

PROVERBS 15: Selected Verses

¹A soft answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.

² The tongue of the wise dispenses knowledge,
but the mouths of fools pour out folly.

⁴ A gentle tongue is a tree of life,
but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

⁵ A fool despises a parent's instruction,
but the one who heeds admonition is prudent.

¹² Scoffers do not like to be rebuked;
they will not go to the wise.

⁶ In the house of the righteous there is much treasure,
but trouble befalls the income of the wicked.

¹⁶ Better is a little with the fear of the Lord
than great treasure and trouble with it.

¹⁷ Better is a dinner of vegetables where love is
than a fatted ox and hatred with it.

³³ The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom,
and humility goes before honour.

These verses cover some familiar themes, but each proverb touches what is familiar in a unique way of expression evoking deeper self reflection.

1) The first set of verses (1,2,4) are all about our words and the spirit behind them. How do we speak to someone so that they listen, especially when we need to speak a difficult truth? A soft approach versus a harsh one will make all the difference in whether a person becomes defensive or not and ready to listen rather than shut down (1). Do we speak words, perspectives and information that is thought out and researched with a desire to understand context and situations or do we just speak out of our grievance, bitterness and cynicism (2)? Do we speak to another gently with the hope of building them up, even when we must speak honestly, or do we seek to wound them and "break their spirit" because we ourselves have been wounded (4)? How must we heal within ourselves so that our words are healing words too?

2) The second set of verses (5,12) are all about words spoken to us, and words that are difficult to hear regardless of whether there is truth in them. No one likes to be "rebuked", "instructed" or challenged. And yet, can we ever truly grow if there is none of this in our lives from people whose words and perspective we can trust? How do we enlarge our capacity to hear others and step into their world so that we see the world and ourselves from their

perspective? The world is far bigger than how we see it and experience it, and we enjoy privileges that do not benefit everyone. How are we intentionally and unintentionally part of systems that harm others and how may we step outside enough to listen, try to understand and reach out with compassion even when change is bigger than what we ourselves can accomplish? Our spiritual growth involves all of this. What do you think?

3) the third set of verses (6,16,17) use the material metaphor of treasure to teach truths about the difference between righteousness and wickedness. What is true treasure for you? When pondering these verses together, we're told that true treasure is found in relations of love with God and others around us. But even more, these verses target those who put so much stock in material treasure that they compromise if not hurt their relations to gain treasure. In fact, if you compare verses 16 and 17 with 6, you can see clearly that it is better to be materially poor while having built your life around love given and received than materially rich while having sacrificed love to do it. The danger, though, is how we deceive ourselves with the promise that we can have it all without having to make choices in where we invest and where we sacrifice. Love that is meaningful in our lives always has a cost and an investment that take up our hearts, our minds and our attention. Wealth is a huge distraction and a craven passion that can corrupt all too easily. Do not be fooled. As Jesus says: where your heart is truly, there your true treasure is also.

4) The final verse (33) is simple, yet profound. The fear of the Lord is about recognizing there is a higher power and wisdom than your own power and wisdom, and one that you must heed and devote your life to follow. This partners well with humility, recognizing that you are not sufficient unto yourself and need a higher wisdom, along with the care of others to live well. To focus on your own honour and how much you deserve it is to lack sufficient recognition of all you receive from God and from others through God. Humility always receives more because it recognizes what others contribute to enhance and enrich one's own life. Any honour that comes becomes a gift to cherish rather than something we expect and feel entitled to.

Humble people are happier, more content human beings, whereas one who chases honour will never get enough to satisfy and will always feel deprived of what they are entitled to in their own minds. What do you think?

PRAYER: Thank you, O God, for those who are there for us not because we are entitled to it but because they care. Thank you for the gift of restraint with our words and love in our hearts when we speak, especially when what we want to say is difficult and painful to say. Thank you for the gift of listening, even when we hear what is difficult to hear. Thank you for the gifts of heart and connection that are so much more valuable than any material treasure. Make us mindful and appreciative where it matters. In Jesus' name; Amen.