A good name is to be chosen rather than great  
riches,

and favor is better than silver or gold.

2 The rich and the poor have this in common:  
the LORD is the maker of them all.

3 The clever see danger and hide;  
but the simple go on, and suffer for it.

4 The reward for humility and fear of the LORD  
is riches and honor and life.

5 Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse;  
the cautious will keep far from them.

6 Train children in the right way,  
and when old, they will not stray.

7 The rich rule over the poor,  
and the borrower is the slave of the lender.

8 Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity,  
and the rod of anger will fail.

9 Those who are generous are blessed,  
for they share their bread with the poor.

10 Drive out a scoffer, and strife goes out;  
quarreling and abuse will cease.

<sup>a</sup> Gk: Heb *and oil*

<sup>b</sup> Gk: Heb *life and righteousness*

<sup>c</sup> Gk: Heb *all day long one covets covetously*

<sup>d</sup> Another reading is *establish*

### Read Proverbs 22:1–16

Status in society is again addressed. One's reputation is dependent on one's ability to conform to the standards of society. The importance of training and discipline is stressed. A humble attitude and concern for others characterize the wise person. The role played by the Lord in all of this is emphasized.

**Reflect:** These proverbs may appear to be somewhat repetitious, but we should perceive them as snapshots that capture a single moment of truth, not every aspect of it. It is only by looking at a person or an object from several points of view that one can approach a more accurate understanding. In like manner, a number of proverbs that offer various points of view provide fuller understanding.

**Pray:** Ask forgiveness for the times your selfish choices have caused hardship for yourself or for others.

**Act:** How might you be more faithful to your social responsibilities?

- 11 Those who love a pure heart and are gracious in speech  
will have the king as a friend.
- 12 The eyes of the LORD keep watch over knowledge,  
but he overthrows the words of the faithless.
- 13 The lazy person says, "There is a lion outside!  
I shall be killed in the streets!"
- 14 The mouth of a loose<sup>a</sup> woman is a deep pit;  
he with whom the LORD is angry falls into it.
- 15 Folly is bound up in the heart of a boy,  
but the rod of discipline drives it far away.
- 16 Oppressing the poor in order to enrich oneself,  
and giving to the rich, will lead only to loss.

### Sayings of the Wise

- 17 The words of the wise:  
Incline your ear and hear my words,<sup>b</sup>  
and apply your mind to my teaching;  
18 for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you,  
if all of them are ready on your lips.
- 19 So that your trust may be in the LORD,  
I have made them known to you today—yes,  
to you.
- 20 Have I not written for you thirty sayings  
of admonition and knowledge,  
21 to show you what is right and true,  
so that you may give a true answer to those  
who sent you?
- 22 Do not rob the poor because they are poor,  
or crush the afflicted at the gate;  
23 for the LORD pleads their cause  
and despoils of life those who despoil them.
- 24 Make no friends with those given to anger,  
and do not associate with hotheads,  
25 or you may learn their ways  
and entangle yourself in a snare.
- 26 Do not be one of those who give pledges,  
who become surety for debts.
- 27 If you have nothing with which to pay,  
why should your bed be taken from under you?
- 28 Do not remove the ancient landmark  
that your ancestors set up.
- 29 Do you see those who are skillful in their work?  
They will serve kings;  
they will not serve common people.

**23** When you sit down to eat with a ruler,  
observe carefully what<sup>c</sup> is before you,  
2 and put a knife to your throat  
if you have a big appetite.

<sup>a</sup> Heb *strange*

<sup>b</sup> Cn Compare Gk: Heb *Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise*

<sup>c</sup> Or *who*

### Read Proverbs 22:17—24:22

This collection, entitled “Sayings of the Wise,” resembles an ancient Egyptian document, *Instruction of Amenemope*. The biblical collection opens with a characteristic exhortation to listen (“Incline your ear”). The proverbs themselves direct the student to listen to instruction, to live peaceably with others, to be prudent in business matters, and to be faithful to social and religious obligations.

**Reflect:** Though religious doctrine may differ from faith to faith, advice for successful living is remarkably the same across social and religious cultures. Everyone must learn the customs of the group and decide whether or not to conform to them; and everyone learns that there are consequences for one’s decisions. The similarities highlight common human concerns.

**Pray:** Pray for people who hold religious traditions that differ from yours. Realize that they are searching for truth in their own ways.

