



Proverbs chapter 24:1-25:28

Taught at our Sunday evening service, 21st November 2021 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Psalm 73

Good evening. Let's pray.

Introduction

Tonight we'll conclude the second section of this book, that runs from chapters 10-24, where Solomon laid out many proverbs on many subjects - and also begin the third section, which is comprised of 5 chapters of similar proverbs, also written by Solomon, but arranged at a later date.

Themes in chapter twenty four

And in chapter 24 we see the following themes (you may find more):

- Evil men (v1-2, 8-9, 15-16, 19-20)
- Treatment of others (v11-12, 17-18, 24-26, 28-29)
- Laziness (v30-34)

Themes in chapter twenty five

Next in chapter 25 we'll see the following:

- Humility (v6-7, 27)
- Treatment of others (v8-10, 17-18, 20)
- Our words (v11-15)

Chapter twenty four

In the first two verses we read...

Proverbs 24:1-2

Do not be envious of evil men,
Nor desire to be with them;
For their heart devises violence,
And their lips talk of troublemaking.

You and I have a choice as to how we live, how we conduct ourselves. And while as Christians we know that we should live to please God, we can sometimes look around this world and see that wicked, unkind, and cruel people do pretty well on occasions. But the problem when we do that is that we're only seeing part of the picture.

Asaph wrestled with this in Psalm 73 that we read earlier...

Psalm 73:2-5

But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;
My steps had nearly slipped.
For I was envious of the boastful,
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
For there are no pangs in their death,
But their strength is firm.
They are not in trouble as other men,
Nor are they plagued like other men.

But like a poorly behaved child who thinks they are getting away with everything they want to, yet will return home and face their parents discipline, so are those who are wicked in this world storing up wrath for the day of judgement. We read later in that Psalm...

Psalm 73:16-17

When I thought how to understand this,
It was too painful for me—
Until I went into the sanctuary of God;
Then I understood their end.

And it will be the same for us... when we only look at those around us, we'll despair. But when we spend time with God - in His Word, and in prayer - we'll gain understanding of how this all works out - as we we read at the end of the Psalm...

Psalm 73:27-28

For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish;
You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry.
But it is good for me to draw near to God;
I have put my trust in the Lord GOD,
That I may declare all Your works.

So don't be envious of evil men. Or another way of putting it is if you don't desire the consequences, don't desire the actions!

But we are also told not to desire to be with them. Why? We read in 1 Corinthians...

1 Corinthians 15:33

Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."

So if you hear someone, anyone, talking about intentionally causing trouble (whether at work, in the playground, or at church) - get well away from them.

Proverbs 24:3-4

Through wisdom a house is built,
And by understanding it is established;
By knowledge the rooms are filled
With all precious and pleasant riches.

A strong foundation for a house doesn't happen by accident - neither will a strong foundation for your life. You'll need to invest time in that. But even once out of the ground, and the structure is in place, you'll want to furnish it.

And the precious and pleasant riches that'll work best, are those that you'll find in the Word. We read in 2 Timothy...

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

If you want you be be thoroughly equipped, or thoroughly furnished as the KJV translates it, then there's only one store you want to be shopping in!

Proverbs 24:5-6

A wise man is strong,
Yes, a man of knowledge increases strength;
For by wise counsel you will wage your own war,
And in a multitude of counsellors there is safety.

So there is a way to increase strength, without going to the gym! And it's by having wise counsel. Not just counsel. But *wise* counsel. So we need to carefully choose who counsels us.

But not just in person, but through what we read too. And in the Bible you have 40 authors ready to give you counsel at any time. And JVM helpfully notes:

I don't believe in this method of opening the Bible to look at some verse at the time of making a decision. That is not good. The Word of God is not a roulette wheel for us to turn and hope it stops at the right place. We need to know what the whole Bible says. We need to read Moses and Joshua and Samuel and David and Micah and Zechariah and Matthew and Paul and John. They are all our counselors. We can appeal to all of them at any time of decision.

J Vernon-McGee

That's a lot of wise counsel to be getting! But of course, it's optional - with different results if you don't take advantage of it...

Proverbs 24:7

Wisdom is too lofty for a fool;
He does not open his mouth in the gate.

