

Proverbs 5:1-23: The Way of Wisdom: Marriage, Infidelity, and God's Path

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[0 : 00] It comes from Proverbs chapter 5. Please stand for the reading of God's Word.

Proverbs chapter 5. My son, be attentive to my wisdom. Incline your ear to my understanding, that you may keep discretion, and your lips may guard knowledge.

For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death. Her steps follow the path to Sheol.

She does not ponder the path of life. Her ways wander, and she does not know it. And now, O sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house.

Lest you give your honor to others, and your years to the merciless. Lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labors go to the house of a foreigner. And at the end of your life, you groan when your flesh and body are consumed, and you say, how I hated discipline, and my heart despised reproof.

[1 : 16] I did not listen to the voice of my teachers, or incline my ear to my instructors. I am at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation. Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.

Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely dear, a graceful doe.

Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight, being intoxicated always in her love. Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman, and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?

For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly, he is led astray.

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. Quickly, by way of introduction, in case you haven't been here for a couple weeks, or you're visiting us today.

[2 : 26] First, my name is Kevin Schwartz. I'm the youth director here at Holy Trinity, and they threw me up here with this passage today. But also, we've been doing a summer series in the book of Proverbs, and today we find ourselves in Proverbs chapter 5.

We're working our way through portions of this entire book of wisdom throughout this summer. So we hope that you find it beneficial for yourself.

Please join me in prayer, and we'll jump in. Our Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the wisdom and for the instruction that it imparts to us.

We thank you that you are gracious enough and desirous to pass on your wisdom and your knowledge to us. We ask that your spirit would be among us as we look at your word here this afternoon, that it would illuminate the text before us, and that we would learn and grow in your wonderful ways.

In Jesus' name, amen. I don't know if any of you guys have read the latest issue of Today's Chicago Woman. Anybody? I didn't pick this up myself, I promise.

[3 : 43] But my wife and I were downtown for church this morning, and we decided to walk up Michigan Avenue to see if we could catch any of Transformers 3 being filmed. We saw a couple of the cars, but that was about it.

And on the way back around the corner, she picked up the magazine to look at what were the latest decorations for her house, and I don't know, what else. But as we were going back, she flipped to one of the articles, and it actually made for a perfect introduction today instead of the introduction that I had.

Every now and then, we surprisingly will come across articles when the wisdom of the world, the teachings of the world, what someone has to say who may or may not be a Christian, I don't know, actually matches up somewhat well with what we run into in Scripture.

And this article caught my attention. It's called, Keep Your Marriage Fun, Fresh, and Fiery. It starts out, Monogamy is a fabulous thing. One of the defining features of a long-term committed relationship is that it almost always provides us with a deep and profound connection shared by another human being.

It goes on to say a couple other things. Romance, creativity, and passion are not solely reserved for the early stages of a relationship or marriage. Thankfully, there are many couples in committed, long-lasting, solid, and sexually active relationships who put in the effort and have gleaned the results.

[5 : 07] It was actually somewhat encouraging to read an article that, instead of flying directly in the face of what I had been looking at here in Proverbs chapter 5, actually kind of said something that supported it, something that encouraged wisdom that dovetailed, at least in parts, with what we find in the book of Proverbs.

Today we're going to take a look at Proverbs chapter 5 and see that, just as this author said, monogamy is indeed fabulous. Amongst some other pieces of wisdom that the author is passing along to us.

We're going to take it in four pieces this afternoon. Verses 1 through 6 are going to introduce us to the forbidden or to the evil woman in Proverbs. Verses 7 through 14 talk about the folly of infidelity.

Verses 15 through 20, the wisdom of marriage. And finally, verses 21 through 23, God's wisdom, or God's omniscience, and our sin. The narrator of Proverbs at this point begins this chapter like he has done so much in the prologue.

The first nine chapters of Proverbs seem to be a group, and oftentimes he starts his new portions of instruction with this term or this call to my son.

[6 : 25] It's kind of this familial, tender call, and he addresses his listener as my son. Even if just on the couple chapters following you see this a lot, chapter 6 starts the same way, my son.

If you have put up security for your neighbor. In 6:20, a new section starts, my son, keep your father's commandment. In 7:1, my son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments within you.