**Act:** Try to learn something about another faith tradition.

- 3 Do not desire the ruler’s<sup>a</sup> delicacies,  
for they are deceptive food.
- 4 Do not wear yourself out to get rich;  
be wise enough to desist.
- 5 When your eyes light upon it, it is gone;  
for suddenly it takes wings to itself,  
flying like an eagle toward heaven.
- 6 Do not eat the bread of the stingy;  
do not desire their delicacies;
- 7 for like a hair in the throat, so are they.<sup>b</sup>  
“Eat and drink!” they say to you;  
but they do not mean it.
- 8 You will vomit up the little you have eaten,  
and you will waste your pleasant words.
- 9 Do not speak in the hearing of a fool,  
who will only despise the wisdom of your words.
- 10 Do not remove an ancient landmark  
or encroach on the fields of orphans,  
11 for their redeemer is strong;  
he will plead their cause against you.
- 12 Apply your mind to instruction  
and your ear to words of knowledge.
- 13 Do not withhold discipline from your children;  
if you beat them with a rod, they will not die.
- 14 If you beat them with the rod,  
you will save their lives from Sheol.
- 15 My child, if your heart is wise,  
my heart too will be glad.
- 16 My soul will rejoice  
when your lips speak what is right.
- 17 Do not let your heart envy sinners,  
but always continue in the fear of the LORD.
- 18 Surely there is a future,  
and your hope will not be cut off.
- 19 Hear, my child, and be wise,  
and direct your mind in the way.
- 20 Do not be among winebibbers,  
or among gluttonous eaters of meat;
- 21 for the drunkard and the glutton will come to  
poverty,  
and drowsiness will clothe them with rags.
- 22 Listen to your father who begot you,  
and do not despise your mother when she is  
old.
- 23 Buy truth, and do not sell it;  
buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.
- 24 The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice;  
he who begets a wise son will be glad in him.
- 25 Let your father and mother be glad;  
let her who bore you rejoice.

<sup>a</sup> Heb *his*

<sup>b</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain



- 26 My child, give me your heart,  
and let your eyes observe<sup>a</sup> my  
ways.
- 27 For a prostitute is a deep pit;  
an adulteress<sup>b</sup> is a narrow well.
- 28 She lies in wait like a robber  
and increases the number of the  
faithless.
- 29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow?  
Who has strife? Who has  
complaining?  
Who has wounds without cause?  
Who has redness of eyes?
- 30 Those who linger late over wine,  
those who keep trying mixed  
wines.
- 31 Do not look at wine when it is red,  
when it sparkles in the cup  
and goes down smoothly.
- 32 At the last it bites like a serpent,  
and stings like an adder.
- 33 Your eyes will see strange things,  
and your mind utter perverse  
things.
- 34 You will be like one who lies down in  
the midst of the sea,  
like one who lies on the top of a  
mast.<sup>c</sup>
- 35 “They struck me,” you will say,<sup>d</sup>  
“but I was not hurt;  
they beat me, but I did not feel it.  
When shall I awake?  
I will seek another drink.”

### Read Proverbs 24:23–34

This short collection of “Further Sayings of the Wise” contains a new theme, the place of honest work. Mention of the field, thorns, nettles, vineyard, and a stone wall are evidence of an agrarian society.

**Reflect:** The metaphors of farming or growing grapes characterize conscientious living of life. In such occupations, the fruits of one’s labor are immediately obvious. The need for planning, diligence, and patience are clear. As the final saying (vv. 33–34) states, there is no time for inopportune sleep or slumber.

**Pray:** Trust in God that the efforts you put into living with honesty and commitment will reap the kind of fruits for which you hope. God does not promise that he will intervene to guarantee these hoped-for rewards, but he gives us this hope to strengthen our trust that all of life is under God’s guidance and purpose.

**Act:** Resolve to do something today with extraordinary diligence.

- 24** Do not envy the wicked,  
nor desire to be with them;  
2 for their minds devise violence,  
and their lips talk of mischief.
- 3 By wisdom a house is built,  
and by understanding it is established;  
4 by knowledge the rooms are filled  
with all precious and pleasant riches.
- 5 Wise warriors are mightier than strong ones,<sup>e</sup>  
and those who have knowledge than those  
who have strength;
- 6 for by wise guidance you can wage your war,  
and in abundance of counselors there is  
victory.
- 7 Wisdom is too high for fools;  
in the gate they do not open their mouths.
- 8 Whoever plans to do evil  
will be called a mischief-maker.
- 9 The devising of folly is sin,  
and the scoffer is an abomination to all.
- 10 If you faint in the day of adversity,  
your strength being small;
- 11 if you hold back from rescuing those taken away  
to death,  
those who go staggering to the slaughter;
- 12 if you say, “Look, we did not know this”—  
does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?  
Does not he who keeps watch over your soul  
know it?  
And will he not repay all according to their  
deeds?

