

PROVERBS

Chapter 16

The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD. 2 All the ways of a man are pure in his 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 Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished. 6 By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil. 7 When a man's ways please the LORD, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. 8 Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice. 9 The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps. 10 An oracle is on the lips of a king; his mouth does not sin in judgment. 11 A just balance 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 him who speaks what is right. 14 A king's wrath is a messenger of death, and a wise man 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 turns aside from evil; whoever guards his way preserves his life. 18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. 19 It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud. 20 Whoever gives thought to the word will discover good, and blessed is he who trusts in the LORD. 21 The wise of heart is called discerning, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness. 22 Good sense is a fountain of life to him who has it, but the instruction of fools is folly. 23 The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips. 24 Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body. 25 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death. 26 A worker's appetite works for him; his mouth urges him on. 27 A worthless man plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire. 28 A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends. 29 A man of violence entices his neighbor and leads him in a way that is not good. 30 Whoever winks his eyes plans dishonest things; he who purses his lips brings evil to pass. 31 Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life. 32 Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. 33 The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

16:1–22:16 Made up mostly of complementary proverbs; the second half of a verse usually completes the idea set forth by the first half. Cf 16:3: “Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.” This is different from chs 10–15, where most proverbs describe contrasting behaviors. Pr 10:1, e.g., contrasts the pride of a wise son’s father with the grief of a foolish son’s mother. (TLSB)

16:1 *plans*. Chemnitz: “The thoughts, deliberations, and desires in men which are subject to the reason and senses” (*LTh* 1:243). (TLSB)

plans of the heart belong to man...is from the Lord. God must give the ability to articulate and accomplish those plans (cf. 19:21). (CSB)

People may make plans, but truth comes from the Lord (e.g., the words of Caiaphas in Jn 11:49–52). (TLSB)

Who is the most important person in our life? Our spouse? Our children? Parents? A friend? Or, is it God? The opening verses of this proverb emphasize that the Lord is most important. He is central. And once we place Him first, then we'll be able to see all other relationships in the proper perspective. We can plan, but only He can enable us to carry out plans. "You ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that'" (James 4:15). Solomon's reference to the Lord supplying "the reply of the tongue" seems to be this: God alone can give us the gift of language to put our ideas into words and thus bring them to completion. (PBC)

16:2 *are pure in his own eyes.* We all like to think we are good people, even criminals rationalize what they do. William Saroyan noted: "Every man is a good man in a bad world – as he himself knows." (PBC)

the Lord weighs the spirit. The Lord evaluates humans differently from their methods of self-evaluation, considering even hidden motives and agendas. (TLSB)

Rather than setting our own agenda, then, and trying to justify whatever we do, we ought to look at everything we do in the light of God's Word. (PBC)

16:3 *Commit.* Human work is committed to the Lord when it is undertaken in faith and when it is accompanied by the prayer that God's will should be done on earth as in heaven. Cf 1Co 10:31; Heb 11:6. (TLSB)

Committing whatever we do to the Lord, means that we pray as Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father, "Yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39). We ask God's guidance, make our plans, commit them to God's will and leave the results to Him. (PBC)

plans will be established. Goals will be reached. (CSB)

God will always bring about the best results. (PBC)

16:4 Chemnitz: "He is not speaking about guilt, as if God for His own sake wills or brings about ungodliness; but he is speaking of the punishment ... because the ungodly has ignored His justice and judgment" (*LTh* 1:198). God earnestly desires that all people be saved (Ezk 33:11; 2Pt 3:9). (TLSB)

made everything for its purpose. God is sovereign in every life and in all of history (see Ecc 7:14; Ro 8:28). (CSB)

God is in control. He uses everything for the ultimate good of His people. (PBC)

the wicked for a day of trouble. Even through wicked men God displays his power (cf. Ex 9:16), and all evil will be judged (cf. Eze 38:22–23; Ro 2:5–11). (CSB)

As for those who reject Him, they hurtling toward their day of disaster – Judgment Day. (PBC)

16:5 Melancton: "This evil can more clearly be seen in heroic people, yet all are subject to the disease" (Chem, *LTh* 2:367). (TLSB)