Through these first nine chapters, a phrase like my son or my son listen actually comes up 19 different times. So it's a popular kind of way of this narrator or this father, as we'll call him today, is calling out to the person to whom he is giving instruction.

And he calls to him in a very general way at the beginning of our chapter. Take a look at verse 1. My son, be attentive to my wisdom, incline your ear to my understanding. And he immediately gives him two results of what will happen if he were to do this.

Verse 2, that you may keep discretion and that your lips may guard knowledge. Two of the benefits of this wisdom that he is instructing, this wisdom that he is seeking to pass along to this son is discretion and knowledge that is being guarded.

[7 : 40] Both things that we're going to find out very quickly he will need if he is to go up against the temptation that will soon be before him. Before we dive into the rest of the passage, I just want to make two quick notes.

The first is I'm going to use this relationship of father and son as we go through the passage today. He addresses it to the son. It's easier, so I'm just going to say the father as the narrator, the son as the person he's speaking to, even though it may or may not be a literal father-son relationship.

Secondly, and even though this passage is addressed to the sons, this is for the ladies out there, I'm going to try to make this a little bit harder on you this afternoon.

I think this is very applicable to men and women alike, but it's kind of like if I were teaching you to throw a baseball or hit a tennis racket, if you're left-handed, you have to kind of flip everything around and look at it backwards.

So I'm going to ask you to kind of do the same thing today, if that's okay. So since it's so much, the language is this father passing down wisdom to the son, just kind of flip it around in your mind like you're a lefty.

[8 : 51] Fair enough? If you are a lefty, even better. But first we see, in verses 3 through 6, we see this introduction and description of this forbidden or adulterous woman that the father is warning his son against.

We begin to get her description in verse 3. For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil. But in the end, she is bitter as a wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.

The father has just gotten done instructing his son to make sure his lips guard knowledge. And immediately he flips the route and says, make sure your lips guard knowledge because the lips of this adulterous woman, this lips, the lips of this temptress that will be before you, they drip with honey.

They seem to be sweet. They're smooth. They're suave. They're going to, you're going to need every ounce of that knowledge that you are guarding. So while the son is called to guard this knowledge with his lips, this forbidden woman's lips are dripping with sweetness.

Her talk is smooth. The son's lips are to trap this wisdom and discernment so he can use it against women such as this, whose honey lips will turn bitter and revolting, whose sweet words will later dice him up like a sword.

[10 : 14] This forbidden woman is actually a pretty popular character in the beginning chapters of Proverbs, especially here in chapters five through seven. The father will turn to instructing and describing this woman a lot, but if you flick back to chapter two, we actually see her first introduction there.

The father is talking about the value of hanging on to this wisdom that he will pass along and one of the things that will assist his son in is with this forbidden woman.

Take a look at verse 16. He's saying, hang on to this wisdom, value wisdom, so you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God.

For her house sinks down to death and her paths to the departed. None who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life. And if you look again in chapter five at those verses we read, three all the way through verse six, we see that she's seemingly smooth, but yet she ends up being bitter, that her feet lead to death, her steps follow the path down to Sheol.

She doesn't even ponder the path of life and her ways wander and she doesn't even know it. If you were to go on and look in chapter six and chapter seven, chapter six describes the woman as beautiful, beautiful to the eye, but yet dangerous to the man.

[11 : 41] Chapter seven actually personifies this woman. We see her, her husband has left and she's going out and praying upon any man that she can find to seduce and persuade to come into her own.

So by the time we actually combine all of these chapters together, we get a pretty well developed picture of who exactly this forbidden woman is. She's a smooth talker. She's abandoned her own marital fidelity.

She entirely consumes those who come to her. She's sweet, smooth, but ultimately bitter and unrelenting. She has rebelled against God, rebelled against the covenant he has made with his people, and she is personally on the path of unrighteousness and folly and those who come to her end up in the exact same place.

She's beautiful to the eye, but her beauty comes at a steep price. She is loud, wayward, and does not merely lie in wait, but goes out and catches her prey. She is seductive and persuasive.

She makes sure that her home and her bed are the same. She seizes whomever she can grab when her husband is away. Her prey at the end of chapter 7 are described as an ox on its way to slaughter and a bird rushing to the snare.

