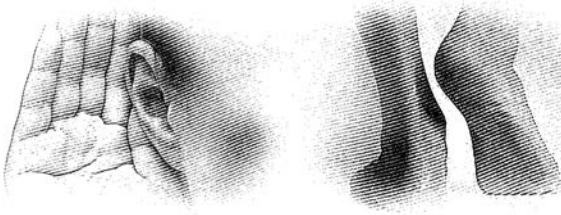


From Ears *to* Feet



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Proverbs 4, 1 Kings 3:9, Matt. 13:44, Proverbs 5, 1 Cor. 10:13, Prov. 6:1–19.*

Memory Text: “Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil” (*Proverbs 4:26, 27, NKJV*).

Science has demonstrated that hearing impacts how we walk, and that even our balance is influenced by how well we hear. So, instruction, or education—that is, what we hear—is crucial to how we live. “Wisdom is the principal thing,” says Proverbs 4:7.

Yet no matter how good the instruction is, the student must pay attention. Not without some irony an ancient Egyptian teacher noted that the “the ear of the boy is on his back; he listens when he is beaten.” (In Egyptian art, the student was often represented with big ears on his back.)

It’s not enough just to know about right and wrong; we need to know *how to choose* right and not wrong. Training in wisdom consists in hearing proper instruction and in following and obeying what we have learned so that we don’t end up walking in the wrong direction.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 10.

Hear!

Read Proverbs 4. What practical truth is found here, and how can we apply this to our own lives as we seek to live in faithfulness to God?

The act of “hearing” marks the first step in education. In Hebrew thought the seat of wisdom or of intelligence is located not in the brain, but in the ears. This implies that even before we seek to conceptualize or solve a problem, we first need to hear it. This means we need to listen. When Solomon asks for wisdom, he specifically asks for “a hearing heart” (*1 Kings 3:9, literal translation*).

The first act of wisdom, then, is “to listen,” which suggests that wisdom comes from an external source (in this case, the parents). We cannot discover wisdom by ourselves. The self-made individual is an impossible concept in the domain of biblical wisdom. Wisdom is, first of all, something that we receive, not something we shape with our own skills or that we unearth through our own brilliance and reasoning. The capacity of “paying attention” (Hebrew, “to put one’s heart”) implies the involvement of the heart. The search for wisdom, then, is not merely a cold, objective enterprise. The heart, which is the core of the individual and (in Hebrew thought) the seat of emotions, participates in the search for wisdom.

Read Matthew 13:44 and Jeremiah 29:13. What link can you find between these verses and the search for wisdom as it is expressed in Proverbs 4?

Emotions play a crucial role in our basic existence as humans, and thus cannot and should not be ignored in our relationship with God. How do we learn the proper place and value of emotions in regard to our spiritual life? How have your emotions steered you right (and wrong), and what have you learned from those experiences?

Protect Your Family

Once we determine to walk in the way of wisdom, we still need great caution because we will meet obstacles along that way (*see 1 Pet. 5:8*). One of the greatest dangers we face deals with our families, the most precious, sensitive, and intimate domain of life.

Read Proverbs 5. What dangers must we guard against?

The first danger begins with ourselves; it lies in our own words. We should watch our tongues to make sure that what we say does not convey an inappropriate or a mixed message. Our lips should be in harmony with our knowledge and should reflect our spiritual views.

The second danger comes from the other woman or the other man (although the text refers to the danger coming from a “strange woman,” the language should be understood in a generic sense; temptation could come from either a man or a woman) who interferes in the family. Either could seduce a spouse into violating the marriage vows, and who hasn’t seen, or experienced, just how destructive this sin is?

According to the text, the best way to resist these temptations, which often start with alluring words, is to listen to the words of wisdom. By heeding and obeying inspired instruction, we are more likely to stay focused on the essentials and so be protected from adultery or whatever other temptations come our way.

Of course, not only should we keep ourselves from adultery, we should also avoid going to the place where the “temptress” stays (*Prov. 5:10*); we certainly should not approach her door (*vs. 8*).

