

Proverbs on Wise Counsel

Various Proverbs

Baxter T. Exum (#1727)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
March 17, 2024



Good morning, and welcome to the Four Lakes congregation! If you are visiting this morning or joining us online or on the phone, we are glad to have you with us. We'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card online if you can, or you can use one of the cards from the pew in front of you. Whatever works for you, we would love to hear from you, and we invite you to pass along any questions or prayer concerns.

We are here this morning to preach the good news that God loves us and that Jesus came to this earth and died on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up on the first day of the week. We obey this good news by being buried with him in baptism, and by rising out of the water to live a new life. And we do have several examples to share this morning, starting with an update from Shelby's home congregation down in Paintsville, Kentucky. They posted a few days ago, "What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Rejoice with us! There is joy in the presence of the angels! Everyone welcome our new sister in Christ, Olivia. After attending our Gospel Meeting and completing a Bible study, she recognized the need to be re-baptized in a scriptural manner (Acts 19:1-7), into the one baptism of the scriptures (Ephesians 4:4). Olivia obeyed the gospel by being baptized for the remission of sins and the Lord added her to His church (Acts 2:38-47)." And then they quote Galatians 3:27, ***"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."*** In another post, they explain that they have had a gospel meeting this week, and that they have had four people obey the gospel, including one woman in a wheelchair who had five or six people assist her down into the water. And all of this came as a result of their members inviting their friends and family to come and study. They say that "Each new Christian was the result of ONE who loved them enough to lead them to the ONE who could save them." So good to see all of this!

We have an update from the Lord's church down in Rutherford, Tennessee, where they say that "Annalise Eddlemon was baptized into Christ tonight by her brother Coltan. We are super proud and excited about Annalise's decision to become a Christian!" This is the coolest thing ever, that a brother and sister are now brother and sister!

We have an update from the Lord's church over in Richmond, Virginia. They say that "We were filled with praise and awe as we got to witness Tai get baptized! There were many laughs and tears, all stemming from a deeply embedded joy for God saving Tai and for Tai making the faithful choice to make Jesus the Lord of his life. We were grateful to have experienced this miraculous moment!"

There are many others we could share, but we'll wrap it up with a recent post from Abanda Edwin, who preaches the gospel in Yaounde, the capital of Cameroon. He simply says that "Two souls submitted to the kingdom rule of Jesus Christ in Baptism." This may be the first baptism I've seen among the lily pads, but if you would like to study God's plan for your life, if you have any questions or concerns, please get in touch using the contact information on the wall up here (or on your screen at home). If you are joining us on the phone, you can send a text or give me a call at 608-224-0274.

This morning, I'd like for us to return to our very sporadic and long term study of Proverbs. As I've explained over the past two weeks, we have looked at Proverbs 1-9 on a chunk by chunk basis. However, starting in Proverbs 10, nearly every sense of context flies out the window, so I've been dividing the rest of the book by topic, and we are looking at these in no particular order. We'll have somewhat related clumps of topics grouped together as we move forward, but today we come to one that stands on its own. As I've been working through Proverbs again over the past few months, I've noticed a number of proverbs scattered throughout the book, dedicated to the idea of listening to wise counsel, listening to advice, even the idea of listening to correction or rebuke. There is a value in getting input from others. We might think about the value of consulting online reviews, whether for restaurants or products, even large purchases like a car, we value checking in with others who have already purchased what we are considering. For probably 30 years, we subscribed to Consumer Reports, and we valued those opinions, but I have finally let that subscription expire, because they are no longer the only place to go for reviews. Far from it. We look for a place to eat, and we check the reviews. I go looking for a new pair of shoes, I check the reviews. Before we go see a movie, we check the reviews. Or maybe we get advice on how to do something. I'm getting ready to change the spark plugs and the PCV valve on my Subaru, and I've been watching YouTube videos and looking at the Reddit group, soaking up advice on those who have gone before me. So also in other areas of life: There is a value in listening to advice. And we're reminded that as the king, King Solomon most definitely surrounded himself with advisors. Sometimes those advisors would have given good advice, sometimes they would have given bad advice, but generally speaking, there is a tremendous value to listening to wise counsel, and there is a danger in rejecting it.

