

PROVERBS

Chapter 27

Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring. 2 Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips. 3 A stone is heavy, and sand is weighty, but a fool's provocation is heavier than both. 4 Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy? 5 Better is open rebuke than hidden love. 6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy. 7 One who is full loathes honey, but to one who is hungry everything bitter is sweet. 8 Like a bird that strays from its nest is a man who strays from his home. 9 Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel. 10 Do not forsake your friend and your father's friend, and do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity. Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother who is far away. 11 Be wise, my son, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him who reproaches me. 12 The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it. 13 Take a man's garment when he has put up security for a stranger, and hold it in pledge when he puts up security for an adulteress. 14 Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing. 15 A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike; 16 to restrain her is to restrain the wind or to grasp oil in one's right hand. 17 Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another. 18 Whoever tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who guards his master will be honored. 19 As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man. 20 Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, and never satisfied are the eyes of man. 21 The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and a man is tested by his praise. 22 Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him. 23 Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds, 24 for riches do not last forever; and does a crown endure to all generations? 25 When the grass is gone and the new growth appears and the vegetation of the mountains is gathered, 26 the lambs will provide your clothing, and the goats the price of a field. 27 There will be enough goats' milk for your food, for the food of your household and maintenance for your girls.

27:1 Cf. the words of the rich fool in Lk 12:19–20; see Pr 16:9; Isa 56:12. (CSB)

James refers to Proverbs 27:1, as he teaches us to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that” (James 4:13-16). Since our times are in God’s hands (Psalm 31:15), it is foolish to boast as if we controlled the future. The rich fool in Jesus’ parable made that mistake. He boasted, “I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’” God’s response was, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you.” (Luke 12:16-21) (PBC)

27:2 *Let another praise you.* See 2Co 10:12, 18. (CSB)

True praise comes from others. (TLSB)

Just as we ought not boast about the future, we are not to boast about ourselves either. Leave that to others. Whatever talents we have come from God. And whatever we accomplish in life happens only because he has enabled us. So, if there is to be praise, let it come from someone else. Solomon’s frequent warnings about the smooth talk of wicked people and about the

fickleness of many “friends” should remind us not to put too much stock in human praise. Far more important than the praise of other human beings is the praise of God Himself (John 12:43). (PBC)

27:3 *stone is heavy, and sand is heavier than both* – When a fool provokes others, it’s a heavy burden. Because the fool cannot be reasoned with, he becomes all the more annoying. People who reject God and His Word are fools; they provoke the Lord. For example, we read that King Jeroboam “provoked the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger” (1 Kings 15:30). As a judgment upon this wicked king, his entire family was destroyed. (PBC)

27:4 *Wrath ... anger*. Typically brief emotions. Jealousy persists for a longer period of time. (TLSB)

who can stand before jealousy? As harsh as anger and fury are, jealousy is even more severe. Often when the Bible speaks of jealousy, it speaks of the positive characteristics, such as God being jealous. In His intense love for us, He wants our devotion (see, for example, Exodus 20:5). He is jealous for us. St Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy” (2 Corinthians 11:2) (PBC)

Besides jealousy for someone, there is jealousy of someone. Solomon speaks of this negative jealousy. In answer to his rhetorical question, no one can stand this jealousy. It leads to destruction of its object and consumes its possessor. If our hearts harbor such jealousy, we need to ask God’s forgiveness and help to root it out. (PBC)

27:5–22 New section; offers advice for dealing with family, friends, and other people but also contains the greatest concentration of enigmatic sayings in the entire Book. (TLSB)

27:5 *open rebuke*. Called “life-giving rebuke” in 15:31; cf. Gal 2:14. (CSB)

The seven simple words of this verse speak volumes. For all the brashness of our modern world, our society shies away from criticizing, especially on a person-to-person basis. It takes courage to confront, and there is always the danger that openness will result in hurt feelings and broken friendships. Yet open, loving, constructive rebuke is God’s way. It is better than talking behind one’s back or, out of love saying nothing when something needs to be said. (PBC)

