

May 19

## Proverbs

Hey y'all welcome to the May 19 Project 4:4 edition, our continued journey through the Proverbs. I'm Reid Brown .

Let's start in our reading today with 10:11 where Solomon says, "*The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life.*" What he means surely is that God uses the words of righteous men and women as instruments through which his life flows to other people - my tongue, as a channel through which life flows to others. What a great possibility! From the later portion of the verse 11, The New English Bible has a very graphic rendering of this expression. It says, "*The wicked are choked by their own violence.*" Unfortunately, we may see in our day more than one person choked by his or her own violent words.

Chapter 12:25, "*A kind word cheers him up.*" You can use your words as 'weapons' of encouragement. God desires to use you to influence those around you in powerful ways. There are so many discouraged people all around us all the time. Parents who are brokenhearted over the bad choices their children have made, and racked with guilt because they aren't sure whether or not they are the cause of their children's waywardness; children who have been victimized by neglect and abusive relatives; individuals with physical afflictions to their bodies whose spirits are on the verge also of breaking - Jesus wants us to be His instruments of encouragement. Look for the opportunities to use your tongue to encourage them.

Several times already in our reading of Proverbs before today we have seen little notices that God is watching, that He knows what is going on with regard to both the actions and the motives of mankind. That awareness confronts us again in today's reading at the beginning of Chapter 17:3. It says:

"The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the heart." You use the crucible and the furnace not only to purify the precious metals of gold and silver but to test them to prove that they are genuine. Well, just as a wise business man wants to know that the silver and gold are for real, so God is busy testing the hearts.

This is a pretty important concept. We tend to be very concerned about what a person does. Sometimes we know that people will do the right things for the wrong reasons, but since we are not able to see into their hearts and judge their motives, our tendency is (and ought generally to be) to not worry about the motives of others and simply concentrate upon their actions. That is what a human being does. But God is not a human being. He knows the motives as well as the actions and if we do all the right things outwardly but our inner motives are false or wrong, God knows that and he holds us accountable for our motives as well as our actions. Think about that for a minute. Just how pure are your motives? Well, I cannot know anything about your motives, but I am somewhat aware of my own and I have to tell you that far more often than I would ever like to admit they are anything but pure. There are times when on the outside I appear to be listening patiently and sympathetically to someone else's woes when deep down in my heart I'm saying, "would you please get this over with. I want to go home and rest now!" in fact if the truth

be told I probably have mixed motives much if not most of the time. It is a sobering thing to know that God not only knows my actions but weighs my motives as well.

In today's reading Solomon also reminds us that we ought to rely upon a man not just because of what he says he will do, but because of what he actually demonstrates. "Many a man claims to have unfailing love but a faithful man, who can find." Proverbs 20:6. In other words, words are cheap, but actions are the keys. A wise man or woman will be very happy to hear words of fidelity and commitment from others but wisdom demands a certain amount of healthy skepticism about such claims until there is opportunity for the words to be confirmed by actions that are consistent with the claims. We all need to remember that it is not by our words that we will be judged or remembered, but by our actions. In fact, Solomon says, even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right.

There are just two more Proverbs that I want us to look briefly at today. The first is found in chapter 20:9. In a rhetorical question, Solomon asks, "Who can say I have kept my heart pure. I am clean and without sin?" Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Both New and Old Testaments say, "There is no one who is righteous - no not one." Solomon may have been the wisest man in all of history, but he knew very well that he was a sinner -- just like everyone else. This wisdom keeps us humble and dependent upon the saving power of God through Jesus.

The last Proverb I want you to notice today is also found in chapter 20:27. It says, "The lamp of the Lord searches the spirit of a man, it searches out his inmost being." Whether the word "lamp" is meant to stand for the eye of the Lord or another word to signify the Spirit of the Lord is not clear, but the truth that the Lord searches the spirits of human beings is one that you need to remember today and every other day as well.

Knowing that God sees all and knows all about what our motives are and the matters of our heart, it gives us hope and encourages us with His patient love and work in our lives. Despite knowing us completely, he remains faithful and compassionate. May you be inspired to draw near to God and thank him for his work in your life. This is Reid Brown signing off with the May 19 Project 4:4 edition reminding you that it is the Lord that gives wisdom and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding and find someone to encourage with your words.