And as I've been dividing the Proverbs, I'm finding that there's some overlap between topics. There are many proverbs that may fit in several categories, and it's a challenge sometimes. In fact, I've been reminded of Solomon's words in the passage from Ecclesiastes 12 that Caleb read for us earlier. He described his own work as he said (in Ecclesiastes 12:9-10) that, ***"In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly."*** Part of preaching, then, is arranging proverbs! We have this inspired book, we have these words of wisdom, and it's the preacher's job to arrange these words in a way that applies God's truth to the lives we're living, not 3000 years ago, but right here right now.

This morning, then, I want us to take a look at those proverbs that address listening to wise counsel. Sometimes wise counsel comes in the form of encouragement, sometimes it comes in the form of a rebuke, and sometimes it comes in the form of good advice. We have nearly thirty Proverbs that fall in this category, so I'd like to run through these rather quickly as we pull out both the benefits of listening to wise counsel as well as the dangers of ignoring it.

1. And we'll just jump into these in the order they come in Proverbs, starting with Proverbs 10:8, where Solomon says that ***"The wise of heart will receive commands, but a babbling fool will be ruined."*** As we look at this first one, we simply note the value of receiving commands. And the opposite of this (in the second half of the verse) is that ***"a babbling fool will be ruined."*** So here, we have the idea of someone speaking when they should be listening. Those who are wise will listen, but those who speak (or babble) instead of listening, ***"will***

be ruined." So, to start off this morning, receiving commands is tied to being *"wise of heart,"* while speaking instead of listening leads to ruin.

2. The second proverb (in the order that they come in the book) is Proverbs 10:17, where King Solomon says, *"He is on the path of life who heeds instruction, but he who ignores reproof goes astray."* Those who heed instruction, then, are *"on the path of life."* On the other hand, those who ignore reproof *"go astray."* Listening to wise counsel, then, is a choice between life and death, a choice between choosing to go in the direction of life and intentionally choosing to be lost.

3. The third proverb is Proverbs 11:14 where Solomon says, *"Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory."* And to me, this sounds like advice from one wise old king to his son, to the young man who would probably be king someday. And we see this in the Proverbs. We have some advice on leadership. Part of leading is listening. And here, it comes in the context of going to war. When leading people into battle, get advice! Listen to wise counsel! Without it, when we think we can make wise decisions on our own, *"people fall."* On the other hand, victory comes by getting some good advice. Check in with those who have done this. Look to those with experience. Surround yourself with wisdom and lean on those people for advice.

4. The fourth proverb is Proverbs 12:1 where Solomon says, *"Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid."* I love that this comes from a father to his sons: Don't be stupid! It sounds like something a dad might say. When we check the original language here, we find the word translated as *"discipline"* in the NASB comes from a word that can refer to *"chastening"* or *"correction."* It's translated elsewhere as *"instruction"* or *"reproof."* So, this definitely fits with our theme of paying attention to wise counsel. Loving discipline or instruction is compared to loving knowledge, but the other side of this is that one who hates being corrected is stupid. And this is where we start to understand in this series of proverbs that it may not always be pleasant, but there is a real value to being corrected. All of us get corrected from time to time, and if we get angry and defensive at that, if our first instinct is to reject it, we really miss out. We miss out on what might have actually been good advice, but we may also miss out on that person ever offering their help to us in the future; we shut down that line of communication. Now, obviously, people may harass us, people may hate us, people may have some bad advice, but we need to filter through that. Instead of just hating any and all reproof, Solomon is suggesting here that we need to approach reproof with the idea that we may find something valuable in it.

