

Proverbs: Skillful Living - Purity

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[0 : 00] If you are new or with us today, we are in the middle of a sermon series, walking through the book of Proverbs, and we're looking at virtues and characteristics of a person who is wise.

And so the whole book of Proverbs is written to instruct us what wisdom looks like. It's as if wisdom puts on streak clothes and informs us how to behave in this world.

And that's the tenor of the book of Proverbs. And so we have been looking at different attributes that Proverbs shares with us. And today we find ourselves with this attribute that's this character, habit, if you will, of a wise person, being that of one who exhibits and possesses purity, both purity in heart and purity in behavior.

And the question that we're going to ask today and respond to is, I want us to consider, how do we know that God loves us? How do we know that someone else cares for us?

How do we know that others love us? And one of the ways we could answer, there's many of ways that we know that people love us and the Lord loves us, but one of the ways we know when someone loves us is when they warn us of danger.

[1 : 18] When someone goes to great lengths to warn someone, we are convinced danger lies ahead. One example of this is I was second on the scene to an auto accident.

I saw the accident ahead of me in the, this is a country road. And the person in front of me who immediately saw the accident right in front of them stopped.

They waved me down and I parked, put my flashers on and the gentleman yelled back to me, stop traffic. And so there I was in the road and cars are coming and I'm waving my hand, slow down, slow down, I'm making a big scene.

Why? Why would I warn? There's something that's wrong with this guy that's doing this to cause people to slow down. Why? I was warning them. There's something ahead that lies danger and I love people, both those in the accident, and you well enough to warn you, slow down.

Danger lies ahead. It's one of the ways and God has gone to great lengths writing us a book in part full of warnings to tell us and inform us where danger lies.

[2 : 33] And today we find a text that's going to illustrate this. Today we're going to find ourselves in Proverbs chapter seven. I encourage all of us to take a copy of scripture out open to Proverbs chapter seven.

There's a pew Bible in front of you. If you have forgotten yours today that I would encourage us to do. Why? Because today I don't have slides because oftentimes we will have looked at a verse here or looked at a verse there and we would have hopped around a book of Proverbs and it may have taken more time to do that so I put slides.

Today we're going to look at a whole chapter and so I don't have slides and I know what you're thinking, can Scott preach without slides?

And today we will both find out. And so Proverbs chapter seven is where we will find ourselves today. And what will we find in this warning today?

We're going to, there's going to be three parts to it. We're going to find something about love. We're going to see that God's word has something to say about temptation. And then thirdly, we're going to see God has something to say about safety and our protection.

[3 : 46] But I want us to open this section and read the first four verses. We'll get to the fifth in a moment, but the first five verses kind of are this prologue to this warning and a lead up to the warning.

And so the first four verses in particular, look how earnestly Solomon or the author of Proverbs writes this. And before I read, let me share the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs are written in such a way where it's like a father speaking to a son.

So you'll see this motif written of my son, my son. Now we know mom is included because we find her in chapter one. And so you have this father and mother speaking to their son, warning them of certain things.

But specifically, often the father comes as a taking his son aside, warning his son. And this is what he says to his son. First, this is what the father wisdom tells his son.

Verses one through four. My son, keep my words and treasure my commandments with you. Keep my commandments and live. Keep my teachings as the apple of your eye.

[5 : 01] Bind them on your fingers and write them on the tablet of your heart. Say to wisdom, you are my sister and call insight your intimate friend.

Notice the importance. In verse one, keep my words. Verse one, treasure my commands.

Verse two, keep my commands. Verse two, keep my teachings. Verse three, bind them on your finger. Write them on the tablet of your heart.

Write them. And then if that's not enough, the teachings are so precious. They must be guarded.

They must be internalized. Guard what I'm about to say to you, son.

Guard these things. These are so important. Don't neglect them. You have to keep these. Bind these. Write them on your heart. Don't neglect these. This is so important.

[6 : 04] The father is pleading with his son. They must be internalized. And then verse four, personifies or wisdom. So it says wisdom and insight are personified.