That is a fool will never *listen* to wisdom, so will never be chosen to be a judge in the gate where court is held.

Proverbs 24:8-9

He who plots to do evil
Will be called a schemer.
The devising of foolishness is sin,
And the scoffer is an abomination to men.

So even *planning* foolish and evil things is sin, for indeed our hearts are where it all starts. And we need pure HEARTS to have a hope of pure words and actions.

Proverbs 24:10

If you faint in the day of adversity,
Your strength is small.

This feels like a statement. But I think we should take it as a warning to remember that we need to build our strength. But how do we do that? Well, we've already seen the answer in verse 5 - by getting wise counsel. And there is no better counsel you can get than God and His Word!

But you can't wait until you're in the middle of a trial to do that. You need to be praying and reading your Bible now.

And I would offer my Mum as an example of that - you've seen how amazingly she has acted in the midst of her health trials of late. But she didn't wait until she was in the midst of those trials to read her Bible, to pray, to serve God. She has patiently and faithfully pursued God and served Him for years. Don't sit there and think "I'd like faith like she has" and do nothing about it - that's laziness! And it won't build your strength.

Some ask, "Have you got a verse that will encourage me?". Perhaps the answer should always be "Yes - start at Genesis 1:1 and don't stop until you get to Revelation 22:21"!

But I'm also reminded of the need to pray. And in turn reminded of something Phillips Brooks said:

Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle, but you shall be the miracle.

Phillips Brooks

Your strength needn't be small.

Proverbs 24:11-12

Deliver those who are drawn toward death,
And hold back those stumbling to the slaughter.
If you say, "Surely we did not know this,"
Does not He who weighs the hearts consider it?
He who keeps your soul, does He not know it?
And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?

I think there are 2 ways we can, and should, apply this. First, in a day and age where we're increasingly aware of, even affected by suicide - we should not ignore those who are struggling, whether for the sake of our own convenience, or any other reason. We read in Romans 15...

Romans 15:1

We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

That is, we should help others in their burdens and infirmities.

But second, how much should we be motivated to reach those who are lost - those that, should they not turn to Jesus as their Saviour, are headed for hell. The answer is we should be motivated more than we are. The apostle Paul was one such person who took his responsibility seriously, and fulfilled it:

Acts 20:26-27

Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

What will you say to God if you never once shared His gospel with someone else? What will you say to Him if you shared it just once? Or even just once ever few years? We should be challenged by this.

Proverbs 24:13-14

My son, eat honey because it is good,
And the honeycomb which is sweet to your taste;
So shall the knowledge of wisdom be to your soul;
If you have found it, there is a prospect,
And your hope will not be cut off.

There is no downside to wisdom - not even calories! Yet, we somehow don't prioritise it, or invest in it at all! We're idiots aren't we!

David reminds us in Psalm 34...

Psalm 34:8

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good;
Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

Oh, how we should develop a taste for the Bible! For there is no greater wisdom than that which we'll read there.

Proverbs 24:15-16

Do not lie in wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous;
Do not plunder his resting place;
For a righteous man may fall seven times
And rise again,
But the wicked shall fall by calamity.

If you're going to pick on someone, at least don't be stupid enough to pick on those God loves! While the righteous will not be free from troubles, they will not be in trouble when they stand before the Lord. But that shouldn't cause us to gloat...

Proverbs 24:17-18

Do not rejoice when your enemy falls,
And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;
Lest the LORD see it, and it displease Him,
And He turn away His wrath from him.

So don't laugh when your enemy runs into problems, nor be pleased at where he is headed eternally. In fact, we're to treat our enemies better than we naturally want to - and we'll come back to this point in chapter 25.

Proverbs 24:19-20

Do not fret because of evildoers,
Nor be envious of the wicked;
For there will be no prospect for the evil man;
The lamp of the wicked will be put out.

Once again, let's remind ourselves of what we read in Psalm 73...

Psalm 73:16-17

When I thought how to understand this,
It was too painful for me—
Until I went into the sanctuary of God;
Then I understood their end.

So don't be jealous of your friends who seem to be having a better time than you right now. But rather, have prudence! We know how things work out for us, and for them. And longing for the old life is a problem - look at what it cost Israel as they looked back to Egypt! They were the example we need to learn from.

