

God's Advice and Warnings
Proverbs 19, 25, 26
Carol Martin

When we first started this year, I told you that Psalms had the vertical thrust of showing us how to get along with God and Proverbs had the horizontal thrust of showing us how to get along with each other. Today's lesson is taken from three chapters in Proverbs that deserve some serious attention because in them God has some warnings of what we can expect from improper and foolish behavior and some advice we'd better heed if we're going to get along with each other and in the long run bring glory to Him.

Webster defines advice as "to counsel about a course of action." Sometimes we're in that position of giving advice and I have just a word of caution for you – it should grab (G-R-A-B) the listener. Those initials stand for being Gracious, Relevant, Authentic and Biblical. Gracious is only giving advice when it's asked for. Relevance sticks to the subject at hand. Authenticity means you live a life of integrity that would give weight to your words. And Biblical is, of course, the only standard for counsel and the listener should weigh all counsel received in light of Scripture.

One comment I found on giving advice was from Samuel Coleridge, "Advice is like snow, the softer it falls, the longer it dwells and the deeper it sinks into the mind." Another used the same analogy saying it like this, "Our advice must not fall like a violent storm, bearing down and making those to whom it is meant to cherish and refresh, instead droop under the pelting of harsh words. It must descend as the dew upon the tender herb, or like melting flakes of snow; the softer it falls, the longer it dwells upon and the deeper it sinks into the mind." Those thoughts both have the element of graciousness in them, don't they?

But just giving an answer with grace doesn't mean we skirt what may be the harsh truth. After all, advice isn't necessarily what is most pleasant, but what is most useful. That's where knowing the God of the Bible and having knowledge of His Word gives you the foundation to share advice that can really help. How do I deal with this issue, person, circumstance in my life? Where can I turn in this time of trouble? What should I do next? We might not have the expedient answer, but we do know Who will work all things together in His time.

Sometimes with advice should come a warning of what not to do. There is seldom an easy solution to life's problems. One person commented, "My most painful experiences have been when I've been a problem or contributed to the problem and no one loved me enough to tell me about it."

Warning, as defined by Webster, is "to make aware of potential or probable danger, harm or evil; counsel to cease an undesirable course of action; to notify in

advance.” Since ignoring God’s counsel will invite discipline or judgment, God warns us in advance of what is going to do us harm, both in relationships with others and spiritually with Him.

A little bit of Bible trivia . . . what was the first warning in the Bible? A hint, it’s in Genesis 2:17. “Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” This very first warning went unheeded and look at the consequences of sin in the world today. How about the last warning in the Bible? Another hint, it’s in Revelation 22:18,19. “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book and if anyone takes away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city which are described in this book.” Specifically, this applies to the book of Revelation, but generally it applies to the whole word of God – don’t mess with it!

When I thought about the difference between advice and warning in my own life, it seems that advice most often applies to that which is seeking the best for me . . . and warnings apply to that which is definitely a danger for me. Regardless of which category we put the verses of these Proverbs chapters into, God means for us to pay attention to His Word earnestly.

As I read the 73 verses in this lesson, it seems to me that God gives us advice about seven areas: wisdom, character, family, neighbors, generosity, our tongue and our lifestyle. And He warns us in five areas: our walk, our witness, our wealth, our words and our ways. Let’s see what His advice was first.

Who among us doesn’t want to be wise . . . to have wisdom? Proverbs 19:20 says, “Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise.” It all begins there, doesn’t it? Being willing to listen and to change. 25:12 says “Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man’s rebuke to listening ear.” People who care about you will tell you the truth . . . The Holy Spirit does. Some may call it conscience, but the Holy Spirit’s duty is to lead you into truth and to convict you of sin. The question is, “Do you have a listening ear?” Are you grateful both to God and others who keep you accountable? Listening doesn’t come easy, especially when “self” is so sure. But “in the end you will be wise” if you do listen.

Those who listen continually do learn and gain wisdom. We’re told in Proverbs 19:8 to cherish understanding and we’ll prosper . . . in vs. 11 that wisdom gives us patience to overlook offenses . . . and wisdom gives us discernment. 25:20 advises us to be discerning when trying to cheer someone up . . . maybe what they really need your sympathy. Isn’t that one of the things we admire in spiritually mature Christians? They seem to know just the right thing to say or do for the circumstances we’re in. To have that maturity grow in your own life – it starts with the first piece of advice . . . have a listening ear – especially to the voice of God.

It's been said that God is more concerned about our character than our comfort. His goal is not to pamper us physically but to perfect us spiritually. That's why in these Scriptures His advice is to be humble – to let others exalt you so you won't be humiliated with pride. That's why He says to be a trustworthy messenger (a good employee, if you will). And why He says kindness is the proper response to those who rub you the wrong way.

