

PROVERBS 23: Selected Verses

¹When you sit down to eat with a ruler,
observe carefully what is before you,
² and put a knife to your throat
if you have a big appetite.

³ Do not desire the ruler's delicacies,
for they are deceptive food.

⁴ Do not wear yourself out to get rich;
be wise enough to desist.

⁶ Do not eat the bread of the stingy;
do not desire their delicacies;
⁷ for like a hair in the throat, so are they.
'Eat and drink!' they say to you;
but they do not mean it.

¹⁰ Do not remove an ancient landmark
or encroach on the fields of orphans,
¹¹ for their redeemer is strong;
he will plead their cause against you.

²² Listen to your father who begot you,
and do not despise your mother when she is old.

²³ Buy truth, and do not sell it;
buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.

²⁵ Let your father and mother be glad;
let her who bore you rejoice.

1-4: This set of proverbs uses food to speak about something more than food: wealth and how tempting it can be for some of us to sell our souls to get it. We need to think about our desires and our attachments. Do they serve life, or do they make us dependent and needy in a way where more important things are compromised, neglected and even abused. Why do people desire money? Is it security? Is it significance? Is it because it is a mark of success and worth? What about growing and cultivating other desires more like relationships where worth and significance grows out of love and depth of sharing and caring?

6-7: This set of proverbs also uses the metaphor of food to talk of something more than food. It also complements the first set of proverbs. Be careful what you become dependent on and desirous of. It draws you into relationships where what you take makes you even more indebted and only builds resentment in relationships. Is someone offering you something because they want to? Do you have a sharing relationship? Do they give to you as much as you give to them in various ways? What kind of relationship is it? Are you prepared to detach

should you need to? This is about people but it's also about other things we become attached to and dependent on. What do you think?

10-11: We live in a world where many admire those with power who take whatever they want without accountability. These proverbs speak of respecting land, borders and those more vulnerable to whom it belongs. But it can also apply metaphorically to any one of us in terms of respecting boundaries with people and taking from them. Do we give as much as we take? Do we take into consideration what someone has and what they are able to give? Do we respect the vulnerability in others because we also recognize our own? Do we listen to what others may need from us and where we may need to step back? An orphan represents those most vulnerable in society who already have very little. Not only must we be careful what we take from others, but we should also be motivated to protect what the vulnerable have and even give so that they are not so vulnerable.

22,23,25: These proverbs are about parents, but they are also about wisdom and truth we may learn from those with more years and more wisdom than us. Some of us have had and continue to have great relationships with our parents and elders. Others of us less so. Who are those we learn from? How do we appreciate truths we were never able to appreciate the same earlier in life because we just thought we knew better? The arrogance and ignorance of youth is something we know about. But sometimes, people don't learn the lessons even in later life, and sometimes we just don't have good parental or elder figures in our lives whom we respect and can learn from. These proverbs point to the possibility of healthier familial and social structures where one generation is learning from another and growth continues to happen. What do you think?

PRAYER: We need your wisdom O God, and we need the wisdom of those who have been where we have been and beyond. Open our hearts, our minds and our trust so that we listen and learn rather than presume to know what's best ourselves. Help us know our attachments and give us the courage and will to detach from attachments that make us dependent in unhealthy ways. May genuine love be the one reason we bind ourselves to others and build practices and patterns in our life that serve life. May we respect the needs and boundaries of others without resenting them and may we set healthy boundaries for ourselves because we value ourselves and grow in understanding what it is we need for our own health. In Jesus' name; Amen.