Paul openly criticized Peter for “not acting in line with the truth of the gospel” (Galatians 2:14). It was the loving, God-pleasing, and helpful thing to do. At times Jesus rebuked His disciples. We need to ask God’s help in this area – both to offer loving rebuke when necessary and to accept it when we need it. Hidden love, however, remains within the heart and neither rebukes nor warms the loved one with its fire. (PBC)

hidden love. Love that does not take action. (TLSB)

27:6 *faithful are the wounds of a friend*. Called a “kindness” in Ps 141:5. (CSB)

Emotional wounds caused by loving concern. (TLSB)

No matter how tactfully they come, loving rebukes still sting. These are the “wounds from a friend.” But like good medicine that stings, such wounds are wholesome. The one who applies the medicine is trustworthy. (PBC)

profuse are the kisses of an enemy. See Mt 26:49. (CSB)

Insincere signs of affection from an enemy. (TLSB)

As Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss (Mark 14:44-15), however, enemies merely feign friendship and love. (PBC)

27:7 *loathes honey.* They say that hunger is the best cook. When we have eaten a big meal, nothing looks inviting. When we're famished, anything does. Applying this verse to spiritual matters, we need daily to remember our sinfulness and our need for the Savior. Otherwise, we become self-satisfied and foolishly thin we need nothing, when in reality we are starving to death. (PBC)

Those who lack the necessities of life will endure suffering to attain them. (TLSB)

27:8 *man who strays from his home.* He has lost his security and may be vulnerable to temptation (cf. 7:21-23). (CSB)

Warning against adultery. Cf ch 7. Also, counsel to those who despise their family. (TLSB)

The mother bird that strays from her nest must build another one. The person who strays from home must begin all over from scratch. Those who have physically wandered or been uprooted know what an overwhelming task it can be. The word picture Solomon paints in this verse is lone and sad, especially when applied to our spiritual life. Those who stray from the teachings of God's Word are spiritually homeless. They might build another home, but it will never be as good as what they left behind. (PBC)

27:9 *Perfume.* Solomon appeals to the sense of smell in describing the joy of true friendship. The fragrances of perfume and incense please anyone who comes near. (PBC)

Scents were mixed with olive oil for anointing the body (today, perfume is usually mixed with alcohol). (TLSB)

oil and perfume. Cf. the one "perfumed with myrrh and incense" (SS 3:6). (CSB)

Aromatic compound for burning. Ingredients of incense used in worship given in Ex 30:34-35. (fragrant spices – gum, resin, onycha and galbanum – and pure frankincense all in equal amounts and make a fragrant blend. It is to be salted and pure and sacred) Burned morning and evening on altar of incense (Ex 30:1-10). Carried into the Holy of Holies on Day of Atonement. (Concordia Bible Dictionary)

sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel. The "earnest counsel" of a friend is his deep-felt desire to help. It's one of life's finer pleasures to have a good friend who's willing to listen and offer loving advice. (PBC)

Value or worth. (TLSB)

27:10 Do not fail a friend in need; when in need rely on friendship rather than on mere family relationships. (CSB)

Just as we want the benefits of friendship from others, we will want to be a friend as well. (PBC)

do not forsake your friend. Either physically or emotionally. (CSB)

This points out that a good friend can be more helpful than one's own brother, especially if that friend lives nearby. What a joy it is to know that in Jesus we have the closed friend of all! (PBC)

Warning against overreacting to adversity by imposing on family members. (TLSB)

27:11 *Be wise, my son.* It's a source of joy, when the young accept the teaching of parents or teachers. Wise young people are proof of the value of their elders. (PBC)

that I may answer him who reproaches me. A wise son (or student) serves as a powerful testimony that the father (or teacher) who has shaped him has shown himself to be a man of worth. (CSB)