Proverbs 24:21-22

My son, fear the LORD and the king;
Do not associate with those given to change;
For their calamity will rise suddenly,
And who knows the ruin those two can bring?

That is, do not go joining in with those calling for our government to be overthrown. We've previously read:

Proverbs 17:11

An evil man seeks only rebellion;
Therefore a cruel messenger will be sent against him.

Peter warns that God knows how to...

2 Peter 2:9a-11

...reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.

And Paul, writing to the church in Rome, said:

Romans 13:1-2

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

Indeed he continues up to verse 7 explaining that. We are to be obedient to God and His Word first, and to human authority second, but where there is no conflict, make no mistake, that we are to obey the law of the land.

Solomon now concludes this section of the book, writing:

Proverbs 24:23

These things also belong to the wise:
It is not good to show partiality in judgment.

In fact, Moses warned the leaders he appointed...

Deuteronomy 1:17

You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's...

And we ourselves are also warned by James...

James 2:1-4

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

We are to treat all people fairly.

Proverbs 24:24-26

He who says to the wicked, "You are righteous,"
Him the people will curse;
Nations will abhor him.
But those who rebuke the wicked will have delight,
And a good blessing will come upon them.
He who gives a right answer kisses the lips.

People hate injustice, we see how rightfully upset we get at those in the public eye who fail. But are you prepared to rebuke the wicked? Will you stand up when injustice is done? We should.

Proverbs 24:27

Prepare your outside work,
Make it fit for yourself in the field;
And afterward build your house.

That is, make sure the necessary things are done before the optional things. Work comes before reward. Labour before the harvest.

Proverbs 24:28-29

Do not be a witness against your neighbour without cause,
For would you deceive with your lips?
Do not say, "I will do to him just as he has done to me;
I will render to the man according to his work."

So while it should be a given that we shouldn't be a *false* witness, we shouldn't be an *unnecessary* one either - we shouldn't be looking for ways that we can condemn others. Never criticise out of spite, revenge or retaliation.

Proverbs 24:30-34

I went by the field of the lazy man,
And by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding;
And there it was, all overgrown with thorns;
Its surface was covered with nettles;
Its stone wall was broken down.
When I saw it, I considered it well;
I looked on it and received instruction:
A little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to rest;
So shall your poverty come like a prowler,
And your need like an armed man.

Finnis Dake gives the clearest explanation of this, so I want to read it to you. We see 6 things about the lazy man.

1. His personal description (Prov. 24:30): He is slothful and ignorant, and lacks the courage and intelligence to make proper decisions about work and to carry them out.
2. His circumstances (Prov. 24:30-31): He has a vineyard and a farm capable of producing his own food and prospering him.
3. The condition of his farm (Prov. 24:31): It is grown over with thorns and nettles and the fences are broken down. The whole place is in a ruined state through long neglect.
4. The cause (Prov. 24:30,33): He is too lazy to prune the vineyard; clean up, plow, and plant his field; or to repair the fences and the residence. He spends his time in sleep, neglecting his essential duties (Prov. 24:33).
5. The result (Prov. 24:34): Absolute poverty as one who travels and has spent his last money, and as one who becomes impoverished through warfare (Prov. 24:34).
6. The lesson learned (Prov. 24:32,34): To follow the example of the slothful is to come to the same end.

We have read so much wisdom from these Proverbs that Solomon wrote, and set in order. And I hope we've retained some of that. But it still won't do us any good if you don't get out of bed.

Chapter twenty five

So now we move into chapter 25 and read:

Proverbs 25:1

These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied:

So, these are still Solomon's words, and still inspired by the Holy Spirit, but arranged by these men of Hezekiah, possibly with Isaiah as editor-in-chief of this work, around 275 years after Solomon.

And the first we read is:

Proverbs 25:2

It is the glory of God to conceal a matter,
But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.

There are many things we'll never know, at least this side of Heaven, for only God knows the answers. Yet there is great reward for the diligent - especially those that are diligent in pursuing wisdom, knowledge, and most of all, pursuing God Himself through His Word and prayer.