Finally, perhaps the best protection of all against the temptation to love another woman or man is this: just love your own spouse, “the [wife or husband] of your youth” (*vs. 18, NKJV*). The author of Ecclesiastes resonated with this counsel: “Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun” (*Eccles. 9:9, NIV*). Be thankful for what you have, and you won’t be looking elsewhere.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. With this promise before you, what definitive and practical steps might you need to take, right now, in order to protect yourself from the passions that might be brewing in you?

Protect Your Friendship

Someone once said: “Lord, protect me from my friends; I can take care of my enemies.” The book of Proverbs is concerned with the vulnerability of friendship; it counsels us on how to keep our friends and also, if necessary, how to protect ourselves from them. The Hebrew word for “friend” also means “neighbor,” the one who is close to us, the one who is already a friend or who may become one. Biblical wisdom values human relationships and appeals for thoughtfulness and respect in these relationships.

Read Proverbs 6:1–5. What problem does Solomon refer to, and what is the solution? What crucial spiritual principle do we find here as well?

While the torah urges people to help the poor and to lend them money without charging interest (*Exod. 22:25*), wisdom warns us against unwise financial backing for a friend who is in debt. The duty of charity does not exclude the duty of justice (*Exod. 23:2, 3*). Though we need to be generous when we can, we would be wise to make sure that our charity will not turn into a fiasco (*compare Prov. 22:27*).

Hence, the wise counsel given to us in the proverb. The first caution applies to our words. How crucial that we evaluate the situation and make sure that we can afford to help our friend. If so, only then speak and promise. Indeed, the warmth of our relationship or a moment of emotion may precipitate our commitment, and we may regret it afterward.

No matter how well-intentioned you might have been, it’s crucial to think before you act and commit to something that you can’t fulfill. The point is that if we get into a bind, we need to do what we can to fix it, including humbling ourselves, admitting our mistake, and asking for grace.

How do we learn to balance our desire to bear one another’s burdens (*Gal. 6:2*) with the words given to us in this proverb?

Protect Your Work

Read Proverbs 6:6–8. What can we learn from the ant?

Not only do ants work hard (even harder than humans, if one compares the burden they are able to carry to the burden humans can carry in proportion to their respective weights), but ants work independently and do not need to be supervised. The main reason for their hard work is the future. They “anticipate” times of trouble (winter) and prepare themselves for it. So, the ant teaches us the wisdom of thinking about the future when making plans or engaging in an activity. “This is a question that demands consideration by every parent, every teacher, every student—by every human being, young or old. No scheme of business or plan of life can be sound or complete that embraces only the brief years of this present life and makes no provision for the unending future.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 145.

Read Proverbs 6:9–11. What can we learn from the sluggard?

It is the sluggard who has something to learn from the ant, not the other way around: “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise” (*vs. 6, NKJV*). While the ants are at work, the sluggards are asleep. While the ants are productive at the harvest, the sluggards keep folding their two hands, a symbol of indolence. The ants surpass themselves by carrying burdens heavier than themselves and by preparing for the future; the sluggards live in the present and are occupied only with themselves.

Though indolence and laziness are condemned here, we must also remember that life consists of more than work and earning money. How does the Sabbath, as presented in the context of the workweek, help us find this proper balance?

Protect Yourself

After having warned us against the particular evils that threaten three domains of life—our family, our social contacts, and our work—Proverbs gives us a portrayal of the wicked. It is a satire full of irony and sharp psychological observation. The two poems (*Prov. 6:12–15 and 16–19*) are parallel and, with the same poetic rhythm of seven, cover corresponding motifs. The wicked person’s inside is described as linked to what is thought in the heart; at the same time, it all becomes manifested in what is done on the outside.

Read Proverbs 6:14, 18 and Matthew 15:19. What important point is being made here?

“If you indulge in vain imaginations, permitting your mind to dwell upon impure subjects, you are, in a degree, as guilty before God as if your thoughts were carried into action.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 334.

What warnings are given in Proverbs 6:12–19?