The words in this verse are very strong. They remind us that God is a God of judgment as well of as of grace. The proud in heart are those who don't see their own sin. They are like the Pharisee in Jesus' parable, who prayed, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers (Luke 18:11). Though he may not recognize it, in God's sight such a person is in worse shape than other men. He is blind to his own sinful condition and need for repentance. (PBC)

16:6 *love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for.* The moral quality of conduct that God desires is sometimes summed up as "love and faithfulness" (3:3; Hos 4:1). When his people repent of sin and bring their lives into accord with his will, God forgives and withdraws his judgment (see Isa 1:18–19; 55:7; Jer 3:22; Eze 18:23, 30–32; 33:11–12, 14–16; Hos 14:1–2, 4). Thus it can be said that love and faithfulness, in a manner of speaking, "atone for" sin, i.e., they turn away God's wrath against it. (CSB)

Strictly speaking, this is something no sinful human can achieve. It is only through Jesus' love and faithfulness that our sins are atoned for. His innocent blood atones for – that is, covers – our sins and washes them away. His undeserved grace moves us to respond in kind. (PBC)

fear of the LORD. Our fear of God, our great respect for Him, motivates us to avoid evil. Again, what we do is but a response to what God has done for us. (PBC)

16:7 *when a man's ways please the Lord.* Our ways can be pleasing to God only through faith, for "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). (PBC)

makes even his enemies be at peace with him. As in the reigns of godly Asa and Jehoshaphat (2Ch 14:6–7; 17:10). (CSB)

When we live a God-pleasing life, God blesses us with peace. During the reigns of the godly kings Asa and Jehoshaphat of Judah, God gave their whole country peace from their surrounding enemies. (PBC)

peace. See Ro 12:18; Heb 12:14. (Hebrew shalom, translated "prosperity." (CSB)

16:8 As we go about our work, the bottom line should be, "How can I use my God-given gifts," and not, "How can I get rich by any means?" (PBC)

16:9 *the LORD establishes his steps.* Verses 1, 3–4 (see notes) also emphasize God's control of men's lives (see 19:21; 20:24; Ps 37:23; Jer 10:23). (CSB)

That's why, when we make plans and go about our work, God should be a part of everything we do. (PBC)

16:10 *an oracle.* In judging cases brought before him, a king functioned as God's representative (see Dt 1:17). Therefore he needed the divine gift of wisdom to discern between right and wrong in order to render God's judgment (see 1Ki 3:9). When he did so, his judgment was tantamount to a divine oracle for the people (see 1Ki 3:28; see also 2Sa 14:17, 20; 19:27). (CSB)

Hbr term could be translated "divination," and usually has negative connotations (1Sm 28:8; 2Ki 17:17). May refer to making decisions by casting lots. Given such background, this proverb may be sarcastic.(TLSB)

In these verses Solomon focuses on kings and their functions. What he says about kings applies to rulers and officials in general. (PBC)

An oracle was a message or word of God. It often had a negative connotation. Here is used in a sense of justice. (Concordia Bible Dictionary & PBC)

king. Rulers are God's representatives. As such, they should judge well and so be honored and obeyed (Rm 13:1–7). (TLSB)

16:11 *just balance and scales are the LORD'S.* In Solomon's time, merchants often strapped to their belts a bag of stones, which were used as measuring weights. In matters of both commerce and justice, God desires impartiality and fairness. (TLSB)

The Lord expects honesty of rulers. They cannot create scales, balances, and weights to suit their own fancy. (PBC)

all the weights in the bag. Merchants carried stones of different sizes with them to weigh and measure quantities of silver for payment (cf. Mic 6:11). (CSB)

16:12 *throne is established by righteousness.* When the king "judges the poor with fairness" (29:14), refuses to take bribes (29:4) and removes any wicked advisers (25:5). See 14:34; Dt 17:19–20; Isa 16:5; Ro 13:3. (CSB)

16:13 *righteous lips.* Rather than in flattering lips (cf. 20:28). (CSB)

Honest rulers take pleasure in honesty and will surround themselves with truthful advisors. (PBC)