5. The next one comes to us in Proverbs 12:15, *"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel."* In the first part of this proverb, the fool is arrogant; the fool thinks he knows it all already, but in contrast, the wise man *"listens."*

6. The next proverb comes to us in Proverbs 13:1, where Solomon says that *"A wise son accepts his father's discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke."* The word that we have here as *"discipline"* can also refer to *"chastening"* or *"correction"* and is translated elsewhere as *"punishment"* or a *"warning."* This is one of those proverbs that overlaps with those on parents and their children, but we're reminded here that wise counsel may come from within the family, even from parents to their children. Our parents have been through some things that we haven't been through quite yet. I'm finding that to be true even in my 50's! But the second half of this is that a *"scoffer"* refuses to listen to rebuke. The word *"scoffer"* refers to someone who scorns, or mocks, or makes fun of others. So, if I'm always mocking and making fun of the people around me, I'm probably not too open to listening to their advice.

7. The next proverb is quite similar to the one before last and comes in Proverbs 13:10 where Solomon says, ***“Through insolence comes nothing but strife, but wisdom is with those who receive counsel.”*** The word we have here as ***“insolence”*** is sometimes translated as ***“presumptuousness”*** or ***“pride,”*** and it’s the idea of ***“arrogance,”*** being approached by somebody who may have good advice, but we don’t listen to it, because we think we already know it all. This kind of attitude brings ***“strife,”*** Solomon says. On the other hand, ***“wisdom is with those who receive counsel.”***

8. Next in line is Proverbs 13:18, where Solomon says, ***“Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects discipline, but he who regards reproof will be honored.”*** We have a new negative consequence of ignoring instruction, and that is, ***“poverty and shame.”*** So, there is a financial and social aspect to this. When we refuse to listen to wise counsel, we may have a tendency to lose money over it, to be embarrassed over it. On the other hand, the one who listens to correction will be ***“honored,”*** and Solomon uses a word here that refers to being ***“heavy”*** or ***“weighty.”*** In English, we might think of the word ***“gravitas.”*** Someone who listens to correction builds a serious or weighty reputation over time.

9. The next proverb applies specifically to Solomon’s son’s role as the future king. As the old king, in Proverbs 14:28, Solomon says to his son, ***“In a multitude of people is a king’s glory, but in the dearth of people is a prince’s ruin.”*** When a king is surrounded by advisors, this leads to ***“glory.”*** But when a young prince tries to press forward on his own without listening to advice, he’s headed for ***“ruin.”*** Another way of looking at this proverb is to realize that to be a leader, you must have followers! There’s an old saying to the effect that “if you’re leading and nobody is following, then you aren’t really leading, but you are just out on a walk.”

10. The next one, in Proverbs 15:5, comes in the form of some family advice, ***“A fool rejects his father’s discipline, but he who regards reproof is sensible.”*** Once again, we have a contrast between a ***“fool”*** and someone who is ***“sensible.”*** The difference is the son’s response to discipline and reproof. To reject discipline is to be foolish, and to regard reproof is to be ***“sensible.”***

11. In Proverbs 15:10, Solomon continues, ***“Grievous punishment is for him who forsakes the way; he who hates reproof will die.”*** Once again, this is a matter of life and death. On one hand, punishment comes for those who turn away from the path, but those who hate correction will die.

12. Two verses later, in Proverbs 15:12, the king observes that ***“A scoffer does not love one who reproves him, he will not go to the wise.”*** Remember, a ***“scoffer”*** is someone who mocks or makes fun of others. The scoffer can dish it out, but cannot take it, and so the scoffer refuses to go to the wise for advice. Instead, it’s almost as if the scoffer insulates himself even from the possibility of being corrected. He refuses to ask the wise for advice, because he knows what they will say, and so the endless loop of foolishness continues. There is no love for reproof. Sometimes, even today, we also may avoid getting input from certain people, because we want to do what we want to do, and we know this person may try to talk some sense into us.

