

Dealing With Fights



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Proverbs 17, 1 Cor. 13:5–7, John 8:1–11, Proverbs 18, 19, Deut. 24:10–22.*

Memory Text: “Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife” (*Proverbs 17:1, NKJV*).

Proverbs again denounces the deception of appearances. We may seem to have everything the world offers—wealth, power, pleasure, fame—yet, behind the facade, tension and misery flourish. It's even possible that the cause of this tension and misery is precisely the wealth and pleasure that people strive so hard for. As an Egyptian proverb notes: “Better is bread with a happy heart than wealth with vexation.”—Miriam Lichtheim, *The New Kingdom*, vol. 2 of *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), p. 156. According to the book of Proverbs, the first step to solve this problem is to recognize what our priorities are: peaceful relationships are more important than wealth (*Prov. 17:1*). What counts is not so much what we have but who we are within ourselves. The advice that follows will help in restoring this priority and lead us toward an inner peace (*shalom* in the Hebrew) that will add to our happiness.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 14.

Sin and Friends

Read Proverbs 17:9, 19:11. What crucial point is being made in these texts? How should we deal with others who fall?

When someone messes up, it's so tempting to spread the story, to tell others, *Have you heard about what so-and-so did?* Though we might act as if we are appalled by the action, we still like telling others about what happened. In short, we are gossiping, and that's what we're being warned against, because this behavior will generate contention, even between close friends. After all, if a friend of yours messes up, what kind of friend are you if you go around telling others about it?

We are advised instead to "cover" the mistake. This is not, however, to imply that we have to hide the sin, to act as if it never happened, as if the person never did wrong. The sin that is covered is still present, even though hidden. In fact, the Hebrew word for "cover" in that expression has the specific connotation of "forgiving" (*Ps. 85:2, Neh. 4:5*). Love, not gossip, should be our response to someone else's mistake.

Read Proverbs 17:17 and 1 Corinthians 13:5–7. How does love help in coping with a friend's mistake?

One does not love a friend or spouse because he or she is perfect. We love in spite of their mistakes and flaws. Only through love do we learn not to judge others, because with our own faults and shortcomings we could be just as guilty. Instead, we can mourn with them over what they have done, and seek in whatever way we can to help them work through it. After all, what are friends for if not for this?

Think about a time you messed up badly and you were forgiven, ministered to, and comforted. What does that tell you about how, if possible, you should do the same for others?

Be Just!

True love is not blind. That we “cover” someone’s mistake through love does not mean that we do not see the sin and do not recognize it as such. Love and justice go together. The Hebrew word for “justice,” *zedeq*, also means “love,” “charity.” We cannot have real compassion if we are not just, and we cannot be just if we do not have compassion and love. The two concepts must be together.

For example, the exercise of charity toward the poor should not be done at the expense of justice; hence, the recommendation not to favor the poor in court (*Exod. 23:3*). If love obliges us to help the poor, it would be unjust to favor them when they are wrong, simply because they are poor. Justice and truth should therefore go along with love and compassion. It is this wise balance that characterizes the torah, the law of God, and which is taught and promoted in the book of Proverbs.

Read Proverbs 17:10, 19:25. What do they say about the need for rebuke and confrontation?

The fact that Proverbs 17:10 immediately follows the call to cover the mistake through love (*vs. 9*) is not an accident. This mention of “reproof” in connection with “love” places love in the right perspective. The text implies a strong rebuke.

Read John 8:1–11. How do we see Jesus dealing with open sin?

“In His act of pardoning this woman and encouraging her to live a better life, the character of Jesus shines forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness. While He does not palliate sin, nor lessen the sense of guilt, He seeks not to condemn, but to save. The world had for this erring woman only contempt and scorn; but Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope. The Sinless One pities the weakness of the sinner, and reaches to her a helping hand. While the hypocritical Pharisees denounce, Jesus bids her, ‘Go, and sin no more.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 462.

Words, Again

Read Proverbs 18. Though different themes are presented here, focus on what it has to say about our words. What important concepts are presented here regarding what we do or do not say?

