

PROVERBS 18 Selected Verses

¹The one who lives alone is self-indulgent,
showing contempt for all who have sound judgement.

² A fool takes no pleasure in understanding,
but only in expressing personal opinion.

¹³ If one gives answer before hearing,
it is folly and shame.

¹⁷ The one who first states a case seems right,
until the other comes and cross-examines.

¹² Before destruction one's heart is haughty,
but humility goes before honour.

²³ The poor use entreaties,
but the rich answer roughly.

¹⁴ The human spirit will endure sickness;
but a broken spirit—who can bear?

²⁴ Some friends play at friendship
but a true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin.

1) 1,2,13,17 – Each of us has an opinion about many things. But how much is our opinion formed and developed in interaction with others where we learn, evolve and even change our opinion because of what we hear and learn? These first set of proverbs are all about the dangers of not listening, learning and growing with others. Do you only trust yourself and refuse to consult others for what they think (1)? Do you just care to offer your opinion and refuse to listen to that of others (2)? Do you give your opinions right off the bat without taking the time to listen and think about what you hear (13)? Do you presume you are right without taking the time to ponder alternative if not contrasting opinions with openness (17)? Imagine what our collective discourse in our politics, social media and community gatherings could be like if we followed the wisdom of these proverbs!

2) 12,23 – The first part of 12 is a version of the famous saying: “Pride goes before a fall.” Have you heard it? Have you used it? Pondering the whole proverb and the one that follows gives us a fuller picture of the meaning. When we are overconfident in our position, status and privilege, we can afford to be declaratory in our demands and requests as well as our opinions. But humility teaches us that we need to persuade others, build respect and trust, and sometimes even appeal for understanding and compassion. It can also mean we care for others to have to appeal to them. We don't just dictate our terms and impose our views. Once again, here is practical wisdom for how to build better relationships built on better ways of communicating.

3) 14 – This proverb offers compassionate insight. When we are spiritually strong, we can weather many storms. But when our spirit is broken, many things in us also break down. What can break our spirit? What could cause us deep sadness, hopelessness and despair? What can tear through our confidence and break our will? The terrible way we're treated by others is first and foremost a cause. Natural disasters and loss of loved ones can also break us, although in this case, if our integrity and devotion to them remained intact through the storm, we can move through our grief and grow strong again in how we care for others who go through hard times.

But if we ourselves are ground down in terms of how we see ourselves and feel about ourselves; if we have been betrayed or have lost the person or position in life we believe is at the centre of our being, then it is very difficult to rebuild life again on a new foundation and trust again in people and life's possibilities. Only the power of God's grace and Spirit breaking through our devastation can help us rebuild our broken self.

4) 24 – Many of us know the truth in this proverb. What makes a true friend from a false one? It's easy to gather friends when we're enjoying the same things and there is more pleasure than pain in life. People can also be close to us when we have something of value to offer them. But a true friend is there for us in our down times, our times of struggle and our times of need. We have little to give at times but a true friend is there for us expecting nothing in return. Should we offer gratitude or one day reciprocate in a similar way it is always received as a gift rather than an expectation of payback. Do you have a friend like that be they kin, colleague, neighbour or simply friend? Pray for such friendship and seek to become such a friend yourself.

PRAYER: Thank you, O God, for friends who are truly friends. Thank you for the ways we have changed our opinions and gained wisdom because we have listened and trusted the wisdom and insight of others. Thank you for the ways we have been held when broken inside and for the ways we have found strength to rise up again. Thank you for the gift of humility which has taught us gratitude and not taking the gift of friendship and other privileges for granted. May you inspire and empower us to grow in humility, in care for others, in listening with discernment and trust, and in the face of discouragement and loss. In Jesus' name; Amen.