16:14 *messenger of death.* Any angry king can pronounce death quickly and effectively (see 19:12; Est 7:7–10; Mt 22:7; Lk 19:27). (CSB)

Ancient despots held an awesome power of life and death. All they had to do was to say the word and they could have a person put to death. The Bible gives many examples of this. Several come from the Book of Esther. Queen Esther herself had to be careful how to approach the king, lest she incur his disfavor (Esther 5:1-3); and when the king became angry with Haman, a high-ranking official, he had him hanged (7:8-10) (PBC)

wise man will appease it. Cf. Daniel's response to the rage of Nebuchadnezzar (Da 2:12–16). (CSB)

Wise men knew how to appease a king's anger. (PBC)

16:15 *king's face there is life.* Cf. Nu 6:25. (CSB)

Brightening countenance signifies the king's favor. Like the needed spring rain, such favor is always beneficial. (TLSB)

This signified that that person was looking on you with favor. When the king shows you favor, your life improves. Most important, however, is that the king's glory shows you his favor. The Aaronic blessing says, "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon

you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26). (PBC)

his favor is like the clouds that bring spring rain. The spring rain was essential for the full development of barley and wheat; it was therefore a sign of good things to come. Cf. the “dew” of 19:12; see Ps 72:6. (CSB)

Similarly, without God’s favor there can be no life – either physical or spiritual. (PBC)

16:16 *wisdom* – *hokmah* – The most frequently used word for wisdom and refers to practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the chief concept in Proverbs. (PBC)

understanding – *binah* – The emphasis in this word is on understanding and the ability to distinguish. – This word is related to the concept of “between” and refers to the ability to make distinctions. Young King Solomon prayed for this type of wisdom early in his reign. (1 Kings 3:9) – Life constantly calls on us to distinguish between what is good and bad, or between what is a wise choice and what is an even better choice. How we make such choices does much to determine in the course of our life. When we face important decisions in life, how do we distinguish between the options? Do we merely act on impulse? Do we follow the advice of friends? Do we read books to gain insight? All these are important factors in life’s choices. But it is even more important that we consult God’s Word (including the scriptural advice of wise Christian friends, counselors and pastors) and that we ask God’s guidance in prayer. (PBC)

16:17 *highway of the upright.* Wisdom is the highway through life for the upright and protects us. Wisdom is a priceless gift from God; it cannot be bought. (PBC)

turns aside evil. Cf. the thorns and snares in the paths of the wicked (22:5). (CSB)

16:18 *pride goes before destruction* – The proud person wants to usurp for himself what belongs to God, namely, the glory. Psalm 115:1 declares, “Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to Your name be the glory.” To raise ourselves up instead of God is to be proud. Such haughtiness is but for a moment, as God brings down the proud. (PBC)

16:19 *Better to be lowly in spirit.* See Isa 57:15; Mt 5:3. (CSB)

This humility does not mean burying one’s talents. But it does mean recognizing that all we have comes from God and should be used in God-pleasing ways. (PBC)

divide the spoil with the proud. See Jdg 5:30. (CSB)

To share in the abundance of newly acquired goods or treasure. (TLSB)

16:20 *word.* God’s Word of Law and Gospel is always a source of good and blessing. (TLSB)

discover good. We prosper as we trust in the Lord and follow His instructions. (PBC)

blessed is he who trusts in the LORD. See Ps 34:8; 37:4–5. (CSB)

Just how these blessings come is up to God. We cannot dictate to Him. He may bless us with friends, happy families, honor, wealth, steadfastness, or countless other gifts. It’s in His hands. (PBC)

16:21 *wise – khaw-kawm'* From H2449; *wise*, (that is, intelligent, skilful or artful):—cunning (man), subtil, ([un-]), wise ([hearted], man). (QV)

discerning – bene A primitive root; to *separate* mentally (or *distinguish*), that is, (generally) *understand*:—attend, consider, be cunning, diligently, direct, discern, eloquent, feel, inform, instruct, have intelligence, know, look well to, mark, perceive, be prudent. – Being a man of discernment means being able to sift out what is good from what is not, to distinguish the wheat from the chaff. (PBC)

sweetness of speech increase persuasiveness. Cf. the last line of v. 23. “Pleasant” (lit. “sweet”) is expanded in v. 24. Cf. the persuasive but destructive words of the adulteress in 7:21. (CSB)