The imagery is ironic. The walking wicked follows the lazy sluggard. The two attitudes seem to be different, and yet they carry the same lesson. Both stay within themselves. Neither one is interested in the instruction coming from outside of themselves. They both follow their own wisdom and inclinations. The sluggards are sleeping, and neither their ears nor their feet function; the wicked have only their feet and their mouths working, not their ears. The result is the same: they will both go to destruction.

Meanwhile, evil has two effects: it harms not only persons sinned against, but sinners, as well. The liars will finally believe their own lies. It is also noteworthy that the ultimate result of wickedness is discord and conflict, which also can affect society. Indeed, the effects of sin rarely, if ever, remain confined to sinners. Others are impacted, and usually only for the worse.

How have the sins of others affected your life? Greatly, no doubt. What lessons can you learn from this about how careful you need to be so that your actions don’t hurt others?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Moral Standards,” pp. 326–339, in *The Adventist Home*; “In Contact With Others,” pp. 489–491, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Other Object Lessons,” pp. 117–120, in *Education*.

“The student of the Bible should be taught to approach it in the spirit of a learner. We are to search its pages, not for proof to sustain our opinions, but in order to know what God says. . . .

“One of the chief causes of mental inefficiency and moral weakness is the lack of concentration. . . . With the immense tide of printed matter constantly pouring from the press, old and young form the habit of reading hastily and superficially, and the mind loses its power of connected and vigorous thought.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 189.

“The habitations that the ants build for themselves show skill and perseverance. Only one little grain at a time can they handle, but by diligence and perseverance they accomplish wonders.

“Solomon points to the industry of the ant as a reproach to those who waste their hours in idleness or in practices that corrupt soul and body. The ant prepares for future seasons; but many gifted with reasoning powers fail to prepare for the future immortal life.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 190.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on this idea of how we can help others, even at a personal cost to ourselves. How do we look at what this week’s lesson taught in contrast to this verse: “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (*John 15:13, NKJV*)?
- 2 What other lessons can we take from the natural world that we can apply to our own lives? Given, however, that the world is fallen, why must we be careful in the lessons we do draw?
- 3 Read through the seven abominations in Proverbs 6:16–19. Why do you think that they are considered so bad in God’s eyes?

Camp Polaris: A Guiding Star

After they married, Roland and Jackie Moody started talking about ways to reach out to the native Alaskan community around them, and decided to build a Seventh-day Adventist school on their property by the lake. They called it the Mission School and offered first through eighth grade. Students and parents were delighted, and kids came from as far away as Nome just to attend the mission school. In order to accommodate the students, two dormitories were built. Additionally, the Moodys started an Adventist congregation and built the first Aleknagik Seventh-day Adventist Church.

As the school grew, Roland and Jackie wanted to provide more for their students, so they started a camp. “We just didn’t have any place to take the young kids for activities and stuff,” recalled Roland, “and kids like to go someplace.” They named the new place Camp Polaris—after the guiding light of the North Star.

Roland purchased several old buildings from Crick Cannery, which had gone out of business. He barged these buildings across Bristol Bay to Aleknagik, and then 12 miles up the lake to Camp Polaris. More than 60 years later, these old cannery buildings are still in use each summer by the children of western Alaska.

For decades, Roland and Jackie enjoyed hosting the children and ferrying them up the lake by barge to the camp. Each year on the last Sabbath of camp, the entire Aleknagik Adventist church prepared a feast for the kids and made the one-and-a-half-hour boat trip up the lake to Camp Polaris where they enjoyed a special Sabbath by the lake with the campers. After Jackie passed away, Roland married Beverly, who helped continue the Camp Polaris traditions.

Over the years, the camp has been a vital ministry to the young people of western Alaska. Many of the children who attend camp come from less than ideal homes where poverty, alcoholism, and abuse are too often the norm. They often exclaim that going to the camp is the highlight of their year, because it is a place where they feel loved, accepted, and cared for.

While Roland and Beverly have since retired and moved to Walla Walla, Washington, the ministry of Camp Polaris continues. You can become a part of this special ministry to the children of Alaska by contributing to this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.

To meet some of the children at Camp Polaris, read their stories at www.adventistmission.org/resources.