27:12 *the simple.* Those who have not been well instructed. (PBC)

go on and suffer for it. The simple naively walk into danger and suffer for it. One can think of many examples in our day of dangers about which to warn the young: premarital sex, drugs, drinking, unwise friendships, disrespect for authority. Christian parents, teacher, and church leaders will work together to guide and warn the young. (PBC)

27:14 *blesses his neighbor.* Perhaps to win his favor (cf. Ps 12:2). (CSB)

Although not explicitly stated in this verse, the implication is that the blessing is not sincere. The description of the blessing is being both "loud" and "early in the morning" indicates that it comes with vigor and energy. The point is that when a person comes across as too eager to be friendly, his overtures may well be met with suspicion. People think there must be ulterior motives behind the blessing. (PBC)

Poorly timed or insincere compliments are not compliments at all. (TLSB)

27:15 While some might be overly eager to please, verses 15 & 16 portray a wife who is at the opposite end the spectrum. Far from downplaying the role of wives in ancient society, these verse show the vital part they played in their husbands' wives. That still holds true. A wife can either make or break her husband. (PBC)

27:17 *iron sharpens iron.* Develops and molds his character. (CSB)

Characteristics of the people with whom you associate will eventually shape or hone your character. While this can be positive, as this text implies, it can also be negative for those who keep bad company. (TLSB)

When we share and learn with others, we sharpen one another, as iron sharpens iron. The rabbis of old held that studying with others leads to fuller and more accurate knowledge. When we do all of our learning alone, there is the possibility that, without the corrective of others, we will go off on tangents. This is verse is a good endorsement for attending Bible study at church, in addition to reading Scripture at home alone. (PBC)

27:18 *will eat its fruit.* Cf. 2Ti 2:6. (CSB)

Loyalty pays off in any vocation. (TLSB)

Along with the grape vine, olive trees, and palm trees, the fig tree receives frequent mention on the pages of Scripture. This slow growing-plant requires years of patient care. It was often planted with the grape vine, and its growth symbolized prosperity. The person tending a fig tree in this verse is the person who through careful effort enjoys prosperity. (PBC)

will be honored. Cf. Ge 39:4; see also Mt 25:21; Lk 12:42–44; Jn 12:26. (CSB)

27:19 *the heart of man reflects the man.* The condition of a man’s heart indicates his true character (see Mt 5:8). (CSB)

We might understand the second line in two ways, both of which are fitting. (1) The heart reflects the true person. If you want to know what a person is really like, you’ll need to know what’s in his or her heart. (2) The reflection spoken of comes not from within our own heart, but from the heart of another. In other words, what is in our heart is reflected in the heart of another. Our feelings and thoughts find reflection in the feelings and thoughts of others. Because of this, we are able to pour out our hearts to another and that person will understand and sympathize, because his or her heart holds similar thoughts and feelings. (PBC)

27:20 *Sheol and Abaddon.* Sheol takes one person after another. (TLSB)

are never satisfied. Their appetite is insatiable (see Isa 5:14). (CSB)

They take more and more. (PBC)

the eyes of man. See Ecc 4:8. (CSB)

In Ecclesiastes, the wise king speaks in a similar way: “The eye never has enough of seeing” (1:8), and the eye of a greedy man is “not content with his wealth” (4:8). Solomon is describing what the Bible elsewhere calls “lust of they eyes” (1 John 2:16). The eye represents human covetousness and greed. Sinful man always wants more and is never content. (PBC)

Ironically, the dust of the grave will finally fill the unsatisfied eye! There is, of course, another, better solution for the restless eye. Rather than fixing our eyes on things of this world, which can never satisfy, let us fix them on Jesus. He brings peace, satisfaction, forgiveness, and victory over Death and Destruction. St. Paul put it this way: “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal’ (2 Cor 4:18). (PBC)

27:21 *crucible ... gold.* Silver and gold were refined to remove their impurities (cf. Isa 1:25; Mal 3:3). (CSB)

man is tested by the praise he receives. He must not become proud, and he must be wary of flattery (cf. 12:8; Lk 6:26). (CSB)

