

# PROVERBS

## Chapter 15

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. 2 The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly. 3 The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good. 4 A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. 5 A fool despises his father's instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is prudent. 6 In the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but trouble befalls the income of the wicked. 7 The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so the hearts of fools. 8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him. 9 The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but he loves him who pursues righteousness. 10 There is severe discipline for him who forsakes the way; whoever hates reproof will die. 11 Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD; how much more the hearts of the children of man! 12 A scoffer does not like to be reproofed; he will not go to the wise. 13 A glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed. 14 The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouths of fools feed on folly. 15 All the days of the afflicted are evil, but the cheerful of heart has a continual feast. 16 Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it. 17 Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it. 18 A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention. 19 The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway. 20 A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish man despises his mother. 21 Folly is a joy to him who lacks sense, but a man of understanding walks straight ahead. 22 Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed. 23 To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is! 24 The path of life leads upward for the prudent, that he may turn away from Sheol beneath. 25 The LORD tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow's boundaries. 26 The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD, but gracious words are pure. 27 Whoever is greedy for unjust gain troubles his own household, but he who hates bribes will live. 28 The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things. 29 The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous. 30 The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the bones. 31 The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise. 32 Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence. 33 The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor.

15:1 *soft answer turns away wrath.* Cf. the way Gideon calmed the anger of the men of Ephraim in Jdg 8:1–3 (cf. also Pr 15:18; Ecc 10:4). (CSB)

Answers are received favorably, not only because of their content but also because of the manner in which they are offered. (TLSB)

*harsh word stirs up anger.* Nabal's sarcastic response put David in a fighting mood (1Sa 25:10–13). (CSB)

15:2 *knowledge* – *dah'-ath knowledge*:—cunning, know(-ledge), awares (wittingly). (QV)

*pour out folly.* This verse asserts that the wise are thoughtful in their speech. The fool has nothing to say, but says it anyway. If we find ourselves feeling as if we have to state our opinion on every topic under the sun, it may be time to sit back and listen to what others have to say. (PBC)

**15:3** *eyes of the LORD are in every place.* See Job 31:4; 34:21; Jer 16:17. (CSB)

God is both omniscient (all-knowing) and omnipresent (present everywhere). While these attributes are a source of comfort and joy for those made righteous through faith, they strike fear in the hearts of those who are evil. Cf 1Pt 3:12. (TLSB)

The fact that God sees everything is a warning to the wicked; they don't get away with anything. It's also a comfort to the good; God's people have the assurance that he sees and cares about our burden and will in his good time deliver us. (PBC)

**15:4** *a gentle tongue is a tree of life.* The tongue is a source of life, esp as it is used to apply the Gospel to human souls. (TLSB)

Kind words lift and revive one's spirit. (PBC)

*tree of life.* Brings back images of Eden. (PBC)

*perverseness.* Especially false testimony in court (see 6:19; 22:22), or slander in the community. (CSB)

It is disheartening when one is lied about and slandered. (PBC)

**15:5** *instruction – moo-sawr' – properly chastisement; figuratively reproof, warning or instruction; also restraint:—bond, chastening, chastisement, check, correction, discipline, doctrine, instruction, rebuke.* (CSB)

This is another key concept in Proverbs. It is that quality of being able to follow through and apply our God-given wisdom. We might call it self-discipline. The ancient Jewish rabbis had a saying, "The wicked are under the control of their impulses, but the righteous have their impulses under their control." - Self-discipline is especially important for us to keep in mind, since our society encourages just the opposite. In a thousand different ways we are told, "If it feels good, do it!" Proverbs does not deny emotions their due. Joy and self-satisfaction have their place. But they are fully realized only when kept within the limits of God's Word. God sets up rules for living, not to make us unhappy, but to bring us real, lasting happiness. (PBC)

PRUDENCE – *aw-ram'* A primitive root; properly to *be* (or *make*) *bare*; but used only in the derived sense (through the idea perhaps of *smoothness*) *be cunning* (usually in a bad sense):— *X* very, beware, take crafty [counsel], be prudent, deal subtly. (QV)

**15:6** *house of the righteous.* The righteous always enjoy the enduring wealth of God's love and blessing, regardless of fluctuating income and possessions. (TLSB)

*much treasure.* Often the righteous aren't rich materially, but their houses contain great treasure. The material possessions they do have are cause for thankfulness, and since they are not

ill-gotten they cause no anxiety. They also enjoy the riches of God's love, a love reflected in their house. (PBC)

**15:7** *lips...hearts* – Solomon sets “lips” and “hearts” in parallel lines. The connection between the two is close. The heart motivates what we say’ the lips reflect what’s in the heart. (PBC)

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

When they speak, the wise share knowledge, because they have it stored in their hearts. Since fools don't have it inside,, it can't come out in speech. (PBC)