So wisdom is your sister, if you will. And insight is your intimate friend. It's your kinsman. The closeness and understanding you have with your sister and the closeness you have with your kinsman, these intimate friends, this is the same kind of intimacy you must possess with regard to what I'm about to say to you.

Is what the father is pleading to the son. And so this is a highly specific warning. And we see what is the specific warning that he's talking about.

What is it that is so important that this person is to, the son is to bind them on his heart and write them on his heart and bind them on his fingers. Keep the commands in his heart. And verse five tells us, excuse me.

This wisdom is to keep you from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words.

[7 : 17] It's interesting here that the father's plea is saying, keep these things close to your heart.

Write them, bind them, do everything you can to, I'm using my words to plead with you here son.

I'm pleading with you. And why is it? Because this adulteress woman that he's about to write about, he says she's going to use the same thing.

It's going to be her words that will tempt you to fall. It will be her words that will get you to fall into this temptation. So keep my words son as the father's writing.

Keep my words son because it's my words that will guard you and keep you, this wisdom that I'm employing to you. Because you're going to hear another word, set of words that are going to lead you somewhere that you don't want to go.

So then verse six, he tells the story from six to twenty-three. From chapter six, or verse six to twenty-three, we have this adulteress woman that he has written about.

[8 : 31] And so now let us read this narrative about this woman. And let's find some things out about her. So then he tells this story to this son to say, here's how this is going to work.

For at the window of my house, I have looked out and through the lattice and I have seen among the simple, I have perceived among the used, a young man lacking sense, passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house in the twilight in the evening at the time of night and darkness.

And behold, the woman meets him and dressed as a prostitute, wildly in heart. She is loud and wayward. Her feet do not stay at home. Now in the street, now in the market, and at every corner she lies in wait.

She sees with him and kisses him and holds with a bold face. She says to him, I had to offer my sacrifices and today I have paid my vows.

So now come out to me, so now I have come out to meet you, to seek you earnestly. And I have found you. I have spread my couch with coverings and colored linens from Egyptian linen.

[9 : 42] I have perfumed my bed and myrrh and alas and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love till morning and let us delight ourselves with love. For my husband is not at home.

He has gone on a long journey. He has took a bag of money with him and at full moon he will come home. With much seductive speech, she persuades him with her smooth talk.

She compels him. And all at once he follows her as an ox goes to the slaughter. As a stag is caught in the fast till an arrow pierces its liver as the bird rushes into the snare.

He does not know that it will cost him his life. The father tells this cautionary tale to his son and we read something.

I said earlier the first thing we're going to learn is something about temptation. The thing about temptation I want us to see is there's a deceptiveness to temptation, specifically immorality.

[10:45] There's a deceptiveness to temptation. We meet the young man in verses 6 through 9.

He's a man, he's young, he's inexperienced, his feather-brained, he lacks sense, he lacks judgment we read in verse 7.

He's naive, he's neglected wisdom and he's neglected to borrow the wisdom of others, especially his father. He lacks sense, he lacks common understanding.

What things do we observe that indicate that he lacks sense? Number one, we see a place. Why is he out?

He's passing verse 8, passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house. Why is this man in this place?

The second thing we notice is the time. He is also not in the right time, in the twilight, in the evening, of the night, in the darkness.

[11:45] When Scripture writes about this time in other places in Scripture, what happens at that hour? Well, that's when thieves and robbers are out, that's when those who set ambush are out, that's when prostitutes are out.

Why is he in that place going in those locations and at that hour? Scripture would say, anyone who is familiar with Scripture would say, what is this guy doing?

So he lacks sense. He's a simpleton. And then, verses 10 through 12, we meet the tempter.

Outwardly, she keeps nothing back, and inwardly, she gives nothing away. Outwardly, she is dressed as a harlot. She has bold attire to match her bold approach.

She has no shame, she is loud, she is unruly, she is careless, wandering to and fro. She is not where we would have expected her to be.