How people react to praise often reveals their nature. Persons who pride themselves on flattery are self-centered. Luther: “There must be great diligence and care lest honor and good reputation puff up the heart and the heart find pleasure in them.... Few and most spiritual men must they be who, when honored and praised, remain indifferent and unchanged, so that they do not care for it, nor feel pride and pleasure in it, but remain entirely free, ascribe all their honor and fame to God,

offering it to Him alone, and using it only for the glory of God and the edification of their neighbors” (WLS § 2063). May we be humble, by receiving praise without pride and by acknowledging every gift and talent as a blessing from God to be used in service to our neighbor! God, grant us such hearts for the sake of Christ! (TLSB)

God tests the heart through trials; this verse shows that men test the heart in a different way. How we respond to whatever flattery we might receive is a test of our character. Jesus warned, “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets” (Luke 6:26). If the praise of men is a major driving force in our lives, we’ll tend to be less than honest and not so willing to speak up for and live the truth of God’s Word. Moreover, when praise comes, how do we deal with it? Do we let it “go to our head”? Or do we keep focused on the One who gives us whatever abilities and success we have? (PBC)

27:22 mortar. A bowl (see Nu 11:8). (CSB)

Stone bowl. (TLSB)

pestle. A club-like tool for pounding grain in a mortar. (CSB)

Stone tool for grinding grain in the mortar. Hardened fools cannot be separated from their foolishness. (TLSB)

his folly will not depart. In spite of severe punishment, fools refuse to change. (CSB)

Fools in Proverbs

God often teaches the way of wisdom by using contrast. As a skilled artist sets his or her subject matter against a contrasting background, so the Lord, through His inspired writers, sets the bright gem of wisdom against the dismal backdrop of foolishness.

When the Bible in general—and Proverbs in particular—speaks of foolishness, the first and most important point to remember is that it describes a moral and *spiritual* condition. We should not confuse foolishness with lack of academic prowess or a low IQ. Some people who are brilliant may, in God’s eyes, be fools. For example, Ps 14:1 and 53:1 state, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ ” In Proverbs, the fool is one who does not have a proper fear of the Lord. Consequently, such a person is likely to deny God’s Word.

The Hebrew language in which Proverbs was originally written makes a distinction among different kinds of foolishness or fools. Awareness of these differences will help you more fully appreciate the message of Proverbs.

The simpleHbr *pethi*, the person who is easily lured or deceived; gullible. Of the various types of fools, this one is the least hardened in his or her foolishness. These naive and inexperienced people drift along aimlessly, until they fall easy prey to temptation (14:15). Such gullibility, of course, is not an excuse for sinning. Gullible people are responsible for their actions and may even end up killing themselves (1:32). In Pr 7, Solomon observes the gullible people and notes

one who is drifting along aimlessly, ripe for a prostitute's picking. If they are to escape their ways "and live," the gullible need wisdom (9:4–6). Indeed, wisdom invites them by calling out, "Whoever is gullible, turn in here!"

The foolHbr *kesil*; if the gullible person doesn't learn, he or she may well move to the next level of foolishness and become a regular fool. This Hbr word is used 50 times in Proverbs and is the Book's most common term for fool. In the end, "fools die for lack of sense" (10:21).

Stubborn foolHbr *'ewil*, occurs 20 times in Proverbs. What can be said about the "generic fool" can also be said about this fool. As the term "stubborn" implies, however, the individual at this level of foolishness is more hardened and persistent. "Fools mock at the guilt offering, but the upright enjoy acceptance" (14:9). This category of fool is connected to the word for foolishness and stupidity, or folly. Sadly, it's a trait often found in children: "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him" (22:15). As the child becomes a grown-up, the trait is even more difficult to correct: "Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him" (27:22).