<sup>a</sup> Another reading is *delight in*

<sup>b</sup> Heb *an alien woman*

<sup>c</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>d</sup> Gk Syr Vg Tg: Heb *lacks you will say*

<sup>e</sup> Gk Compare Syr Tg: Heb *A wise man is strength*

- 13 My child, eat honey, for it is good,  
and the drippings of the  
honeycomb are sweet to your  
taste.
- 14 Know that wisdom is such to your  
soul;  
if you find it, you will find a future,  
and your hope will not be cut off.
- 15 Do not lie in wait like an outlaw  
against the home of the righteous;  
do no violence to the place where  
the righteous live;
- 16 for though they fall seven times,  
they will rise again;  
but the wicked are overthrown by  
calamity.
- 17 Do not rejoice when your enemies fall,  
and do not let your heart be glad  
when they stumble,
- 18 or else the LORD will see it and be  
displeased,  
and turn away his anger from them.
- 19 Do not fret because of evildoers.  
Do not envy the wicked;
- 20 for the evil have no future;  
the lamp of the wicked will go out.
- 21 My child, fear the LORD and the king,  
and do not disobey either of them;<sup>a</sup>
- 22 for disaster comes from them  
suddenly,  
and who knows the ruin that both  
can bring?
- 24 Whoever says to the wicked, "You  
are innocent,"  
will be cursed by peoples,  
abhorred by nations;
- 25 but those who rebuke the wicked  
will have delight,  
and a good blessing will come  
upon them.
- 26 One who gives an honest answer  
gives a kiss on the lips.
- 27 Prepare your work outside,  
get everything ready for you in  
the field;  
and after that build your house.
- 28 Do not be a witness against your  
neighbor without cause,  
and do not deceive with your lips.
- 29 Do not say, "I will do to others as  
they have done to me;  
I will pay them back for what they  
have done."
- 30 I passed by the field of one who was  
lazy,  
by the vineyard of a stupid person;
- 31 and see, it was all overgrown with  
thorns;  
the ground was covered with  
nettles,  
and its stone wall was broken  
down.
- 32 Then I saw and considered it;  
I looked and received instruction.
- 33 A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest,  
34 and poverty will come upon you like  
a robber,  
and want, like an armed warrior.

### Further Sayings of the Wise

- 23 These also are sayings of the wise:  
Partiality in judging is not good.

### Further Wise Sayings of Solomon

**25** These are other proverbs of Solomon that the officials of King Hezekiah of Judah copied.

- <sup>2</sup> It is the glory of God to conceal things,  
but the glory of kings is to search things out.
- <sup>3</sup> Like the heavens for height, like the earth for  
depth,  
so the mind of kings is unsearchable.
- <sup>4</sup> Take away the dross from the silver,  
and the smith has material for a vessel;

<sup>a</sup> Gk: Heb *do not associate with those who change*

### Read Proverbs 25

This Second Solomonic Collection is attributed to the men of the court of King Hezekiah. Though many of these proverbs are typical two-line sayings, others are several lines long. There is heavy use of nature imagery here, and many of the proverbs highlight the importance of the king.

**Reflect:** The Israelites believed that their kings possessed wisdom that flowed from a special relationship with God. Furthermore, political authority was not intended for the individual aggrandizement of the ruler. Rather, such authority carried serious social responsibility.

**Pray:** Ask God for the insight to choose leaders who will govern with wisdom and impartiality rather than those interested in advancing their own causes.

**Act:** As a citizen, you have the responsibility of learning about the political issues of the day and discovering the positions held on these issues by those seeking public office.