[12:44] It says of her that her feet do not stay at home. Why is this woman out? She should be caring for her house. She should be caring for her children.

She too is not where she ought to be. And inward, that's outwardly, and inwardly, it says in verse 12, she lies in wait. She is restless, she is turbulent.

She has a boisterous disposition, which would have seemed ludicrous to the wise individual, biblically. She is neither observant nor is she reflectant.

She lies in wait to ambush the poor simpleton. Then we read, and from verses 13 through 21, we read several tactics that she uses.

The first one could be the shock treatment. Verse 13, she seizes him, kisses him, and with a bold face says to him, she seized him.

[13:48] She physically forces herself upon him and communicates that he is physically desirable. The second tactic she employs is she is religiously aligned.

Look in verse 14, I had to offer sacrifices, and today I've paid my vows. I've gone to the temple. I've offered a fellowship offering, and part of the fellowship offering is you get to keep part of your sacrifice.

Look, I have some food. I have some food. I have sought you out. You're the one I'm looking for. I have, I'm right with the Lord.

Come with me. I have food for my sacrifice. I have paid my vows. I'm religiously aligned with you. Yet her sacrifice to the Lord has meant little to nothing to her. She is communicating, I have fresh meat for a meal, and I am ceremonially clean.

[14:55] Come with me. It would be unthinkable to refuse. Someone who's clean, someone who worships the Lord, we're religiously aligned.

She's wonderful. So she is religiously reassuring. The third tactic she uses is, found in verse 15, is flattery.

Flattery. So now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have found you.

You are the one for me. I have been looking for my whole life. I can't imagine doing life with anyone without you.

I have been waiting for someone like you my whole life. You are special to me. Verse 4, she has a fourth tactic, or sorry, verse 16 through 18, is a sensuous appeal.

[16:01] I won't read it again, but it's an invitation and a euphemism for an act that is constrained to marriage.

She has a fifth appeal. And you can see this man having some reservation at this point. You can... He has been grasped.

He has been told that he is physically attractive to her. She's been looking for him his whole life. She is religiously aligned. But everything about this seems a little bit wrong to him.

And so perhaps he has a conscience that is begging him to reconsider. But she, at that right moment, comes in with another appeal.

And the fifth appeal is reassurance. Look how she reassures him that everything is fine. What we're doing is fine. 16 through 18. I'm sorry, not 16 through 18.

[16:57] 19 through 20. For my husband. Listen, it's okay. It's okay. For my husband is not at home. He has gone on a long journey.

He took a bag of money with him. And so at full moon, he will come home. And so... She disarms him with reassurance.

My husband, he's left with a big bag of money so he can stay out for a long time. He can afford to be out there. In fact, he isn't scheduled to come home. That money should last him until the next full moon.

We have nothing to worry about. No one will know. He surely won't. And besides, he's left me on my own again.

The schedule he keeps is hardly fair. Would you come and look after me? She reassures... Her reassurances are bold.

[18:00] They're exciting. And they communicate we're safe. She manages to rationalize the immorality and she justifies it.

And unlike Joseph, who had the character to resist this similar appeal, this man, this simpleton, does not.

Notice what he uses, what she uses to reassure him. In verse 21, with much seductive speech, she persuades him.

Remember where we started? The father telling the son, listen to my words. Listen to my words. Because if you don't, if you don't heed what I'm about to say, if you don't write these things on your heart, if you don't keep them, bind them on your finger, if you don't...

There's going to be someone speaking other words that will make you fall. I plead with you, my son. And how does she convince him?

[19:03] How does she reassure him? With her words. It's okay. It's okay. The temptation that comes to this man is strong.

Her tactics are sound. She communicates, you're physically desirable.

She was attractively independent. She was emotionally flattering, affirming him that he was unique and special.

She was looking and waiting and longing just for him. She was religiously reassuring. It had a veneer of religion. And we're not talking about a godless woman here, per se.