The godless foolHbr *nabal*, appears only three times in Proverbs. This is the word used in the psalms quoted earlier in this article. Those people who say to themselves, "There is no God." Their mind is closed; they have rejected the Lord. This word is used in Pr 30:21–23, which states that one of four things under which the earth trembles is "a fool when he is filled with food." Once such a person's physical needs are satisfied, who knows what havoc he or she will bring to others? We find the epitome of this boorish and domineering fool in the man named Nabal (1Sm 25). He was "harsh and badly behaved" (v 3), and one of his own servants said of him, "He is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him" (v 17).

Scripture and the Fool

As we look closely at the fool in Proverbs and the rest of Scripture, we come face-to-face with sinful human beings and with the "natural man." In other words, we see ourselves. The believer

realizes, “There but for the grace of God go I.” Even the author and compiler of Proverbs, wise King Solomon, became such a fool that he fell into idolatry (1Ki 11:4–11). As long as we are in this world, we will struggle against giving in to our sinful, foolish tendencies.

The remedy for foolishness is for God’s Word to remain our daily companion (Pr 2:1). The foolishness of the world is overcome by the foolishness of Christ. As the apostle Paul says, “If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise” (1Co 3:18). It comes down to this: to know Christ and Him crucified is to know God’s wisdom (1Co 1:23–25). His forgiveness destroys our sinful foolishness. Through the Savior, we become truly wise and able to offer that wisdom to others as well. (TLSB)

There is a Jewish saying, “Drunkards sober up, but fools remain fools.” Only God, for whom nothing is impossible, can change the fool. By nature we are all fools. Through Christ, we become wise. (PBC)

27:23–27 A section praising the basic security afforded by agricultural pursuits—reflecting the agricultural base of the ancient economy. (CSB)

Exhortations for rulers regarding governance of their people. (TLSB)

In Solomon’s day, young men were tempted to leave the rural life for the wealth and luxuries of the city. He depicts the simplicity and beauty of country life. (PBC)

27:23 *give attention to your herds.* Like Jacob, with Laban’s flocks (Ge 31:38–40). (CSB)

Instead of leaving the country, Solomon urges attention to the work at hand – taking care of the flocks and herds. Young Israelites may have recalled the care that Jacob took while tending his father-in-law’s sheep and goats (Genesis 31:38-40) (PBC)

Kings were often referred to as shepherds in the OT (1Ki 22:17; Ps 78:70–71; Jer 6:3; Ezk 34:23; Mi 5:2–4). As such, they are called to guard and protect their people as a shepherd tends his flock. This mandate also applies to fathers: “He gives to the father of a family a domestic precept, that he should use what is his own and refrain from what is another’s. Solomon commands the father to take good care of his own property. Yet he should do so in such a way that, with his mind occupied with the increase of his resources, he should not cast away the fear of God or faith or care in God’s Word” (Ap XIIIB 9). (TLSB)

27:24 *does a crown endure to all generations.* Even kings may lose their wealth and power (see Job 19:9; La 5:16). (CSB)

Successful governing requires constant attention. Prosperity and the right or ability to rule are not automatic. (TLSB)

The implication is do not set your heart on riches and the king’s crown . (PBC)

27:25–27 Kings are to watch over their people who, in return, will cause everyone to flourish. (TLSB)

27:25 *grass is gone.* This began in March or April. (CSB)

Part of the joy of rural life comes from observing the wonder of the changing seasons, in particular harvest time. The psalmist reminds us of the source of these blessings, when he declares, “[The Lord] makes grass grow on the hills” (Psalm 147:8). (PBC)

27:26 *price of a field*. Sheep and goats sometimes also served as tribute payments (see 2Ki 3:4). (CSB)

27:27 *goats’ milk*. Commonly drunk along with cows’ milk (see Dt 32:13–14; Isa 7:21–22). (CSB)

maintenance for your girls. Nourishment for female servants. (TLSB)

This depiction of rural life is more than just a pretty picture. It also serves as an illustration of contentment with God’s provision. We continue to rely on the produce of the country. And may we continue to thank a gracious God who sustains our life, as He sends the rain and the sunshine. (PBC)