We are again confronted with the reality and power of words; in this case we see how fools use their mouths to their own undoing. Verse 13 is especially enlightening. How easy it is to speak out before carefully listening and discerning what has been said to us. How many times might we have spared ourselves, and others, undue pain and strife if we had only learned to think through carefully what we had just heard before responding to it. There is indeed a time when silence is the best response.

Read Proverbs 18:4. Why are the words of the wise like deep waters?

The image of “deep waters” is used positively in the book of Proverbs to represent wisdom (*Prov. 20:5*). It conveys the idea of quiet, but also of profundity and riches. The wise are not superficial. They draw their words from the depths of personal reflection and experience. Who hasn’t marveled sometimes at the deep thoughts and insights from those who obviously have wisdom and knowledge?

Read Proverbs 18:21. What does it mean?

Proverbs again tells us what we should already know: our words are powerful, and they can be a force for good or evil, even life and death. How careful we need to be, then, with how we use this powerful tool.

Think about a time someone’s words hurt you in a terrible way. What should this have taught you about how powerful words are? What should it teach you about how careful you need to be with what you say?

Two Sides to a Story

Read Proverbs 18:2. Why don't fools need time to form their opinions?

Fools are so sure of themselves and so eager to express their own opinions that they are not interested in learning from others. Their closed minds go along with their open mouths. This is a deadly combination. How careful we need to be that we don't find ourselves doing the same thing, especially on a topic that we are convinced we are right about.

After all, haven't we all at some point felt very strongly about a subject only to find, later on, that we were wrong? This doesn't mean that we should be wishy-washy in our views; it means only that we need some humility, in that none of us has all the right answers. Even when our answers are right, truth is often deeper and more nuanced than we can appreciate or understand.

Read Proverbs 18:17. What important point is given to us here?

Only God does not need a second opinion, precisely because by His nature He already has it, for His eyes are everywhere (*Prov. 15:3*). God has the capacity to see all sides of any matter. We, by contrast, generally have a very narrow view of everything; a view that tends to get even narrower when we get locked into a position, especially on matters that we think are important.

As we should know by now, however, there are always two or even more sides to any story, and the more information we have, the better we can form the right view of a subject.

Think of a time you were absolutely convinced of something, maybe a view you have held your whole life, only to find out later that you had been wrong your whole life. What should this tell you about your need to be open to the possibility that you could be wrong about things you are fervent about now?

Be Truthful

A king needed to appoint a new minister to the highest office of his kingdom. For this purpose, he organized a special contest on lying: who could utter the biggest lie. All his ministers applied, and each one came and spoke their biggest lie. But the king was not satisfied; their lies seemed lame. The king then asked his closest and most trusted counselor: “Why didn’t you apply?”

The counselor answered, “I am sorry to disappoint you, Majesty, but I cannot apply.”

“Why not?” asked the king.

“Because I never lie,” the counselor replied.

The king decided to appoint him to the position.

As sinners, lying comes to us easier than we think; for this reason, again, how careful we need to be with our words.

Read Proverbs 19. Though many themes are presented there, what does it say about lying?

The book of Proverbs upholds a high ethical standard. It is better to remain poor, or even to lose a promotion, if we have to lie in order to get it, if we have to sacrifice our integrity (*Prov. 19:1*), if we have to cheat, or if it comes at the price of faithfulness (*vs. 22*).

Read Proverbs 19:9. What is the responsibility of a witness?

Lying, in and of itself, is bad enough; but doing it in court and under oath is even worse. In many countries perjury is a crime, and a serious one at that. The witness must therefore give a truthful testimony. It is no accident that this verse follows the mention of a “friend to one who gives gifts” (*vs. 6, NKJV*) and of the poor who are hated by their friends and even their brothers (*vs. 7, NKJV*). The point is, witnesses must not be influenced by bribes or by the social status of those they are testifying about.

Read Deuteronomy 24:10–22. What important principle is seen here, and how should we apply this to ourselves and to our dealings with those who are needy?