Verbally, she's persuasive, reassuring him, affirming him that he is deeply loved. And that no one would find out.

[20:02] The gains and the prospects here are fabulous. If this was a stock, you would put your money on it.

She makes it so convincing. And so the young man then capitulates. And in verse 22 and verse 23, we read, she convinces him with smooth talk.

They do the deed in verses 16 through 18 that is relegated to the act of marriage. And then verse 22 through 24, he finds out the cost.

All at once he follows her. As an ox goes to the slaughter, as a stag is caught fast, till an arrow pierces its liver, as a bird rushes into its snare.

What is common about all of those scenarios? All of them in the life of the animal.

[21:04] And so he too, it costs him the same. And he does not know it will cost him his life.

She has told him of the delights that are in store. She has reassured him that nothing but rainbows and unicorns, good times, sun-filled afternoons on rolling hills await.

And yet it cost him deeply, in fact, his very life. It is the picture that she paints is like a popper entering into the entrance of a palace.

And the writer of Proverbs has a totally opposite end, telling his son, it's like entering not the entrance of a palace, but entering the entrance of an abattoir, which is a slaughterhouse.

That's what you're entering into. He is a man to be pitied. He is not to be celebrated. He is a man going quietly, if not even eagerly, to his death.

[22 : 09] He has been fooled, and he's too foolish to even recognize it. It speaks to where we begin. It's the deceptiveness of temptation.

Sin looks good until you have tasted its bitter fruit. It's the nature of temptation.

This man somehow may think in his flesh, I can sidestep or even worse, handle the consequences. In my strength, I can overcome the consequences. In my foolishness, I think the consequences that others have faced for millennia will not be true of me.

In my youthfulness, I think, regardless of the sin, it feels nice to at least be pursued. In our naivety, we think that the consequences won't happen to me because I'm unique.

I'm special and I'm smart. Yet in our stupidity, we don't think to listen to wisdom. We don't listen to God's word, and we place our thoughts above God's thoughts.

[23 : 13] And it's the epitome and the height of arrogance when we do so. And the warning is it will cost you your life.

My wife and I know someone close who this proverb that we just read could be written of this man.

And for 20 years, we have been rebuilding a relationship with this person who is very dear to us.

And for 10 years, if you will, it cost him his life.

All relationships that were meaningful to him ended. And then the last 10 years, we have been just slowly rebuilding a relationship. Of all that, he is lost.

It cost him. It will cost us. What I find instructive is I thought about this account this week.

[24 : 14] What I thought was instructive is the appeal that God uses with this man. God could have said, don't do this, this is wrong.

It's sin. God could have said that because it is. But God does not appeal this way, because he could have said, you must not be given to immorality because it is wrong, though it is.

God could have said, you must not do this because it is contrary to God's design, though it is. God could have said, you must not do this because it is contrary to the 10 commandments, though it is.

Thou shall not commit adultery. But God doesn't appeal to this man in this way. And so I considered, why is that? Because I don't know about you, but I own a proud heart.

And when I have been found out in my sin, I can just about justify any reason as to why, or find any reason just to why I should be excused from that sin.

[25 : 12] Let me give you an example. Let's assume the speed limit is 45 miles an hour. And let's assume I'm going 55 miles an hour, and I get pulled over. My thoughts are, here we go.

It's wrong. He's about to tell me it's wrong. My heart, though, is sitting there thinking, I was just keeping up with the flow of traffic. If you had seen what the guy in front of me did, it would have justified what I had to do to avoid it.

Him, her, whatever. And besides that, I get better fuel mileage at that rate than I do at 45. And so I am saving the environment.

You should thank me for speeding. So when I'm told I'm doing wrong, I have this proud heart that loves to justify why I have every reason to do it.

And perhaps the Lord knows that I'm doing it wrong. I have every reason to do it, and perhaps the Lord knows it. And He doesn't take the tactic of saying it's wrong, though it is.