[12 : 50] Ultimately, her prey are given over to death. What started as a distraction, something seemingly beautiful and enticing, takes over everything from the person who does not heed the father's words of wisdom and does not apply the discernment that can be gained from them.

This is what the son in chapter 5 is up against. This is what his father is warning him against. This is why he needs to store up wisdom and knowledge and discernment so when the temptation comes, when he comes face to face with this forbidden woman, he is able to flee from her.

So that's the picture of this forbidden woman, this adulterous woman in the book of Proverbs. The father then goes on to speak of the folly of infidelity, beginning in verses 7 and 8.

He says, O now, and now, O sons, listen to me. Do not depart from the words of my mouth. Keep your way far from her and do not even, do not go near the door of her house.

It's a pretty simple command. He says, keep your way far from her. Do not go even close. Don't go near the door of her house. And this language kind of conjures up images of, I think, a couple other characters that we see in the Old Testament who actually followed this father's wisdom very well.

[14 : 08] I think of Joseph. When he got into the clutches of Potiphar's wife, he ran. He fled as fast and as far away as he could, even leaving his cloak behind in his hands.

But he escaped the temptation as quick as he could. I think also of Job, who says, that I made a covenant that I should not look upon a virgin. He made this covenant with himself and before God, this promise that he would keep himself from sexual immorality.

And so that's the way to flee it. And if you look, oftentimes we, I'm sorry, with sexual immorality, even close association begins this quick path, this quick slippery slope, this path to giving in to temptation, this path of danger.

If you look across the page in chapter 6, where he continues to talk about this forbidden woman, the father asks a couple questions, beginning in verse 27.

He says, can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? The answers, of course, are no.

[15 : 20] Eventually, if you're carrying a heaping fire right next to you, you're going to go up in a blaze yourself, right? If you spend enough time walking on beds of coals, your feet will burn.

You're going to, they will be scorched. And so we see this idea that, especially when it comes to sexual immorality, the idea of putting up boundaries, I think becomes all the more important.

Oftentimes, in our Christian living, we are scared to put up fences. We think we're going to quickly fall into legalistic ways or we're going to become pharisaical or we're going to somehow give up the freedom that Jesus has given us through his death.

But when it comes to this folly of infidelity, in the book of Proverbs and elsewhere, we see it illustrated that fortresses and guards must go up. My father-in-law was visiting us about a year ago now and my wife and I used to live by the county jail over on California.

And he took a walk while we were both out at work one day. And he came back and he said, hey, did you guys know that you have an old abandoned jail just a couple blocks over from where you live?

[16 : 26] It's got these huge fences with the barbed wire still and there's these brick, huge brick walls outside of that. And there's even some watch towers that are still up that you can see where the guards could overlook.

And we let him know that it was indeed still in use. But the point being, when it comes to sexual immorality, our guards, I think a lot actually like that jail, need to go up.

It's not just leave sin kind of dangling out here to where we might run into it, but we need barbed wire. We need brick walls. We need watch towers and we probably need to put a couple people up in the watch towers as well to help us and to make sure that we're not trying to break in instead of break out.

So when it comes to sexual immorality and infidelity, boundaries and fences are in fact a good thing. We then quickly see the results of someone who commits themselves to this way of infidelity.

Take a look at verse 9. The father tells his son to stay far away from the forbidden woman lest you give your honor to others and your years to the merciless.

[17 : 37] Lest strangers take their fill of your strength and your labors go to the house of a foreigner. He says be careful because as soon as you go down that path, others from outside the congregation, others from outside your family, from anywhere and everywhere are going to come and it's going to be to your ruin.

The language and the ideas here seem to be pointing towards both economic as well as social ruin. People are coming and just seeping everything away from him that they can.

A lot of commentators have actually put forth the idea that during the time in which this was possibly written that if a husband found that his wife was cheating on him with another man, he could actually enslave that man for the rest of his life.

There would be no monetary amount that could be given to him for the return of him and he could enslave him forever and forever. Thus leading to this economic, this social ruin when it has come to the forefront.

Now obviously that doesn't happen today. We don't see people enslaving the paramours of their infidelity of their wives who have cheated on them.