Proverbs 25:3

As the heavens for height and the earth for depth,
So the heart of kings is unsearchable.

Indeed, we don't always know what our rulers are doing! We may fear that *they* don't know what they're doing! But sometimes we don't know all that is going on for good reason, for not everything can be shared publicly - and it would probably worry us if it was!

The important thing, however, is to do all we can to promote righteousness in our country, for we read...

Proverbs 25:4-5

Take away the dross from silver,
And it will go to the silversmith for jewellery.
Take away the wicked from before the king,
And his throne will be established in righteousness.

The refiners fire purifies. And removing wickedness from any situation will ALWAYS improve it. If we want to see our government rule well, we need Christian MPs, and Godly advisors to them in all matters. The more this happens, the greater hope we can have of a government that honours God.

While I know that it is not my calling to serve in that particular way, maybe it could be yours. We need good men and women to take a stand in this country. However...

Proverbs 25:6-7

Do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king,
And do not stand in the place of the great;
For it is better that he say to you,
"Come up here,"
Than that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince,
Whom your eyes have seen.

It is so important that we wait to be asked up - in the workplace, and the church place. Jesus Himself expounded on this in Luke 14:

Luke 14:7-11

So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: "When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honourable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

So don't blow your own trumpet. If you act as if there's always someone more deserving than you for the job, promotion, pay rise, the thanks, the ministry or responsibility etc, that'll put you in good stead - for sometimes, even often, you'll be right! And remember that even when you feel ready for a certain responsibility, you may not be, or it may not be the Lord's timing.

Do all you can to ensure you are not a Diotrephes type character, such as we looked at a couple of weeks ago when referencing 3 John 1:9

Proverbs 25:8-10

Do not go hastily to court;
For what will you do in the end,
When your neighbour has put you to shame?
Debate your case with your neighbour,
And do not disclose the secret to another;
Lest he who hears it expose your shame,
And your reputation be ruined.

As Christians, we should be less focussed on winning, and more on loving. And so when we are wronged, we must not explode. We must not take people to court hastily. But rather we should, in the first case, aim to reconcile our differences.

And the wisdom of that, will in turn protect us - for we don't always see our own mistakes in the situation, and by talking calmly, peacefully and rationally with the person who has wronged us, we in turn will not have our mistakes made visible to all.

Yes, there are times when litigation is necessary. But especially within the church, we are first to pursue love, rather than legal action - the Corinthian church had got that wrong, hence Paul's rebuke in 1 Corinthians 6.

In Matthew 18, Jesus explains how it should be done:

Matthew 18:15-17

"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

When we do it right, this is the result...

Proverbs 25:11-12

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold
In settings of silver.
Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold
Is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear.

A wise man, when he has wronged someone and been rebuked for it, will listen, and respond in love to both the person rebuking, and the person they have hurt.

So we both need to be prepared to speak in love, and respond in love - in both cases being obedient: not to each other, but to our Saviour; in our conduct, our words and our attitude.

Continuing this theme of words, we read:

Proverbs 25:13

Like the cold of snow in time of harvest
Is a faithful messenger to those who send him,
For he refreshes the soul of his masters.

I think this is quite the indictment, that when someone is actually faithful with doing what they should do, and saying what they should say, that it is refreshing - like a cold drink, ice cream or air conditioning in the heat of summer.

So in a world that is not good at being faithful - in any way - let us be refreshing to our managers, supervisors, and employers. And most of all, let us faithfully carry out what is required of us in ministry - however it is we serve.

Proverbs 25:14

Whoever falsely boasts of giving
Is like clouds and wind without rain.

Here, Solomon warns of those who promise much, but deliver little. And we see both Peter and Jude use this analogy in their letters in the New Testament, warning us of false teachers - the kind we see today promising miracles, or large bank accounts, yet only serve to help themselves.

But, Solomon encourages...

Proverbs 25:15

By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded,
And a gentle tongue breaks a bone.

That is, kind and patient words can soften hard hearts. So we should choose them well - from appropriate, to reproving, refreshing or kind words. And avoiding vain words.

We continue...

Proverbs 25:16

Have you found honey?
Eat only as much as you need,
Lest you be filled with it and vomit.