- 5 take away the wicked from the presence of the king,  
and his throne will be established in righteousness.
- 6 Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great;
- 7 for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.
- What your eyes have seen
- 8 do not hastily bring into court;  
for<sup>a</sup> what will you do in the end,  
when your neighbor puts you to shame?
- 9 Argue your case with your neighbor directly,  
and do not disclose another's secret;
- 10 or else someone who hears you will bring shame upon you,  
and your ill repute will have no end.
- 11 A word fitly spoken  
is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.
- 12 Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold  
is a wise rebuke to a listening ear.
- 13 Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest  
are faithful messengers to those who send them;  
they refresh the spirit of their masters.
- 14 Like clouds and wind without rain  
is one who boasts of a gift never given.
- 15 With patience a ruler may be persuaded,  
and a soft tongue can break bones.
- 16 If you have found honey, eat only enough for you,  
or else, having too much, you will vomit it.
- 17 Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house,  
otherwise the neighbor will become weary of you and hate you.
- 18 Like a war club, a sword, or a sharp arrow  
is one who bears false witness against a neighbor.
- 19 Like a bad tooth or a lame foot  
is trust in a faithless person in time of trouble.
- 20 Like vinegar on a wound<sup>b</sup>  
is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.  
Like a moth in clothing or a worm in wood,  
sorrow gnaws at the human heart.<sup>c</sup>
- 21 If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat;  
and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink;
- 22 for you will heap coals of fire on their heads,  
and the LORD will reward you.
- 23 The north wind produces rain,  
and a backbiting tongue, angry looks.
- 24 It is better to live in a corner of the housetop

<sup>a</sup> Cn: Heb or else

<sup>b</sup> Gk: Heb *Like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, like vinegar on lye*

<sup>c</sup> Gk Syr Tg: Heb lacks *Like a moth...human heart*

than in a house shared with a contentious wife.

- 25 Like cold water to a thirsty soul,  
so is good news from a far country.  
26 Like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain

are the righteous who give way before the wicked.

- 27 It is not good to eat much honey,  
or to seek honor on top of honor.  
28 Like a city breached, without walls,  
is one who lacks self-control.

### Read Proverbs 26

These proverbs describe the ill-advised behavior of the fool, the sluggard, the deceiver, and the talebearer. The consequences that flow from such behavior reflect the theory of retribution: wise or good action brings happiness, while misfortune befalls those who engage in foolish or wicked behavior.

**Reflect:** So often we fail to consider the consequences of our actions, looking only to the pleasure we think we will derive from them. These proverbs can serve as a warning for the wise person, for they describe the consequences of ill-advised behavior and demonstrate that only a fool would choose to act in such ways.

**Pray:** Ask God for the patience needed to examine carefully the foreseeable consequences of a course of action and for the fortitude to act accordingly.

**Act:** Do something today that will genuinely enrich your life and the lives of others.

- 26** Like snow in summer or rain in harvest,  
so honor is not fitting for a fool.
- 2 Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying,  
an undeserved curse goes nowhere.
- 3 A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey,  
and a rod for the back of fools.
- 4 Do not answer fools according to their folly,  
or you will be a fool yourself.
- 5 Answer fools according to their folly,  
or they will be wise in their own eyes.
- 6 It is like cutting off one's foot and drinking down violence,  
to send a message by a fool.
- 7 The legs of a disabled person hang limp;  
so does a proverb in the mouth of a fool.
- 8 It is like binding a stone in a sling  
to give honor to a fool.
- 9 Like a thornbush brandished by the hand of a drunkard  
is a proverb in the mouth of a fool.
- 10 Like an archer who wounds everybody  
is one who hires a passing fool or drunkard.<sup>a</sup>
- 11 Like a dog that returns to its vomit  
is a fool who reverts to his folly.
- 12 Do you see persons wise in their own eyes?  
There is more hope for fools than for them.
- 13 The lazy person says, "There is a lion in the road!  
There is a lion in the streets!"
- 14 As a door turns on its hinges,  
so does a lazy person in bed.
- 15 The lazy person buries a hand in the dish,  
and is too tired to bring it back to the mouth.
- 16 The lazy person is wiser in self-esteem  
than seven who can answer discreetly.
- 17 Like somebody who takes a passing dog by the ears  
is one who meddles in the quarrel of another.
- 18 Like a maniac who shoots deadly firebrands and arrows,  
so is one who deceives a neighbor  
and says, "I am only joking!"
- 20 For lack of wood the fire goes out,  
and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases.

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

- 21 As charcoal is to hot embers and wood to fire,  
so is a quarrelsome person for kindling strife.
- 22 The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels;  
they go down into the inner parts of the body.
- 23 Like the glaze<sup>a</sup> covering an earthen vessel  
are smooth<sup>b</sup> lips with an evil heart.
- 24 An enemy dissembles in speaking  
while harboring deceit within;
- 25 when an enemy speaks graciously,  
do not believe it,  
for there are seven abominations concealed within;
- 26 though hatred is covered with guile,  
the enemy's wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.
- 27 Whoever digs a pit will fall into it,  
and a stone will come back on the one who starts it rolling.
- 28 A lying tongue hates its victims,  
and a flattering mouth works ruin.