[18 : 56] But this idea of social, of economic, and other kinds of ruin is still at kind of this dead-end road of infidelity. I think of divorce, of broken homes that result from cheating husbands and wives, depression, alimony checks, unplanned pregnancies, all kinds of diseases, psychological problems, loneliness, suicide even, murder, things just escalate and escalate and eventually this social and this economic ruin seeps in to the end of infidelity.

And it kind of continues on. Look at beginning in verse 11 and we get a picture of not just the immediate consequences or the consequences that might creep in sooner or later, but we see what it looks like at the end of this person's life.

Verse 11, And at the end of your life you groan when your flesh and body are consumed and you say how I hated discipline and my heart despised reproof. I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors.

I am at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation. We get this picture of this man who has given in to the temptation of the forbidden woman and we see him now at the end of his life after he has lived a life ignoring wisdom, after he has lived a life pushing aside his father's instruction and we see that he is left with imminent death as well as a life full of regret.

Those are the two things that it seems to boil down to. He says, If only he had listened to wisdom early on. Wisdom is never too far away.

[20 : 38] It is never too early to begin to clutch the instruction that his father has passed on to him. It is something that he is training up his own son in. The next generation should always be hearing this valuable wisdom, these valuable instructions on how to live so they do not find themselves at the end of life looking back and regretting the decisions that they have made.

We see that the rewards of this folly, the rewards of this folly of infidelity are not to the person speaking here, to the son, worth the cost that he ultimately paid.

He wishes that he had listened to instruction, that he had heeded the words that were passed down to him. So after introducing his son to the forbidden woman, this adulteress, this temptation that's going to be before him and talking to him and warning him about the folly of sexual immorality, of infidelity, he goes on to extol the wisdom of marriage.

He goes from the folly of infidelity to the wisdom of marriage. And he begins, like most of us do when we talk about marriage and the things that accompany it, with a metaphor. He says, verse 15, Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.

Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone and not for strangers with you. So he goes on and he begins to compare and contrast the value of marriage, the value of a monogamous relationship against a life lived in infidelity, a life lived as a cheating spouse, a life giving over to just instant gratification and concerns.

[22 : 25] He exhausts, it seems like, every water metaphor that there was at the time. And eventually, we see he runs out in verses 18 and 19.

It comes to an end and he just begins to get more literal. But one of the things that, and we'll get to that in a second, but one of the things that jumps out in these verses is kind of this possession language.

If you look at it, even in just verses 15 through 18, the times that the words your or you or own come up is actually quite a bit. He says, your own cistern, your own well, your springs, let them be for yourself alone, let your fountain be blessed and the wife of your youth.

There's this kind of this ownership, not dictatorship ownership, but this idea that the wife that his son has been given is for him and for him alone, that he is supposed to rejoice in this wife.

And just to kind of even out the balance of the sexes here, I guess, flip over to 1 Corinthians chapter 7. I think this is a great time to remind ourselves of something that Paul gives to the Corinthian church when he speaks to them about sexual immorality.

[23 : 39] 1 Corinthians chapter 7. Paul starts in 7 verse 2. But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.

The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a limited time. The same thing that the father in Proverbs is saying to the son that here is your wife, this is the one God has given to you, Paul brings out and kind of balances for the mothers and the daughters as well.

He says, men, your body doesn't belong to you, it belongs to your wife. Wives, your body doesn't belong to you, it belongs to your husband. There's an idea of reciprocal love, of it going both ways.

And so then as the metaphor kind of winds down, we get a couple of the verses in scripture that feel like they should be tucked away in Song of Solomon so we can keep the rest of the Bible safe for ourselves.

[24 : 56] But this is what the father passes down to the son. He says, verse 18, let your fountain be blessed. Rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely dear, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight.

Be intoxicated always in her love. It's easy to kind of want to keep our Bibles on that G rating and kind of sometimes push these or difficult to interpret texts.

Out of the way. That might be why I am up here today. I'm not sure. But, just kidding. Our pastors do a wonderful job with difficult texts. But I think a lot of times it's to our detriment that we ignore these passages that might make us blush or these passages that we can't quite figure out at a first glance.

And I think there's actually three things that we can kind of take from these verses. And just kind of to show that working and not being afraid of these kind of texts is worthwhile.

It's worth the extra work of learning and understanding God's word. So three practical kind of applications from verses 18 through 19. Not too practical.