Pleasant speech enables one’s words to be well received. (TLSB)

16:10–21 These proverbs are especially directed to kings and other public servants. Their authority has been instituted by God (Rm 13:1), and for that reason we owe them honor and obedience. God uses them for the welfare of those who act righteously and as agents of wrath for those who do evil. • Lord God, give Your wisdom to our leaders, that they might always carry out their duties in justice and mercy. Amen. (TLSB)

16:22 *fountain of life*. At times the Bible likens spiritual blessings to a fountain. For example, the Lord calls Himself “the spring of living water” (Jeremiah 2:13). And Jesus promises, “To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life” (Revelation 21:6). (PBC)

16:23 *wise – khaw-kawm'* From H2449; *wise*, (that is, intelligent, skilful or artful):—cunning (man), subtil, ([un-]), wise ([hearted], man).

Speech judicious. The wise man is thoughtful in his speech. (PBC)

16:24 *gracious words are like a honeycomb*. They are good for you (see 24:13–14), and they taste good (cf. 2:10; Ps 19:10). (CSB)

health to the body. The wise man’s words are pleasant, both to the soul and the bones, that is, to the entire person. (PBC)

16:25 *in the end it is way to death*. Test everything by God’s Word. (PBC)

16:26 The laborer’s appetite works for him. It’s his motivation. Christians have a higher motivation: “Do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). (PBC)

16:27 *scorching fire*. His speech is inflammatory and destructive (see Jas 3:6). (CSB)

James takes up the imagery of this verse: “The tongue also is a fire... It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell” (James 3:6). What damage the tongue can do! (PBC)

16:28 *whisperer*. One who causes discord through gossip—a transgression of the Eighth Commandment. God’s people are called to be agents of peace (Mt 5:9) and reconciliation (2Co 5:18). (TLSB)

16:29 *entices his neighbor* – Modern newscasts frequently tell of murderers who enticed their victims into a trap. Take care with whom you make friends. (PBC)

16:30 *winks with his eye*. Facial expressions sometimes say more than words. Slanderers make use of a knowing wink, implying “much more could be said,” and bite or purse their lips, implying the same. (PBC)

purses his lips. Thereby making insinuations. (CSB)

16:31 *Gray hair is a crown of glory*.. The elderly were to receive deep respect (see Lev 19:32). (CSB)

Long life. Promise connected to the Fourth Commandment. Cf Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16; Eph 6:2–3. (TLSB)

In Bible times, gray hair symbolized more than age. It also represented respect. Old people were looked upon as favored by God with long life and wise because of their years of experience. (PBC)

16:32 *slow to anger ... mighty*. See Jas 1:19. “Wisdom is better than weapons of war” (Ecc 9:18). (CSB)

One quality that often comes with age is patience. (PBC)

who rules his spirit than one who takes a city. Although one who practices patience and self-control receives far less attention and acclaim than a warrior who takes a city, he accomplishes better things. (CSB)

Ambrose: “He who wishes to prove his anger is righteous only gets the more inflamed, and quickly falls into sin” (NPNF 2 10:17). (TLSB)

16:33 *The lot is cast into the lap*. Here the lot may have been several pebbles held in the fold of a garment and then drawn out or shaken to the ground. It was commonly used to make decisions. (CSB)

Casting lots among God’s people was not a random method for choosing action but a way to leave the matter in God’s hands because He controlled the outcome. (TLSB)

The disciples cast lots to see who would replace Judas, but only after they prayed (Acts 1:23-26). The disciples recognized – as all believers do – that God holds the future in His hands. When the disciples used lots, it was the last scriptural reference to this practice and significantly, the last event before Pentecost. While lots are not forbidden, we are more likely to use other avenues. Today we might pray, read worthwhile advice, and discuss our plans with fellow believers, before moving ahead and entrusting the outcome to God. (PBC)

every decision is from the LORD. God, not chance, is in control (see vv. 1, 3–4, 9). (CSB)