

PROVERBS 17: Selected Verses

- 1 Better is a dry morsel with quiet
than a house full of feasting with strife.
- ¹⁴ The beginning of strife is like letting out water;
so stop before the quarrel breaks out.
- ⁹ One who forgives an affront fosters friendship,
but one who dwells on disputes will alienate a friend.
- ¹⁷ A friend loves at all times,
and kinsfolk are born to share adversity.
- ³ The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold,
but the LORD tests the heart.
- ⁸ A bribe is like a magic stone in the eyes of those who give it;
wherever they turn they prosper.
- ²³ The wicked accept a concealed bribe
to pervert the ways of justice.
- ¹⁰ A rebuke strikes deeper into a discerning person
than a hundred blows into a fool.

Once again in this chapter, some precious practical wisdom is offered with the challenge of reflecting how our behaviour and our heart are connected.

1,14 and 9,17 are related and have to do with conflict, strife and adversity. 1,14 are about restraint in preventing it and 9,17 are about what we are challenged to do after we have fallen into it. The contrasting imagery of feast or famine, or stopping a leak before it becomes a flood, helps highlight how terrible it is to live with tension and conflict in a household or within friend and community relations. We have already encountered a number of proverbs about the dangers of anger and lack of restraint leading to trouble and hurt. Even as there may be times when we need to speak truth and confront wrong with the courage and grace to do it, many times it is restraint that is needed and a pause so that we think through what is best and where our own responsibility lies before we point fingers at others.

Verses 9,17 also add the importance of forgiveness in any relationship. Without forgiveness it is only a matter of time before any intimate relationship breaks down. With forgiveness there is the opening for healing and a deepening of the relationship. Obviously there has to be a give and take reciprocity for the relationship to grow solid, and it takes practice and thoughtfulness to discern when we must let go and when we must address an issue rather than let it go. The

problem, often, is that we hold on to things and its hard to let go, especially when we are not satisfied with the apology, acknowledgement or repentance of a friend who has wronged us. But how much of that is also, at times, our unwillingness to let go because we are still angry or upset. Forgiveness is hard work. So is repentance. But the promise of deeply rich relationships of trust and the sharing of struggles with one another is a gift second to none. What do you think?

3 – The imagery of purifying precious metal through burning helps zero in on the work of cultivating a pure heart. We're not born with a pure heart. We develop it. Most people in the world focus on the external values (silver and gold) because no one else can really see a person's heart out of which motivation and passion arise. We deceive and pretend for any number of reasons, usually, to make an impression because we're afraid or for personal advantage. But having a vibrant faith in God is also about the value we place on a pure heart (which is motivated and energized by love) above what people may or may not see. What do you think?

8,23 – These verses acknowledge that deception, bribery, dishonesty and a perversion of justice can get you ahead in the world when it comes to power, influence and money. But they also challenge us to reflect on what's most important for us in life and how much we're willing to work at it to develop it. What values are you putting most of your energy and concern in growing?

10 – There are different ways we handle rebuke/criticism. 1) We reject it outright and react with counter criticism of the critic. 2) We internalize the criticism and feel like dirt. 3) We step back and reflect on it and evaluate what truth there may be in it. It takes a lot of maturity and trust to follow 3), especially if the criticism is something serious such as how I have hurt, wounded, betrayed or disappointed you. But as has been mentioned before, we cannot grow seriously and deeply as persons without criticism, rebuke or correction. The challenge is to find those people we can trust, who love and treasure us and value our humanity. Not easy. How may such persons be found in Christian community? How may our friendships be evaluated on this basis? And are our friends (biologically related or not) ones who receive criticism even as they are prepared to give it to us?

PRAYER: Thank you, O God, for family that are truly family to us. Thank you for those who are ready to be truthful with us, but also caring and respectful of us. Thank you for those who see our value and worth and recognize our gifts and our beauty despite the ways we sometimes get it wrong. Thank you for those who love us even when we get it wrong many times before we learn. Help us learn restraint and at the same time give us the courage to be honest with grace and kindness. Grow in us a pure heart. Make us honest even when it may cost us. Open our hearts to listen to others, even when we risk being hurt by what we hear. In Jesus' name; Amen.