[26 : 20] In Proverbs, what He's saying is, you're a fool. Though it is wrong. And I would much rather be told I am wrong, but call me a fool.

I can't, that is a worse insult than just being wrong, though it is. Because it's harder to justify being a fool. Nobody likes to be thought of as a fool.

And so how does the Lord do this? He says in verses 24 through 27, look how the Lord instructs this man.

In this father again, motif is speaking to his son, and now, O sons, listen to me. Verse 24, to the words of my mouth, let not your heart be turned aside to her ways.

Do not stray into her paths. For many a victim has she laid low, and all her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is the way of sheol, going down to the chambers of death.

[27 : 40] Proverbs takes a different tact. He says you won't get away with it. You will be found out. When you are found out, the field of debris that will lay waste within your family, within your broken relationships, they await you, including your children, including your parents, including your spouse, including your future spouse, including your ex-boyfriend, ex-girlfriend.

Regret and shame will be the pillow that you lie your head on at night. Even so, if you could persuade yourself that your actions are justified, don't do it.

This is what Proverbs is saying. This is what wisdom is saying. So Proverbs is not saying, don't do it, you sinner. He's saying, don't do it, you fool.

You and I have defenses around being called wicked, but I hate to be thought of as a fool. So he appeals, verse 24, listen to me, be attentive to my words of my mouth.

He's appealing to him. I've just painted the picture of what's going to happen. Don't do it, listen again. I appeal to you with my words, my son. In verse 25, he says, listen to me, be attentive to the words of my mouth.

[29 : 02] 25, let not your heart turn aside to her ways, and do not stray into her paths. I want to talk for a moment about straying into her paths. This is what the account may have looked like in ancient history.

Today, though, the path may look something like this, and so I encourage all of us to listen to what wisdom ought to say, might say. Today, someone may find themselves looking someone up on social media, just to chat, because I find myself lonely.

Later, I think, well, what does it hurt? Might as well, I asked for her number, and she gave it to me, and said, what does it hurt, just to call her up sometime?

Maybe even continue just a conversation on texting, and see how she's doing. It's been many years since I've heard from her. I mean, I care about her. She's swinging through town, and I mean, it would be nice to have a cup of coffee, just catch up, see how things are going.

Maybe when she's in town next, we'll have a meal together, and share some time over a meal.

[30 : 23] I might go through her town, and after the meal, we'll just, you know, I'll take her home. I'll take her home. And I don't need to go any further, do I?

We know where the story ends. We know where the story ends. So what does wisdom look like?

This says, verse 25, let not your heart be, do not stray into her paths.

This, there is a path. It can be traced. And anyone who found themselves after the door of her home over here probably has done one of these.

If you were asked anyone over there, you ask them, well, how did you get here? And probably, yeah, just looking up in an old friend online.

It may have started here. Verse 26 is what I call probably the most heart-rending verse of the entire section.

[31 : 43] For many a victim has she laid low, and all her slain are a mighty throng. Why is that so heart-rending?

Because in verse 15, it's the opposite of the appeal. I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly.

I have found you, you are the one who is most special. I have waited my whole life for you. And only to find out, you're one of many.

It is the most heart-rending verse of the whole passage. In my mind. You are not the first. You will not be the last.

He was not the special one, for she was searching. You're not special. You're not unique.

[32 : 50] She had said this to many before her, and she will say it to many after. This real love, and she must appeal, this is real love, and real love justifies love-making.

And so the argument that she uses, this is just the natural expression of real love. Yes, in the context of marriage, it may.

And so the argument that we may hear today may sound like this, if you love me, you would. I mean, because I love you, I will.

The only problem with that argument is that the writer's of Proverbs is saying that it is completely and totally, absolutely, utterly, altogether downright and outright, irreversibly foolish.

The love that is real is a public commitment before God to someone of the opposite sex, and that commitment is called marriage.

[34 : 00] And without that commitment, it is masquerading as real, but it is not. And so the argument of Proverbs is very blunt, so blunt I hate to even spell it out, but it must be said, and here it is.