13. In Proverbs 15:22, we come to another one of these leadership proverbs, as King Solomon speaks from experience and says, ***“Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed.”*** And this is one of those where we need the reminder that a proverb is a statement that is generally true and not necessarily true in all circumstances. The general truth here is that it is generally good to ask for advice so that a plan succeeds. But I think we also realize that this can be taken to the extreme that it stops being true. It’s possible, of course, to get so much advice from so many people that we fail to ever get anything done. It’s possible to consult a project to death. I think of the Dane County Jail project. That thing has been studied and restudied perhaps more than any other project in county history. There are people who think that we shouldn’t even have a jail, and they realize that one way to kill a project is to study it. So, let’s have another

study! I'm just trying to illustrate that Proverbs 15:22 is one of those proverbs that is generally true but can be taken to an extreme where it is no longer true. Generally speaking, though, getting advice will help a plan succeed.

14. In Proverbs 15:31-32, Solomon continues and says, ***"He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise."*** And, ***"He who neglects discipline despises himself, but he who listens to reproof acquires understanding."*** In verse 31, Solomon observes that when we listen to reproof, we tend to be welcomed among the wise. The wise know that they got wise by listening, and they welcome fellow listeners. And in verse 32, when we refuse to pay attention to discipline, it shows that we really don't like ourselves. On the other hand, when we listen to reproof or correction we gain understanding.

15. I struggled with whether to include this one, Proverbs 17:10, but I did, because it teaches that listening to a rebuke is better than a beating. Solomon says, ***"A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool."*** So, the value of listening to a rebuke is that it "beats" the alternative, so to speak. We can learn the hard way or we can learn the easy way. The easy way is to listen; the hard way is to forge ahead, ignoring all advice, and getting beaten for it (sometimes literally).

16. In Proverbs 18:1, Solomon says, ***"He who separates himself seeks his own desire, he quarrels against all sound wisdom."*** We are back to the idea of avoiding correction by staying away from people. He doesn't use the word, but Solomon is warning against selfishness. If our reason for staying away from people is just so we can do our own thing without being corrected, that's a problem; we are arguing against wisdom.

17. Continuing with Proverbs 19:20, Solomon says, ***"Listen to counsel and accept discipline that you may be wise the rest of your days."*** So, once again, listening to counsel and accepting discipline leads to wisdom over the long term.

18. We have an interesting statement in Proverbs 19:25 where Solomon says, ***"Strike a scoffer and the naive may become shrewd, but reprove one who has understanding and he will gain knowledge."*** In the first part of this, we have Solomon speaking from experience here as he explains that if you strike a scoffer (someone who's always making fun of people), he may just adjust his behavior to avoid further beatings. So, the striking may get the job done in terms of changing behavior, but the scoffer doesn't really gain wisdom from that. On the other hand, if you reprove someone who has understanding, that man may actually gain knowledge. There is a difference, then, between not doing something because it hurts and truly learning.

19. The next one comes just a few verses later, in Proverbs 19:27, where Solomon says, ***"Cease listening, my son, to discipline, and you will stray from the words of knowledge."*** Once again, we have a warning about the danger of drifting. We stop listening to correction, and we wander.

20. Skipping ahead to Proverbs 20:18, we have another one addressed to a future king, ***"Prepare plans by consultation, and make war by wise guidance."*** This, by the way, is one more reason why we pray for those in positions of authority. Those who may lead the nation to war need to be surrounded by wise guidance. The implication is that guidance leads to victory.

21. As we come to Proverbs 21:11, we have a proverb pretty similar to Proverbs 19:25, but here, Solomon says, ***"When the scoffer is punished, the naive becomes wise; but when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge."*** So, when the guy who's always making fun of people gets punished, he does gain some wisdom from that, but when the wise are instructed, they gain knowledge.

22. We now come to two verses that actually go together (there is a tiny fragment of context here), as Solomon says in Proverbs 24:5-6, ***“A wise man is strong, and a man of knowledge increases power. For by wise guidance you will wage war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory.”*** This is one of those that seems to be aimed at the future king, and like the others, Solomon reminds his son that wisdom has a way of leading to strength, because in a time of war, a wise man looks for advice, and that advice leads to victory.