**15:8** *the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.* Those whose hearts are not right with God gain nothing by offering sacrifices (see 21:3, 27; Ecc 5:1; Isa 1:11–15; Jer 6:20). (CSB)

The sacrifices of the wicked are offered without faith. Cain is an example of this. (PBC)

*prayer of the upright.* See James 5:16. (CSB)

Although God hears all and knows all, only those who trust Him may pray and confidently expect to be heard. (TLSB)

Verses 8 & 9 teach that He is interested in everything. Contrary to the popular notion of God as a vague force “out there” somewhere, the Bible teaches that God takes a deep interest in human activity on earth. God watches our entire life. We can't compartmentalize life into the religious part (which interests God) and the secular part (where we can do as we please because he doesn't care. The Lord is Lord over our entire life. (PBC)

**15:9** *to the Lord* – It is noteworthy how often Solomon refers to God as “the Lord” throughout the Book of Proverbs. He uses the more general term “God” only about half a dozen times. In the wisdom literature of Ecclesiastes and Job, the word God predominates. In fact, the name “the Lord” does not occur in Ecclesiastes. The name “the Lord distinguished Him as the God of free and faithful grace. It was God's special covenant name, used with His chosen nation Israel. (PBC)

*who pursues righteousness.* See 21:21; 1Ti 6:11. (CSB)

The wicked do not please God. He looks into their hearts and sees no faith or love toward Him, but only sinful and selfish motives, no matter how fine some of their outward actions might appear. The righteous, however, live by faith, without which “it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6). God loves the righteous, not because they deserve it, but purely because He is gracious. (PBC)

**15:10** *discipline* – *moo-sawr'* – properly *chastisement*; figuratively *reproof*, *warning* or *instruction*; also *restraint*:—bond, chastening, chastisement, check, correction, discipline, doctrine, instruction, rebuke. (QV)

This is another key concept in Proverbs. It is that quality of being able to follow through and apply our God-given wisdom. We might call it self-discipline. The ancient Jewish rabbis had a saying, “The wicked are under the control of their impulses, but the righteous have their impulses under their control.” - Self-discipline is especially important for us to keep in mind, since our

society encourages just the opposite. In a thousand different ways we are told, “If it feels good, do it!” Proverbs does not deny emotions their due. Joy and self-satisfaction have their place. But they are fully realized only when kept within the limits of God’s Word. God sets up rules for living, not to make us unhappy, but to bring us real, lasting happiness. (PBC)

*forsakes* – To stray from God’s paths invites correction. Sometimes God sends suffering into our lives as a corrective. Hebrews 12:1-13 offers an extended treatment on the topic of God’s disciplining His children. (PBC)

*the way*. The right (or “straight”) path (see 2:13). (VSB)

The way of righteousness. (TLSB)

**15:11** *Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD*. Not even the grave, the netherworld, is inaccessible to God (see Job 26:6; Ps 139:8). Therefore he knows the secrets of man’s innermost being (cf. 1Sa 16:7). (CSB)

*Sheol and Abaddon*. Represent the end of temporal life and what lies beyond it. The point of the proverb concerns God’s omniscience. If He is knowledgeable even about Sheol and Abaddon, then He also knows the human heart perfectly. (TLSB)

Hebrew for death and destruction are Sheol and Abaddon. The term sheol represents the afterlife and can refer to death, the grave, or hell. Abaddon is decay or destruction. In the book of Revelation, Abaddon is personified as the king of destruction: “They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon” (Revelation 9:11). The point is that if God can see into the depth of Death and Destruction, surely it’s an easy matter for Him to look into human hearts. (PBC)

**15:12** *scoffer*. No wonder Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). Nothing is more tragic than unbelief. (PBC)

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

**15:13** *glad heart makes a cheerful face cheerful*. When our heart is happy, our face lights up. (PBC)

*sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed*. Cf. the great sorrow of Job (Job 3) and David (Ps 51:8, 10). (CSB)

A broken heart drains us of energy and confidence. Notice that Solomon does not speak of outward circumstance. These situations could be favorable or not. What really affects us is what’s inside of us, in our hearts. God’s Word always aims at the heart. That’s why we regularly pray in our church service, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10) (PBC)

**15:14** *seeks knowledge* – *dah'-ath knowledge*:—cunning, know(-ledge), awares (wittingly). (QV)

The heart that has been touched by God will seek to grow in godly knowledge. So it longs for a daily diet of wisdom from the Scriptures. The fool just keeps feeding on spiritual and mental junk food. (PBC)

**15:15** *the afflicted*. Perhaps referring to those who are oppressed by their own lack of contentment. (TLSB)

*cheerful heart has a continual feast*. Life is as joyful and satisfying as the days of a festival (see v. 13; 14:30; cf. Lev 23:39–41). (CSB)

