

PROVERBS 11: 12-30 (SELECTED VERSES)

¹² Whoever belittles another lacks sense,
but an intelligent person remains silent.

¹³ A gossip goes about telling secrets,
but one who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a confidence.

¹⁴ Where there is no guidance, a nation falls,
but in an abundance of counsellors there is safety.

¹⁷ Those who are kind reward themselves,
but the cruel do themselves harm.

¹⁸ The wicked earn no real gain,
but those who sow righteousness get a true reward.

²⁴ Some give freely, yet grow all the richer;
others withhold what is due, and only suffer want.

²⁵ A generous person will be enriched,
and one who gives water will get water.

²⁶ The people curse those who hold back grain,
but a blessing is on the head of those who sell it.

²⁸ Those who trust in their riches will wither,
but the righteous will flourish like green leaves.

³⁰ The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,
but violence takes lives away.

Some of these selected verses/proverbs are grouped together and some stand alone. The depth of their meaning and their application requires us to think about our lives and observe the lives of others. Where and how do they make good sense and where and how are they wise guides for living our lives?

12-13 - are about what we say and don't say – our words. Why do we say what we say? What motivates us? Is it compassion, kindness and care? Or is it frustration, envy, anger or resentment? Are we trustworthy with what is shared with us? Or do we talk about others and behind their backs? Do we build others up with our words or do we mock, belittle and tear them down? Sometimes, we need people we can talk to about our frustrations or concerns about other people even when we don't fully disclose the details. But do we do all this with the intent of addressing our concerns with the actual people involved at some point in some way? Or have we become accustomed to talking about other people because it's our way of venting without having the courage or taking the responsibility of addressing them more directly? Has "gossip" become a way of connecting with certain people over against others? Has it become a bad habit we need to break?

14 – I wonder how many counselors and advisors dictatorial leaders or authoritarian and controlling persons have around them, and especially those who are not there simply to help them achieve their goals, but those who have the freedom and encouragement to speak truthfully, often challenging intentions and encouraging deeper rethinking of agendas and goals? I bet someone like Putin has no one around him who will not agree with his goals and intentions. They wouldn't survive. And Netanyahu? He's driving a certain path that has no place for anyone other than those who think as he thinks. But what about you and me? Do we have even one person in our lives who we know can and often does speak truthfully to us and one we can trust has our best interests at heart? God help us if we don't. How well do we take advice and critical advice? If it is not well, how then can we genuinely grow?

17-28 – These verses are all about giving, and not just giving materially, but giving kindness, grace and compassion too. And the promise is that what we receive with all our giving will be truly a reward worth cherishing. But it does take a re-evaluation of our values for such wisdom to become valuable to us, no? If money is our highest value, we will be willing to compromise other values like care for other people and their interests in the interest of getting more money for ourselves. But if care of others is of highest value to us because we know that how we treat others is also the better way to our own personal fulfillment, then we will be generous in our giving for the higher value we will gain in return.

Most of us reading this meditation will readily agree with such wisdom. But applying it consistently in our lives, and with particular situations and persons can sometimes be a challenge. It's those situations that challenge us to think and rethink, and then to take steps that require genuine effort from us, that really impact our souls. Where are those situations for you?

30 – Are we planting seeds with our fruit that keep the tree of life growing, or are we hurting and harming it so that it is withering? "Violence" is an interesting word. We commonly associate it with physical attack. But violence is also any forceful, harsh and cruel action that involves words and behaviour that cut down other people. It may be anger in us, frustration or bitterness. We may even rationalize it as tough love. We may think of it as self-defence or reaching our limit when we've had enough. But every act of violence leaves a residue that must be dealt with. Whether in our personal relations or as groups and nations at war, we must deal with the aftereffects of violence. And sometimes, people and relationships cannot survive. The hurt, the trauma, the loss, fear and mistrust are irreparable. We have to find a way to peace, a new way beyond the rupture and damage.

God help us, God forgive us, God give us healing and peace...

PRAYER: Make us mindful of our words, O God... what we say and what we don't say and how we say what we say... May grace, compassion and understanding fill our hearts again and

again so that whatever we say comes from a good place... Make us generous... Make us good listeners to those around us with critical wisdom to offer us should we have the ears to hear and heart to receive... And may any form of "violence" be purged from our souls, O God, so that truthful and honest communication nourishes health and wholeness rather than rupture... In Jesus' name... Amen.