23. The next one comes in Proverbs 25:12, where Solomon says, ***“Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise reprover to a listening ear.”*** The message is: When one person corrects another, and when that person listens to the correction, it’s beautiful; it’s appropriate. So, there’s no dishonor in either correcting or getting corrected, but that’s the way it’s supposed to be.

24. In Proverbs 27:5-6, Solomon says, ***“Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.”*** In other words, those who are wise realize that it’s better to hear a rebuke from a friend than to have somebody keep silent with the excuse that they love us. That’s not love at all. A real friend tells us what we need to hear, but an enemy may flatter, even when it’s not deserved.

25. This next one, in Proverbs 27:9, is somewhat related, as Solomon says, ***“Oil and perfume make the heart glad, so a man’s counsel is sweet to his friend.”*** Wise counsel from one friend to another is described here as being ***“sweet.”***

26. This next one may be one of the most famous of all the proverbs. In Proverbs 27:17, Solomon says, ***“Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”*** If you’ve ever sharpened anything, then you know the picture King Solomon is painting for us here. When I was a kid, one of the first things I learned working with dad out in the garage is that a screwdriver must never touch the concrete. It’s counter-intuitive, then, to sharpen a tool by rubbing it on a stone or on another piece of iron, but that’s exactly how we sharpen stuff. I’ve told you several times that my grandfather on my mom’s side (my mom’s father) was a machinist, and Pap taught me how to sharpen almost anything – screwdrivers, chisels, knives, lawnmower blades, anything. One of the most difficult things I’ve ever sharpened is a push-reel lawnmower. Remember the old mowers without motors? We got one off a trash pile or something, and called around to see if anyone could sharpen it for us. Nobody knew what we were talking about. The next time Pap came to town, though, he taught me how to do it. There’s a bar underneath the blades, and you need to very slowly adjust that bar so it just barely rubs the blades. Those mowers are self-sharpening. And the test is when you can use the mower to slice a piece of newspaper. We got it done, with iron literally rubbing on iron. By the way, as I was working on sharpening that mower, I had to take it out in the yard again and again, and after a while, the neighborhood kids started to gather, “What in the world is that thing?” They watched, and eventually, they asked, “Can we try that?” I had a Tom Sawyer and the whitewashed fence moment, “Well, I guess so, if you really want to!” And those kids ended up mowing our yard! But the mower is sharpened by iron rubbing on iron, and that’s what happens when two men correct one another. It may not be pleasant, there’s some friction involved, there may be some sparks, but both will eventually benefit.

27. The next one comes in Proverbs 28:23, where Solomon says, ***“He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue.”*** Again, there may be a place for giving a compliment, but if I need a rebuke, that rebuke is far more valuable than flattery.

28. And we close this morning with the last one, found in Proverbs 29:1, where the text says, ***“A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.”*** Not a positive reference at all, but it’s the reminder that the one who ignores much reproof is heading for destruction.

Conclusion:

This morning, we've looked at the proverbs that encourage us to get advice and to listen to correction, and we've seen a pattern up here, haven't we? Generally speaking, listening to wise counsel is good, and rejecting any correction or advice can be dangerous. As we head back into the world this week, therefore, let's renew our commitment to search out wise counsel.

Before Michael leads us in a song, let's go to God in prayer.

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the one and only wise God. From everlasting to everlasting, you are God, and today we pray for the wisdom to seek out wise counsel. We ask that you surround us with good Christian friends who will love us enough to correct and encourage. And we pray that we would be the kind of friends who will speak up whenever it's needed. We pray for those who have little ones on the way, that you will bless them with wisdom and courage for the long journey ahead. Bless the elders of the congregation with wisdom, that they will always do what's right and best for your people. Be with those in positions of authority – surround them with wise advisors, and bless them with the wisdom to listen.

Father, we ask that we be strengthened with power through your Spirit so that the Lord Jesus would dwell in our hearts through faith, that we would understand the love that you have for us. We come to you through Jesus. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com