**Read Proverbs 27**

This chapter contains various kinds of proverbs. Besides using parallelism and poetic imagery, a few of the proverbs compare the merits of one aspect of reality to another. These sayings are referred to as “better than” proverbs. For example: “Better is open rebuke than hidden love” (v. 5).

**Reflect:** As is the case with all proverbs, “better than” sayings call us to careful reflection on some aspect of life and a subsequent decision to action. This is the way we gain empirical wisdom. Unlike those proverbs that contrast good or wise with aberrant or foolish behavior, “better than” sayings presume that both aspects are somehow good. Deciding between them requires astute judgment.

**Pray:** Ask God for the insight needed to recognize what is good, and to choose what is “better.”

**Act:** Spend time today evaluating your manner of acting. Might there be a better way of acting?

- 27** Do not boast about tomorrow,  
for you do not know what a day may bring.
- 2 Let another praise you, and not your own mouth—  
a stranger, and not your own lips.
- 3 A stone is heavy, and sand is weighty,  
but a fool's provocation is heavier than both.
- 4 Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming,  
but who is able to stand before jealousy?
- 5 Better is open rebuke  
than hidden love.
- 6 Well meant are the wounds a friend inflicts,  
but profuse are the kisses of an enemy.
- 7 The sated appetite spurns honey,  
but to a ravenous appetite even the bitter is sweet.
- 8 Like a bird that strays from its nest  
is one who strays from home.
- 9 Perfume and incense make the heart glad,  
but the soul is torn by trouble.<sup>c</sup>
- 10 Do not forsake your friend or the friend of your parent;  
do not go to the house of your kindred in the day of your calamity.  
Better is a neighbor who is nearby  
than kindred who are far away.
- 11 Be wise, my child, and make my heart glad,  
so that I may answer whoever reproaches me.
- 12 The clever see danger and hide;  
but the simple go on, and suffer for it.
- 13 Take the garment of one who has given surety  
for a stranger;  
seize the pledge given as surety for foreigners.<sup>d</sup>
- 14 Whoever blesses a neighbor with a loud voice,  
rising early in the morning,  
will be counted as cursing.
- 15 A continual dripping on a rainy day  
and a contentious wife are alike;

<sup>a</sup> Cn: Heb silver of dross  
<sup>b</sup> Gk: Heb burning  
<sup>c</sup> Gk: Heb the sweetness of a friend is better than one's own counsel  
<sup>d</sup> Vg and 20.16: Heb for a foreign woman

- 16 to restrain her is to restrain the wind  
or to grasp oil in the right hand.<sup>a</sup>
- 17 Iron sharpens iron,  
and one person sharpens the  
wits<sup>b</sup> of another.
- 18 Anyone who tends a fig tree will eat  
its fruit,  
and anyone who takes care of a  
master will be honored.
- 19 Just as water reflects the face,  
so one human heart reflects  
another.
- 20 Sheol and Abaddon are never  
satisfied,  
and human eyes are never  
satisfied.
- 21 The crucible is for silver, and the  
furnace is for gold,  
so a person is tested<sup>c</sup> by being  
praised.
- 22 Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle  
along with crushed grain,  
but the folly will not be driven out.
- 23 Know well the condition of your  
flocks,  
and give attention to your herds;  
24 for riches do not last forever,  
nor a crown for all generations.
- 25 When the grass is gone, and new  
growth appears,  
and the herbage of the mountains  
is gathered,  
26 the lambs will provide your clothing,  
and the goats the price of a field;  
27 there will be enough goats' milk for  
your food,  
for the food of your household  
and nourishment for your  
servant-girls.

**28** The wicked flee when no one pursues,  
but the righteous are as bold as a lion.

- 2 When a land rebels  
it has many rulers;  
but with an intelligent ruler  
there is lasting order.<sup>a</sup>
- 3 A ruler<sup>d</sup> who oppresses the poor  
is a beating rain that leaves no food.
- 4 Those who forsake the law praise the wicked,  
but those who keep the law struggle against  
them.
- 5 The evil do not understand justice,  
but those who seek the LORD understand it  
completely.
- 6 Better to be poor and walk in integrity  
than to be crooked in one's ways even though  
rich.
- 7 Those who keep the law are wise children,  
but companions of gluttons shame their parents.
- 8 One who augments wealth by exorbitant interest  
gathers it for another who is kind to the poor.
- 9 When one will not listen to the law,  
even one's prayers are an abomination.
- 10 Those who mislead the upright into evil ways  
will fall into pits of their own making,  
but the blameless will have a godly  
inheritance.
- 11 The rich is wise in self-esteem,  
but an intelligent poor person sees through the  
pose.