[26 : 07] Don't worry. The first is that when we warn of infidelity or when we speak against sexual immorality, I think it is just important that we lift up and that we extol Christian marriage.

Oftentimes it's easy to say stay away from this. Don't do this. This is wrong. This is bad. And we get this list of what we can do as Christians and what we can't do as Christians.

But when the father is passing along this instruction to his son, he begins there. He says, stay away from the woman. Flee as far as you can. It's bad. But then he switches sides and he gives him an alternative in its place.

He gives him the way that God intended it and created it to be in its place. Oftentimes we're guilty of just saying, don't do this. This is wrong. And that can either just kind of stir up resentment or it can push those to whom we're telling those things to go after them anyway.

But here we see that the father actually lifts up an alternative in its place and he lifts up this idea of marriage, of a monogamous relationship with the husband or wife that they are given.

[27 : 17] Secondly, we see the importance of living according to God's intended or his created intentions. The way that God created things and the joy and the pleasure that comes from living within the boundaries of his created ways.

We kind of see, we've seen wisdom and folly juxtaposed all throughout Proverbs so far and we will continue to. And here that wisdom and folly comes out as sexual immorality and as a committed marriage relationship.

But this idea of marriage is kind of just a snapshot of so many other things that we're guilty of doing when it comes to this. It's so easy to kind of take the good things that God has given and push past those boundaries and use them in ways that he didn't intend them to do or use them in ways that are at enmity with his love and with his grace.

Oftentimes we can use relationships to bring other people down or we might use the job the way that God has allowed us to provide for ourselves for our families to just simply advance our own wants, our own desires.

We're often wasteful of the time that God gives us. It's easy to take the intelligence that God gives us and turn it into just strings of endless, meaningless debates or things that don't necessarily advance or cause us to reflect more on God.

[28 : 38] It's easy to use the money, the wealth that is ultimately God's that he gives to us to use only for more material possessions for ourselves and not helping and aiding those who truly need it.

It's easy to take the creativity that God gives us and to create things and to make things that actually cause reflection on anything except God. Thirdly, if you're married, celebrate your marriage.

marriage, it's very basic. There's a lot of very basic instruction here in Proverbs 5 and the whole book of Proverbs. But we see in verses 18 and 19 that this father is telling his son that God gives you a marriage.

God has given you a wife to enjoy, to celebrate, to enjoy relationally, sexually, as a friend, and many, many other ways.

But he tells them, and then he asks this question to kind of sum it up in verse 20. Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman, and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?

[29 : 41] The answer, of course, by this point that he's hoping for is, I shouldn't be. There's no way. If what you're saying is true, then my focus ought to be on my own wife, on my own sister, in my own well.

That is from where I should be refreshed. That is where God has intended me to be. And after kind of walking us through this folly and wisdom of infidelity in marriage, the father concludes with more of kind of a general theological statement, another kind of broad call to wisdom and to living in its paths.

Look at verse 21. This is what he says, For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin.

He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly, he is led astray. I don't know if you caught it back at the beginning of the chapter, but if you look across on the other side of the page there, we see this path language again at the beginning of chapter 5.

It kind of begins and ends the whole chapter. At the beginning of the father's description of this woman, he says her steps follow the path to Sheol. She does not ponder the path of life, but rather she wanders far away from it.

[31 : 03] And now we see this picture of God in opposition to the woman as one who not only sees all the ways, all the paths of man, but he ponders and is in control, he's sovereign, he's omniscient over those same paths.

We are often, and then we see this kind of this building of sin, the ease that it is for us to fall into the ways of sin, to actually end up on those same paths as this forbidden woman, just kind of wandering, not even knowing where we're wandering, but there nonetheless.

But we need to remember that God is actually looking down, and whether we're following the path to righteousness or whether we're on one of the myriad other paths that are leading to sin, to folly, that are going against this idea of wisdom and righteousness that we've seen in Proverbs, God knows exactly where we are.

[32 : 28] It climaxes on the cross. God's wise ways, God's ultimate wisdom is in that he sent his own son so that whatever path on which we're wandering, he can actually, if we come through his son, through his big picture of wisdom, he can take us and just set us on the path that we need to be on.

Thank you for the practical nature of the wisdom being passed on by the Father in Proverbs. May we do well to listen to it, to

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