Developing a godly character is always a battle with our pride, our integrity, and our relationships with one another. Sometimes we learn the hard way through failure. But it's what we do when we get up from defeat that measures the success of the lesson God wants to teach us. I know both you and I are so grateful that He is a God of second chances.

Probably one of the most familiar verses in our reading for this lesson is found in Proverbs 25:11 "A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." That's one of the Scriptures that expresses God's advice for us to encourage one another. Let me share a story with you not only because it's a good illustration but also because it actually happened here at Eastside many, many years ago. The story goes like this:

A teacher in New York decided to honor each of her seniors in high school by telling them the difference they each made. Using a process developed by Helice Bridges of Del Mar, California, she called each student to the front of the class, one at a time. First, she told them how the student made a difference to her and the class. Then she presented each of them with a blue ribbon imprinted with gold letters which read, "Who I Am Makes a Difference."

Afterwards the teacher decided to do a class project to see what kind of impact recognition would have on a community. She gave each of the students three more ribbons and instructed them to go out and spread this acknowledgment ceremony. Then they were to follow up on the results, see who honored whom and report back to the class in about a week.

One of the boys in the class went to a junior executive in a nearby company and honored him for helping him with his career planning. He gave him a blue ribbon and put it on his shirt. Then he gave him two extra ribbons, and said, "We're doing a class project on recognition, and we'd like you to go out, find somebody to honor, give them a blue ribbon, then give them the extra blue ribbon so they can acknowledge a third person to keep this acknowledgment ceremony going. Then please report back to me and tell me what happened."

Later that day the junior executive went in to see his boss, who had been noted, by the way, as being kind of a grouchy fellow. He sat his boss down and he told him that he deeply admired him for being a creative genius. The boss seemed very surprised.

The junior executive asked him if he would accept the gift of the blue ribbon and would he give him permission to put it on him. His surprised boss said, "Well, sure."

The junior executive took the blue ribbon and placed it right on his boss's jacket above his heart. As he gave him the last extra ribbon, he said, "Would you do me a favor? Would you take this extra ribbon and pass it on by honoring somebody else? The young boy who first gave me the ribbons is doing a project in school and we want to keep this recognition ceremony going and find out how it affects people."

That night the boss came home to his 14-year-old son and sat him down. He said, "The most incredible thing happened to me today. I was in my office and one of the junior executives came in and told me he admired me and gave me a blue ribbon for being a creative genius. Imagine. He thinks I'm a creative genius. Then he put this blue ribbon that says 'Who I Am Makes a Difference' on my jacket above my heart. He gave me an extra ribbon and asked me to find somebody else to honor. As I was driving home tonight, I started thinking about whom I would honor with this ribbon and I thought about you. I want to honor you."

"My days are really hectic and when I come home, I don't pay a lot of attention to you. Sometimes I scream at you for not getting good enough grades in school and for your bedroom being a mess, but somehow tonight, I just wanted to sit here and, well, just let you know that you do make a difference to me. Besides your mother, you are the most important person in my life. You're a great kid and I love you!"

The startled boy started to sob and sob, and he couldn't stop crying. His whole body shook. He looked up at his father and said through his tears, "I was planning on committing suicide, Dad, because I didn't think you loved me. Now I don't need to."

Well, at Eastside many years ago, when the Merolds were here, one Sunday evening service we were handed white ribbons with pins in them and asked to pin it on someone who had made a difference in our life. Ministers and staff were to be excluded. What a joy to acknowledge people publicly who meant so much in my life! Seeing that joy of encouragement has done a lot to my own personal ministry of encouragement over the years. It was truly one of the most significant services I ever attended. Any of you remember that?

I didn't bring ribbons with me today/tonight for you to distribute, but I'd like to inspire you to share your own gratitude and encouragement with someone else this week

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Well, God has more advice for us so here are some pieces of advice from these proverbs that I've just connected together as sort of a letter from God. Listen to God's advice:

My Child:

Family life is important to Me. You can inherit a house or wealth from your parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord. She's a valuable gift meant to be honored. And together I expect you to discipline your children, don't be a party to their death. I discipline My children as an example for you to do likewise.

Neighbors are wonderful, but mind your own business and don't make a nuisance of yourself or your neighbors will hate to see you come. And don't cheat your neighbor and then say, "I was only joking." If you've borrowed something, take it back promptly and in good shape or in like kind.

The more you know people, the more conversations you'll have. Remember that good news is refreshing. Don't always be full of troubles and woes. Look for an opportunity to be an encouragement to others with your tongue – A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.

I give you plenty of opportunities for generosity – remember, He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord. Don't be something you're not though and boast of giving when it isn't true. That's hypocrisy.

And one more thing – don't overindulge yourself (Solomon wrote, "eat too much honey"). Your bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made and they need to be taken care of. Work, play, exercise, rest . . . be balanced.

Your character, your family, your friends and neighbors, your lifestyle are all concerns of Mine. But remember, Proverbs 19:23 says, "The fear of the Lord leads to life; then one rests content, untouched by trouble."