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Heb *face*

<sup>c</sup> Heb *lacks is tested*

<sup>d</sup> Cn: Heb *A poor person*

### Read Proverbs 28

Ancient Israel viewed wealth in various ways. Material comfort was considered the consequence of wise or righteous behavior, and the lack of prosperity the result of frivolous living. Still, the wealthy were prohibited from taking advantage of others and were required to look out for the best interests of those less fortunate.

**Reflect:** Since wisdom had to do with social harmony, it is understandable that those who enjoyed good fortune were expected to share it with those who did not have it. Extreme material disparity is often the cause of great social unrest. The wise person knows that care for those who are needy transcends strict justice.

**Pray:** As you stand before God in prayer, bring with you people who are in great need. Open your heart to their concerns as well as your own.

**Act:** Let your fervent prayer be grounded in concrete acts of justice.

- 12 When the righteous triumph, there is great glory,  
but when the wicked prevail, people go into  
hiding.
- 13 No one who conceals transgressions will prosper,  
but one who confesses and forsakes them will  
obtain mercy.
- 14 Happy is the one who is never without fear,  
but one who is hard-hearted will fall into  
calamity.
- 15 Like a roaring lion or a charging bear  
is a wicked ruler over a poor people.
- 16 A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel  
oppressor;  
but one who hates unjust gain will enjoy a  
long life.
- 17 If someone is burdened with the blood of  
another,  
let that killer be a fugitive until death;  
let no one offer assistance.
- 18 One who walks in integrity will be safe,  
but whoever follows crooked ways will fall into  
the Pit.<sup>a</sup>
- 19 Anyone who tills the land will have plenty of  
bread,  
but one who follows worthless pursuits will  
have plenty of poverty.
- 20 The faithful will abound with blessings,  
but one who is in a hurry to be rich will not go  
unpunished.
- 21 To show partiality is not good—  
yet for a piece of bread a person may do wrong.
- 22 The miser is in a hurry to get rich  
and does not know that loss is sure to come.
- 23 Whoever rebukes a person will afterward find  
more favor  
than one who flatters with the tongue.
- 24 Anyone who robs father or mother  
and says, “That is no crime,”  
is partner to a thug.
- 25 The greedy person stirs up strife,  
but whoever trusts in the LORD will be enriched.
- 26 Those who trust in their own wits are fools;  
but those who walk in wisdom come through  
safely.
- 27 Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing,  
but one who turns a blind eye will get many a  
curse.
- 28 When the wicked prevail, people go into hiding;  
but when they perish, the righteous increase.

<sup>a</sup> Syr: Heb *fall all at once*



## Read Proverbs 29

The need for divine guidance is well stated in this chapter: “Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint [are without direction]” (v. 18). The role that religious tradition plays in the search for true wisdom is acknowledged. It is the Lord who enlightens (v. 13), who makes us safe (v. 25)

**Reflect:** While it is true that wisdom is gleaned from reflection on life experience (as described in the proverbs of this chapter), our religious tradition provides us with well-tested guidance in our search for meaning. The law is not restrictive, as some think. Rather, it sets our feet on the right path.

**Pray:** Thank God for the direction set for us by our religious tradition, and ask for the grace to follow that path.

**Act:** What are some of the major principles that this biblical book has to teach you?

- 29** One who is often reproved, yet remains stubborn,  
will suddenly be broken beyond healing.
- 2 When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice;  
but when the wicked rule, the people groan.
- 3 A child who loves wisdom makes a parent glad,  
but to keep company with prostitutes is to squander one's substance.
- 4 By justice a king gives stability to the land,  
but one who makes heavy exactions ruins it.
- 5 Whoever flatters a neighbor  
is spreading a net for the neighbor's feet.
- 6 In the transgression of the evil there is a snare,  
but the righteous sing and rejoice.
- 7 The righteous know the rights of the poor;  
the wicked have no such understanding.
- 8 Scoffers set a city aflame,  
but the wise turn away wrath.
- 9 If the wise go to law with fools,  
there is ranting and ridicule without relief.
- 10 The bloodthirsty hate the blameless,  
and they seek the life of the upright.
- 11 A fool gives full vent to anger,  
but the wise quietly holds it back.
- 12 If a ruler listens to falsehood,  
all his officials will be wicked.
- 13 The poor and the oppressor have this in common:  
the LORD gives light to the eyes of both.
- 14 If a king judges the poor with equity,  
his throne will be established forever.
- 15 The rod and reproof give wisdom,  
but a mother is disgraced by a neglected child.
- 16 When the wicked are in authority, transgression increases,  
but the righteous will look upon their downfall.
- 17 Discipline your children, and they will give you rest;  
they will give delight to your heart.
- 18 Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint,  
but happy are those who keep the law.
- 19 By mere words servants are not disciplined,  
for though they understand, they will not give heed.
- 20 Do you see someone who is hasty in speech?  
There is more hope for a fool than for anyone like that.
- 21 A slave pampered from childhood  
will come to a bad end.<sup>a</sup>
- 22 One given to anger stirs up strife,  
and the hothead causes much transgression.