The contrast in this verse is not between the wealthy and the poor. Rather, it's between the contented and those who are dissatisfied. (PBC)

**15:16** *great treasure and trouble*. The “ill-gotten treasures” of 10:2. (CSB)

The lasting treasure, of course, is the wisdom of knowing God and His love. (PBC)

**15:17** *dinner of herbs*. An unsatisfying meal when compared to a more luxurious entrée such as fattened ox. (TLSB)

*fattened ox*. Such meat was something of a luxury, reserved for special occasions (cf. 7:14; Mt 22:4; Lk 15:23). (CSB)

**15:18** *stirs up strife*. Quarrels, or the lack of them, depend more on the attitudes of people than on the actual subject being discussed. (PBC)

**15:19** *sluggard*. The picture in this verse is of a path lined with a thorny hedge, on which the traveler keeps snagging his clothes. It's not that the sluggard has more obstacles to face. Rather, he makes more obstacles because of his laziness. He also has a penchant for imagining difficulties that aren't really there. (PBC)

*hedge of thorns*. Mainly because he was too lazy to remove them (see 24:30–31; Hos 2:6). (CSB)

The sluggard's progress is impeded by his own laziness. He finds diligent work to be painful, similar to the pain inflicted by thorns. (TLSB)

While the upright encounter many difficulties along life's way, with the Lord's help, they are able to meet and overcome those problems. (PBC)

*highway*. The upright can make progress and reach their goals. (CSB)

**12:12–15:19** In these proverbs, the characteristics of foolish and wise people are contrasted. The foolish are gullible and believe everything. They are reckless, careless, and quick-tempered. But because wise people thoughtfully evaluate everything on the basis of God's Word, their words and actions are always prudent and cautious. • Lord God, temper our rash and impetuous urges. Lead us, instead, to walk by faith, always expressing ourselves with the gentleness and self-control that come from You. Amen. (TLSB)

**15:20** *wise – khaw-kawm'* From H2449; *wise*, (that is, intelligent, skilful or artful):—cunning (man), subtil, ([un-]), wise ([hearted], man). (QV)

A loving child will seek to honor his father and mother and make them happy. (PBC)

*despises his mother.* The Fourth Commandment tells us to honor our parents. (TLSB)

**15:21** *folly* – Folly in the Book of Proverbs carries moral overtones. It's not merely an intellectual matter. The person who lacks judgment will instinctively incline toward the leanings of his sinful nature, that is, toward folly. The fool delights in folly. The wise person delights in finding answers to life's problem and being able to help others with a timely word. We shouldn't think that fools go through life having fun, while the wise are always somber and stone-faced. No, it's just that they find their joy in different, more fulfilling ways. (PBC)

*understanding – to-boo-naw' – intelligence;* by implication an *argument*; by extension *caprice*:—discretion, reason, skillfulness, understanding, wisdom. (QV)

*walks straight ahead* – In order to develop one's ability to make judgments, training in the Scriptures is must. It's the difference between keeping a straight course through life or being "tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming" (Ephesians 4:14). (PBC)

Could be understood figuratively, i.e., "stays straight on course" or "walks aright." (TLSB)

**15:22** *without counsel plans fail* – The person who always acts alone, without the good advice of others, is bound to have some blind spots and to run into unnecessary failure. (PBC)

**15:23** *apt answer.* Cf. Isa 50:4. (CSB)

### **The Silent Treatment**

A man finds joy in giving an apt reply—and how good is a timely word!  
(Proverbs 15:23)

A frustrated wife says, "He won't say a word. I come to him with my hurts and disappointments. I need his support, but he clams up and refuses to answer me. He doesn't care about me at all. He just buries his head in the newspaper."

How devastating! Sometimes we nag because we want a reaction from our spouse. No answer. We beg and plead. No answer. We try a complaint. No answer. The silent treatment becomes a weapon to frustrate and repay the other person for verbal abuse. We may feel superior for holding our tongue, but often we stand guilty of lovelessness.

Proverbs states the positive value of speaking at the right time: "A man finds joy in giving an apt reply—and how good is a timely word!" We come face to face with our need for forgiveness and our responsibility to forgive one another. Paul says it so well in our Bible reading: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

Christ knew when to keep silent before His accusers, but He also knew when to speak words of encouragement, caring, and forgiveness. His death on the cross and glorious

resurrection makes us His own and frees us to "find joy in giving an apt reply."

