

PROVERBS 16 Selected Verses:

² All one's ways may be pure in one's own eyes,
but the Lord weighs the spirit.

³ Commit your work to the Lord,
and your plans will be established.

⁹ The human mind plans the way,
but the Lord directs the steps.

⁵ All those who are arrogant are an abomination to the Lord;
be assured, they will not go unpunished.

¹⁸ Pride goes before destruction,
and a haughty spirit before a fall.

¹⁹ It is better to be of a lowly spirit among the poor
than to divide the spoil with the proud.

²¹ The wise of heart is called perceptive,
and pleasant speech increases persuasiveness.

²³ The mind of the wise makes their speech judicious,
and adds persuasiveness to their lips.

²⁴ Pleasant words are like a honeycomb,
sweetness to the soul and health to the body.

¹¹ Honest balances and scales are the Lord's;
all the weights in the bag are God's work.

³² One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,
and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city.

These verses all offer practical wisdom for how our behaviour is connected to our hearts. They are intended for self-examination.

1) 2,3,9 – How does God factor into your “way” or “work” (basically the way you live, serve and love)? We may believe or want to believe our intentions, motivations and passions are “pure” but what may God see? The point here is that taking the time to examine how we live, relate and act is essential for personal growth in godliness. Do we desire that our way of being better integrate purity of heart and action (2)? Do we seek to “commit” our actions to God so that we have more blessed results (3)? Committing our way makes us more accountable. Finally (9), we must recognize that any genuinely good action that integrates purity of heart in love with action that blesses, heals, refreshes and raises up, is the work of God rather than our own work. Thus, being in good relationship with God (in our conscience, heart and thoughts) also

allows God to work in us through the flow of the Spirit unencumbered by less honourable motives.

2) 5,18,19 – Pride, arrogance and “haughtiness” (feeling superior) are big obstacles to honest self-examination before God. The opposite of arrogance is humility which inspires openness. Being proud in a negative sense means we have little to learn from others or grow into ourselves, and we persuade ourselves that we know better than those around us. We have little need for God since we are our own gods in effect. While these verses predict an eventual downfall for the proud, in the real world the proud are often the cause of the suffering and downfall of many others before they themselves may go down. Think about some of those who rule our world right now and their arrogant words and actions. How many will suffer under their rule? How many are fooled by their false superiority? May we not seek to emulate the proud regardless of any imagined rewards when in their favour. Human civilization comes with a lot of repair work after the devastation caused by the arrogant who can turn forceful and violent in their presumption of “my way or the highway.”

3) 21,23,24 – These verses are all about how our words can offer such wonderful benefits to others when our hearts are pure in their loving intention. “Persuasiveness” here is not about convincing someone of our point of view to win them over to our side. No. Rather, persuasiveness is about speaking in a way and with a spirit where others can hear us and internalize what we say with acceptance even when it’s not what they want to hear. In another part of scripture we’re told to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). I speak what I believe is the truth to you because I care about you and about justice and right, and yet my ultimate concern is your welfare rather than whether my truth is accepted as the truth. What do you think?

4) 11 – Have you ever thought of honesty in business, in speech and in all one’s dealings as God’s work in you? It’s not easy to be honest at all times. We face the vulnerability of someone not hearing what they want to hear or not getting some deal that would benefit everyone involved however dishonest it may be. We have to prize devotion to God and personal integrity before God above all other benefits to stick with honesty even if we lose friends and profit.

4) 32 – Anger is a great motivator and energizer. But anger also leads to harm. Anger can lead to positive change when activated by some injustice, but if it lingers too long, it destroys relationships and wounds rather than heals. This verse is all about controlling our anger. Controlling is not repressing. Rather, it is intended to help us think through what we are angry about and where the hurt comes from causing the anger to arise. Most of the time there are better ways of dealing with and resolving our problems, humiliations and disagreements than anger. Growing in our slowness to anger is an important spiritual discipline, especially for some of us. For others of us, anger may be an essential area of growth when suffering abuse. Without

anger we can allow others to cause us harm and those around harm too without addressing the harm. Where is growth important for you at this time of your life and in particular relationships when it comes to anger?

PRAYER: Come to us, O God, especially in our hearts, as we speak to others and to ourselves too. Come to us when anger rises up within us. Come to us when we see ourselves as better than others and believe our way is the better way. Come to us when we forget in our hearts that we are always accountable before you. Come to us when it's hard to be honest with those we care about. May the best in us grow stronger as you move through us, and the worst in us diminish. And when we fail and fall after being pushed to our limits and beyond by circumstances and negative interaction, come to us to heal and renew us and raise us up again. In Jesus' name and through his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, we pray; Amen.