<sup>a</sup> Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain

- 23 A person's pride will bring humiliation,  
but one who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor.
- 24 To be a partner of a thief is to hate one's own life;  
one hears the victim's curse, but discloses nothing.<sup>a</sup>
- 25 The fear of others<sup>b</sup> lays a snare,

- but one who trusts in the LORD is secure.
- 26 Many seek the favor of a ruler,  
but it is from the LORD that one gets justice.
- 27 The unjust are an abomination to the righteous,  
but the upright are an abomination to the wicked.

**Read Proverbs 30**

This chapter consists of a collection of proverbs attributed to Agur, an unknown non-Israelite sage, as well as examples of the numerical proverb. Agur's instructions are similar to those found in other places in the book. The numerical sayings follow the x+1 form ("two things... three...; three things... four..."). They have the character of a riddle.

**Reflect:** There are many different ways of learning. The insights of other traditions constitute one such avenue. Informing ourselves of the content of such traditions will not only enlighten us as to the value of that other tradition, but may also shed new light on our own behavior.

**Pray:** Praise God for the many ways in which people come to know God and for the wisdom they discover in their search for ultimate meaning.

**Act:** Open yourself to the possibility of God speaking to you through the traditions and insights of people of other cultures.

**Sayings of Agur**

**30** The words of Agur son of Jakeh. An oracle.

- Thus says the man: I am weary, O God,  
I am weary, O God. How can I prevail?<sup>c</sup>
- 2 Surely I am too stupid to be human;  
I do not have human understanding.
- 3 I have not learned wisdom,  
nor have I knowledge of the holy ones.<sup>d</sup>
- 4 Who has ascended to heaven and come down?  
Who has gathered the wind in the hollow of the hand?  
Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment?  
Who has established all the ends of the earth?  
What is the person's name?  
And what is the name of the person's child?  
Surely you know!
- 5 Every word of God proves true;  
he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.
- 6 Do not add to his words,  
or else he will rebuke you, and you will be found a liar.
- 7 Two things I ask of you;  
do not deny them to me before I die:
- 8 Remove far from me falsehood and lying;  
give me neither poverty nor riches;  
feed me with the food that I need,
- 9 or I shall be full, and deny you,  
and say, "Who is the LORD?"  
or I shall be poor, and steal,  
and profane the name of my God.
- 10 Do not slander a servant to a master,  
or the servant will curse you, and you will be held guilty.
- 11 There are those who curse their fathers  
and do not bless their mothers.
- 12 There are those who are pure in their own eyes  
yet are not cleansed of their filthiness.

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain  
<sup>b</sup> Or *human fear*  
<sup>c</sup> Or *I am spent*. Meaning of Heb uncertain  
<sup>d</sup> Or *Holy One*