*Dear Lord, open my mouth to speak the timely word of compassion for Your sake. Amen.*

Author: Stephen J. Carter/July 20, 1988

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**15:24** *leads upward*. Along the highway (v. 19), the straight course (v. 21) that leads to life. (CSB)

Refers to heavenly life after death, in contrast with "Sheol beneath." (TLSB)

It lead to heaven. It leads away from the grave and hell. (PBC)

*prudent* – *saw-kal'* A primitive root; to *be* (causeatively *make* or *act*) *circumspect* and hence *ntelligent*:—consider, expert, instruct, prosper, (deal) prudent (-ly), (give) skill (-ful), have good success, teach, (have, make to) understand (-ing), wisdom, (be, behave self, consider, make) wise (-ly), guide wittingly (QV)

**15:25** *tears down the house of the proud*. The house represents a person's family, not merely a physical structure. It also represents one's descendants; for instance Jesus was from the "house" of David (Luke 2:4). Proud people, then, bring troubles and shame not only themselves, but on their families and descendants. (PBC)

*maintains the widow's boundaries*. In ancient times boundary stones marked a person's property. Anyone who moved such a stone was, in effect, stealing land (see 22:28; Job 24:2; Ps 68:5). (CSB)

In Solomon's time, property boundaries were marked by stones. It was relatively easy for unscrupulous people to move the boundary stones of helpless widows, thus stealing some of their property. Cf Dt 19:14. (TLSB)

The Lord guards the humble widow. Since property boundaries were marked by stones, it was relatively easy for wicked men to move the boundary stone of helpless widows and thus steal some of their property. God's OT law was one way of protecting widows. That law declared: "Do not move your neighbor's boundary stone" (Deuteronomy 19:14). The Lord is always concerned about weaker, more vulnerable members of society. (PBC)

**15:26** *gracious words*. Pleasant, God-pleasing words, which stand in sharp contrast to the thoughts of the wicked. Such words often convey God's truth. Cf 23:8. (TLSB)

*those of the pure*. See Ps 24:4. (CSB)

**15:27** *greedy for unjust gain troubles*. Achan's whole family perished because of his greed at Jericho (Jos 7:24–26). (CSB)

*he who hates bribes will live.* See Dt 16:19; 1Sa 12:3; Ecc 7:7; 1Ti 6:10. (CSB)

Content with his life, he enjoys his life. (PBC)

**15:28** *ponders how to answer.* Cf. 1Pe 3:15. (CSB)

Solomon says much about how the heart influences our speech. (PBC)

**15:29** *hears the prayers of the righteous* – If we are clinging to pet sins, we shouldn't be surprised if our prayers go unanswered. (PBC)

**15:30** *light of the eyes.* A twinkle of the eyes, which can bring joy to another's heart. (TLSB)

This verse is a reminder not to underestimate life's little things. A cheerful twinkle of the eye can make someone's day. (PBC)

*good news refreshes the bones.* A bit of good news can make one feel good all over, down to the bones. "Health to bones" is the opposite of "drying up the bones" Sometimes we cheer ourselves up by bringing joy to others. (Proverbs 17:22). (PBC)

**15:31** *who listens to a life-giving reproof.* This kind of a rebuke is what turns one from sin and points the way to Christ. (PBC)

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

**15:32** *who ignores instruction despises himself.* See note on 5:12; see also 1:7; 5:23; 8:36. (CSB)

*moo-sawr'* – properly *chastisement*; figuratively *reproof, warning* or *instruction*; also *restraint*:—bond, chastening, chastisement, check, correction, discipline, doctrine, instruction, rebuke. (QV)

This is another key concept in Proverbs. It is that quality of being able to follow through and apply our God-given wisdom. We might call it self-discipline. The ancient Jewish rabbis had a saying, "The wicked are under the control of their impulses, but the righteous have their impulses under their control." - Self-discipline is especially important for us to keep in mind, since our society encourages just the opposite. In a thousand different ways we are told, "If it feels good, do it!" Proverbs does not deny emotions their due. Joy and self-satisfaction have their place. But they are fully realized only when kept within the limits of God's Word. God sets up rules for living, not to make us unhappy, but to bring us real, lasting happiness. (PBC)

*intelligence – labe* ; the *heart*; also used (figuratively) very widely for the feelings, the will and even the intellect; likewise for the *centre* of anything:— understanding, wisdom. (QV)

**15:33** *fear of the LORD.* True self-love, wrote Solomon long ago, comes not from self-indulgence, but from self-discipline. To ignore discipline, especially that coming from God, is a form of self-hatred. (PBC)

*instruction in wisdom – moo-sawr'* – properly *chastisement*; figuratively *reproof, warning* or *instruction*; also *restraint*:—bond, chastening, chastisement, check, correction, discipline, doctrine, instruction, rebuke. (QV)



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*humility comes before honor.* See 22:24; 25:6–7; Mt 23:12; Lk 14:11; 18:14; 1Pe 5:6. Wisdom also comes with humility (11:2; 13:10). (CSB)

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