Practical advice. But advice we should apply not only to our appetite for food, but for money and possessions too - for we're not good at knowing what enough really is. And so on that note...

Proverbs 25:17

Seldom set foot in your neighbour's house,
Lest he become weary of you and hate you.

So here Solomon says, visit your neighbour in moderation - whether your physical neighbour, your friend, or fellow church family members. But also note it says seldom, and not *never*.

Therefore we should be willing to open up our homes, but not take advantage of others when they do so.

Next, we see a few more verses related to our treatment of others...

Proverbs 25:18

A man who bears false witness against his neighbour
Is like a club, a sword, and a sharp arrow.

Never make someone feel beaten up, cut up, or stabbed in the back. We know that feels horrible, so don't do it to anyone. We should be people that others can trust, for we read...

Proverbs 25:19

Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble
Is like a bad tooth and a foot out of joint.

Of course, it's easy to think "Yeah, that's right!!". But we need to apply it to ourselves - are we faithful men and women who do what we say or commit to?

Proverbs 25:20

Like one who takes away a garment in cold weather,
And like vinegar on soda,
Is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

We all need people in our lives who have a sense of humour, even in the tough moments. And sometimes we can bring light to difficult situations, but never make light of other's situations - rather show compassion, just as we read in Romans...

Romans 12:15-16

Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

Also in 1 Thessalonians...

1 Thessalonians 5:14

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.

Exactly how are we to comfort others? Well, we read in 2 Corinthians...

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

...

Proverbs 25:21-22

If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat;
And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;
For so you will heap coals of fire on his head,
And the LORD will reward you.

This is contrary to what society does, and even what we naturally want to do! But we are not to throw the grenade back, but to put a pin in it and send a box of chocolates their way. Not only does it stop anyone from getting hurt, but opens the door for reconciliation.

Of course, this might not be optimum military strategy when someone is intent on actually killing you. But in the context of where most of us live and work most of the time, we are to pursue peace, just as we read in Romans 12 where Paul quotes this very verse.

Proverbs 25:23

The north wind brings forth rain,
And a backbiting tongue an angry countenance.

That is, if you talk behind someone's back, you can expect a glare when they turn around! And as Jon Courson notes, "if gossip was met with a stern look rather than an eager ear, it would be driven away."

Proverbs 25:24

It is better to dwell in a corner of a housetop,
Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

As mentioned before after similar verses, this isn't advice if you already share a house like this, but to avoid it in the first place.

Proverbs 25:25

As cold water to a weary soul,
So is good news from a far country.

We all know it's great to hear good news from friends and family that live far away. But the best news you can get - is that they are walking with the Lord. That's what Paul rejoices about in the opening of his letters to the Colossians, Ephesians and Philippians.

But contrast that to what we read in the next verse...

Proverbs 25:26

A righteous man who falters before the wicked
Is like a murky spring and a polluted well.

Oh how sad it is when we hear of righteous men and women who have stumbled in their walk with the Lord, or even turned their back on Him altogether.

But I wonder, if someone heard about you or I, and precisely how closely we were walking with the Lord - would they be encouraged, or saddened?

Proverbs 25:27

It is not good to eat much honey;
So to seek one's own glory is not glory.

Once again, honey receives a mention - but whereas 16 uses it in the context of making yourself vomit, here you could argue it's used in the context of making others vomit - through pride and arrogance. We'd do well to remember that speaking well of yourself doesn't mean you are well spoken of!

Proverbs 25:28

Whoever has no rule over his own spirit
Is like a city broken down, without walls.

So, finally we end our study this evening with a Proverb that could summarise much of our need - and that is for self control, which as you know is part of the fruit of the Spirit.

Summary

As mentioned before, the word **wisdom** is the best one to summarise the book of Proverbs. But if we had to consider alternatives, then perhaps **choices** would be high on the list. For we each have a choice of whether we read, listen to, or apply the things we find here.

Application questions

So then, here are some questions to ponder, as we seek to apply this to our lives this week:

- Are you envious of evil men? Have you got your perspective right?
- Are you building your spiritual strength now, or will you faint in the day of adversity?
- Are you focussed more on winning, or loving?

- Are you showing care and compassion to those in need of it?

Let's pray.