- 13 There are those—how lofty are their eyes,  
how high their eyelids lift!—
- 14 there are those whose teeth are swords,  
whose teeth are knives,  
to devour the poor from off the earth,  
the needy from among mortals.
- 15 The leech<sup>a</sup> has two daughters;  
“Give, give,” they cry.  
Three things are never satisfied;  
four never say, “Enough”:
- 16 Sheol, the barren womb,  
the earth ever thirsty for water,  
and the fire that never says,  
“Enough.”<sup>a</sup>
- 17 The eye that mocks a father  
and scorns to obey a mother  
will be pecked out by the ravens of  
the valley  
and eaten by the vultures.
- 18 Three things are too wonderful for me;  
four I do not understand:
- 19 the way of an eagle in the sky,  
the way of a snake on a rock,  
the way of a ship on the high seas,  
and the way of a man with a girl.
- 20 This is the way of an adulteress:  
she eats, and wipes her mouth,  
and says, “I have done no wrong.”
- 21 Under three things the earth trembles;  
under four it cannot bear up:
- 22 a slave when he becomes king,  
and a fool when gluttoned with food;
- 23 an unloved woman when she gets a  
husband,  
and a maid when she succeeds  
her mistress.
- 24 Four things on earth are small,  
yet they are exceedingly wise:
- 25 the ants are a people without strength,  
yet they provide their food in the  
summer;
- 26 the badgers are a people without  
power,  
yet they make their homes in the  
rocks;
- 27 the locusts have no king,  
yet all of them march in rank;
- 28 the lizard<sup>b</sup> can be grasped in the  
hand,  
yet it is found in kings’ palaces.
- 29 Three things are stately in their stride;  
four are stately in their gait:
- 30 the lion, which is mightiest among  
wild animals  
and does not turn back before any;
- 31 the strutting rooster,<sup>c</sup> the he-goat,  
and a king striding before<sup>a</sup> his  
people.
- 32 If you have been foolish, exalting  
yourself,  
or if you have been devising evil,  
put your hand on your mouth.
- 33 For as pressing milk produces curds,  
and pressing the nose produces  
blood,  
so pressing anger produces strife.

### The Teaching of King Lemuel’s Mother

**31** The words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his mother taught him:

- 2 No, my son! No, son of my womb!  
No, son of my vows!
- 3 Do not give your strength to women,  
your ways to those who destroy kings.
- 4 It is not for kings, O Lemuel,  
it is not for kings to drink wine,  
or for rulers to desire<sup>d</sup> strong drink;
- 5 or else they will drink and forget what has been  
decreed,  
and will pervert the rights of all the afflicted.

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Or spider

<sup>c</sup> Gk Syr Tg Compare Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>d</sup> Cn: Heb where

### Read Proverbs 31

Women hold an important place in this chapter. It opens with instruction for judicious governing intended for King Lemuel as put forward by his mother. The second part of the chapter is a poem describing the ideal patriarchal wife.

**Reflect:** Though these female characterizations reflect the gender biases of the culture of the author, they are significant nonetheless. In a book that purports to offer direction for wise living, this queen-mother is presented as one whose astute advice should be followed, and the ideal wife is offered as a model of wisdom to be emulated.

**Pray:** Thank God for the wise women in your life who have offered advice and counsel and whose behavior sets a standard to be followed in your own life.

**Act:** Make it a point to thank the wise women you know for the many ways in which they have enriched your life.

- 6 Give strong drink to one who is perishing,  
and wine to those in bitter distress;
- 7 let them drink and forget their poverty,  
and remember their misery no more.
- 8 Speak out for those who cannot speak,  
for the rights of all the destitute.<sup>a</sup>
- 9 Speak out, judge righteously,  
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

### Ode to a Capable Wife

- 10 A capable wife who can find?  
She is far more precious than jewels.
- 11 The heart of her husband trusts in her,  
and he will have no lack of gain.
- 12 She does him good, and not harm,  
all the days of her life.
- 13 She seeks wool and flax,  
and works with willing hands.
- 14 She is like the ships of the merchant,  
she brings her food from far away.
- 15 She rises while it is still night  
and provides food for her household  
and tasks for her servant-girls.
- 16 She considers a field and buys it;  
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
- 17 She girds herself with strength,  
and makes her arms strong.
- 18 She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.  
Her lamp does not go out at night.
- 19 She puts her hands to the distaff,  
and her hands hold the spindle.
- 20 She opens her hand to the poor,  
and reaches out her hands to the needy.
- 21 She is not afraid for her household when it snows,  
for all her household are clothed in crimson.
- 22 She makes herself coverings;  
her clothing is fine linen and purple.
- 23 Her husband is known in the city gates,  
taking his seat among the elders of the land.
- 24 She makes linen garments and sells them;  
she supplies the merchant with sashes.
- 25 Strength and dignity are her clothing,  
and she laughs at the time to come.
- 26 She opens her mouth with wisdom,  
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
- 27 She looks well to the ways of her household,  
and does not eat the bread of idleness.
- 28 Her children rise up and call her happy;  
her husband too, and he praises her:
- 29 “Many women have done excellently,  
but you surpass them all.”

<sup>a</sup> Heb *all children of passing away*

<sup>30</sup> Charm is deceitful, and beauty is  
vain,  
but a woman who fears the LORD  
is to be praised.

<sup>31</sup> Give her a share in the fruit of her  
hands,  
and let her works praise her in the  
city gates.

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