So put Me first . . . that leads to eternal life. Then whatever the world has in store for you, you can rest content in My unfailing promises because I reminded you through Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:17, "That our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." Nothing touches you that has not passed through My hands and I will work it all together for good.

Heed my advice,
Love, Your Heavenly Father

Well, if we'd follow God's advice many things in our lives would go easier wouldn't they? But unfortunately, we're not always balanced and godly. So, today's lesson has some stronger words for us to consider . . . words of warning. We need to pay attention to the red flags in Proverbs. As I mentioned, I see God speaking about our walk, our witness, our words, our wealth, and our ways. Again, I'm going to give it to you in a "letter from God" format.

My Child:

Zeal . . . how I love it! Lukewarmness makes me want to vomit. But be careful about zeal without knowledge, I don't want you to be hasty and miss the way. Get your facts straight . . . know what you believe and why you believe it. Be prepared to let people know that penalties prevail for those who insist on mocking Me and the institutions and systems I've established. On a very personal note, I have three things to warn you of:

- 1) You never lose a bad reputation especially if it comes from betraying the trust or confidence of another. You represent Me, guard your reputation for trustworthiness.
- 2) Poor choice of unreliable friends can be like a bad tooth or a lame foot. Think . . . do they build your Christian walk or try to tear it down?
- 3) Keep the right perspective. You may think you're in charge, but it's My purpose that prevails. If things don't go your way, it doesn't mean I don't love you . . . but most often My way are not your ways. Keep that straight.

I am truth and therefore I place great value on truthful witness – a false witness will not go unpunished; he will not go free. I hate a lying tongue. In fact, let Me remind you again how I feel concerning the damage words can do. Words of gossip are like choice morsels; they get down into men's hearts. Malicious wickedness will eventually be exposed and will be like a man who digs a pit and then falls into it, or rolls a stone only to have it roll back on him. A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and even a flattering mouth works ruin. I am warning you to watch your tongue.

I know that mankind wants what it considers wealth and riches. When you have it, friends seem to abound. Everyone's a friend to one who gives gifts and picks up the tab. People even loved Jesus when He was feeding them, healing them, working miracles. But lose that wealth and become poor and those same people once your friends desert you or even worse. Great wealth is entrusted to the very few because only a few can handle it. And those who have riches without Me in their lives have only temporary pleasure preceding an eternity of deprivation. I know your earthly needs and I'll provide. Your heavenly riches are so abundant . . . well, just wait till you see what I have in store for you!!

One last area I want to warn you about and that is foolish behavior in the way you conduct your life.

Are you being a quarrelsome wife? – Nagging is not the language of love. Your husband would be better off to live on the corner of the roof.

Are you being hot-tempered? – If you haven't already, you will pay a penalty for that behavior.

Are you dishonoring your parents? – Do My words in Exodus 20:12 mean nothing to you? I explicitly told you to honor your mother and father.

Are you being lazy expecting others to feed you or provide for you or do for you what you should be doing for yourself? You should be ashamed of sloth and laziness. You'll go hungry and be in want.

Without self-control in your life, you're like a city whose walls are broken down . . . vulnerable and defenseless. I can help you be in control just as I helped Daniel when he resolved not to defile himself with royal food and wine. You do not have to compromise . . . I am your strength.

My servant, Solomon, had a lot to say in Proverbs 26 about fools and sluggards: Don't trust them to carry messages accurately or speak wisely. They are unreliable, not to be honored.

In fact, there are six characteristics of a sluggard:
He has trouble getting started, is restless, costly to business, often defensive, a quitter and full of excuses.

If you answer a fool according to his folly, you will be like him yourself (in other words, don't agree with a fool or his actions. It's a waste of time to trade insults). However, you should answer a fool or he will be wise in his own eyes. (That is – point out the error of his foolishness and try to get him back on the right course – correct the thinking, not the man).

It's been said that a foolish man repeats his mistakes . . . an average man learns from his mistakes . . . and a wise man learns from the mistakes of others.

My exclamation point on all that Solomon wrote is simply this -- don't be a fool or a sluggard . . . be a wise man!

Hear my warnings,
Signed, God

Well, I know that's a little fanciful, but sometimes we need to read Scripture as if God were across the table from us talking or sending us an urgent telegram we need to read and respond to. Before you start preparing next week's lesson, think seriously about what advice or warning God has given you in this lesson that you need to pay attention to. Is everything okay with family and friends, honesty and humility, diligence and duty, listening and learning?

Picture God beside you then ask yourself, "Have I had a listening ear today?"
Let's pray:

Father, Your Word is living and active. It speaks to us advice and warnings we need to hear. May we take to heart what the Holy Spirit has quickened in our spirits from in this lesson. We love you and desire to please you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Please stand as we sing the Doxology together.

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