Here's the argument. You are not the first. You will not be the last. If he or she is willing to sleep with you without the commitment in marriage, then you are the fool to accept the offer because it is a matter of time before they will move on to someone else.

Our culture is full of examples of this kind of folly. All of us need this warning regardless of our age. Let us remember where the sermon began.

This is a warning, and a warning is an expression of love, and God loves us. And this father to this son loves him so much to warn him of a very specific warning over one specific area of his life.

Warnings guard us. They keep us from disaster and shipwreck. The problem with warnings, though, is it may lead some to despair.

[35 : 14] The warning is given to young men early enough to heed the warning. This man has not had opportunity yet to do this, the father, so he speaks.

And yet there are also individuals who are on the backside of this warning, and it's too late for them, and I will speak to you in a moment. There are also individuals who are maybe too ignorant to hear the warning altogether and will not heed.

It's interesting that this man goes as an ox to the slaughter, and you say, this is not an encouraging message to me, Scott, and I almost regret even coming to church today.

Hold on. There is good news. Where is the encouragement? He and I behave in many ways like oxes.

We bring destruction upon ourselves in various ways of sin and not just immorality.

[36 : 21] Years after the book of Proverbs was written, years afterward, whose fault it was not. There was another man who was led to a slaughter, not like an ox, though, but a lamb.

He who had done no wrong paid the penalty for sin for the folly of humanity, and he died in our place, and his name is Jesus.

And because he did that for us, there is forgiveness, there is washing away of sin, new birth is given to us for all those who trust in his sinless life, his death for sin, and his resurrection from the grave.

Sin is forgiven, even the most grievous of sins. There are consequences to sin for all of us, but we do not, but those consequences are not without hope.

We don't have to pay the final price for sin, and that is death, spiritually dead. There is grace and mercy in the midst of our consequences.

[37 : 32] Even in this life, there is restoration, there is forgiveness, there is rebuilding, and there is always space for the grace of God and the spirit of God.

It is never over. Sin does not have the last word. Sin and consequences don't define the believer in Christ. God's grace and his mercy does.

So let us remind ourselves of the lamb who was slaughtered on our behalf, and that is the good news, and the good news that this world needs to hear.

Let's pray. Father, Lord, I thank you for your word this morning.

Thank you for the text. Lord, I pray that we read a text here, Lord, that is talking about external purity, but purity begins in the matter of the heart.

[38 : 41] So Lord, would you forgive us as a people for all the ways that we are impure, all the ways that we fall short of your standard of perfection?

Lord, forgive us. Lord, for those who have failed in this area of their life, Lord, it could have been years ago where I thank you for the forgiveness and restoration that is yours, that is theirs for the taking in you.

Thank you for the forgiveness that comes from repentance. Lord, I pray for those who are in the rebuilding process of relationships that have been severed and hurt because of this.

Lord, would you provide hope? We pray these things in your name, Jesus, amen.

Before Josh and the worship team sings, may I share this? If you are here today and what we read about of immorality has been a part of your life and or you're in a relationship that you don't know how to get untangled or to be truthful and transparent, I know of a wife who pleaded with her husband and said, pull over.

[40 : 08] This is on Highway 2 out by Colbert. Highway 2 out by Colbert is a great place to be, repent and be restored to your spouse. The wife pleaded with her husband, pull over.

I can't go one more mile. And the husband pulled over and she confessed. She said, years ago I had an affair. Would you forgive me?

And that husband and wife today are living a path of reconciliation and a path of forgiveness. And they are living in God's grace after the affair.

And they're a beautiful couple today. And you say, Scott, I have this in my past. I don't know how to untangle it. I don't know how to go forward. And I could just use some counsel and some help.

If you're here today and that is in your situation, if you would allow one of us as a pastor team and elders, our wives, we would love to help you be reconciled with those you love and to get untangled from relationships you have no business being in.

[41 : 15] So if you would allow us to do that, that would be our privilege and treat. Thank you.