Further Study: “The spirit of gossip and talebearing is one of Satan’s special agencies to sow discord and strife, to separate friends, and to undermine the faith of many in the truthfulness of our positions. Brethren and sisters are too ready to talk of the faults and errors that they think exist in others, and especially in those who have borne unflinchingly the messages of reproof and warning given them of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 195.

“The children of these complainers listen with open ears and receive the poison of disaffection. Parents are thus blindly closing the avenues through which the hearts of the children might be reached. How many families season their daily meals with doubt and questionings. They dissect the characters of their friends, and serve them up as a dainty dessert. A precious bit of slander is passed around the board to be commented upon, not only by adults, but by children. In this God is dishonored. Jesus said: ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.’ Therefore Christ is slighted and abused by those who slander His servants.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, page 195.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 It’s always hard when those you love or care about mess up. And it’s so easy to try to cover up for them. How do we strike the right balance in situations like these? Certainly, we need to show grace, as we have been shown grace for our errors—that goes without saying. But does grace always, or ever, mean that a person can sin with impunity and not face consequences? What then is the right course to take in situations like these?
- 2 As the lesson said this week, most things in life are very complicated and have many facets to them. So, even those things we happen to be right about will usually be more complex than we understand them to be. How can we learn to be open-minded while at the same time not being foolish about it?
- 3 What are some ways we can lie without ever using words?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Proverbs 19:3*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Identify words that create contention.

Feel: Appreciate family and friends as wealth.

Do: Overhaul his or her life in order to bring it in line with the wisdom of Proverbs 17–19.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Identify Words That Create Contention.

- Ⓐ Why do people fight over money? What do they say to one another when they fight?
- Ⓑ Why do families sometimes fight when they are on a vacation together?
- Ⓒ Why are words so important in building a relationship?

II. Feel: Appreciate Family and Friends as Wealth.

- Ⓐ Why do people, at the end of their lives, say that they wish they had spent more time with family?
- Ⓑ What are some things that are worse than poverty?
- Ⓒ Why do the relationships of many rich and famous people end in divorce?

III. Do: Live by the Wisdom of Proverbs 17–19.

- Ⓐ Why do we often end up saying things that we know we should not say?
- Ⓑ How do the words of Jesus line up with the recommendations in these chapters?
- Ⓒ Why do we think that telling the truth will create more contention and not less?

► **Summary:** Human relationships are built on words. We constantly speak words to one another to indicate the nature of our relationships. Angry words of contention and lies indicate a broken relationship. Gracious words of truth and encouragement indicate a growing relationship.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Proverbs 19:3*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Proverbs 19:3 tells us that ruined relationships are often of one's own doing. They are created by contentious and false words, spoken in haste. But often, rather than reforming our behavior, we blame God for our troubles. This week's lesson asks you to think again. More often than not, the cause of one's trouble is the preoccupation with money and self. Identify the words escaping from your lips that may be at the root of your unhappiness, and make decisive changes to your behavior.

Just for Teachers: No changes can take place in one's life until one takes responsibility for one's own actions. We often injure ourselves by our words because we underestimate their power, whether for good or evil. You become a liar if you lie or a bully if you speak threatening words; and no one wants to have a liar or a bully around them.

Opening Discussion: What kinds of voices and words do you use when you speak to different people? Do you speak differently when you talk to your family as opposed to when you speak to your boss or your subordinates? Practice saying a phrase, such as, "Please bring me water," using these different voices and tones, and explain to the class what they mean.

Questions for Discussion:

- ❶ Why do many cultures have polite and familiar forms of address? To whom are we closer, and why: those with whom we use polite expressions or those with whom we use familiar expressions?
- ❷ What words and expressions offend us most? What words and expressions calm us most?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Uncontrolled greed and self-absorption lie at the heart of all controversies. It is not wrong to want to protect your hard-earned wealth. But Proverbs asks us to consider whether or not we are about to lose valuable relationships over that wealth. One often sees that powerful people speak down to their subordinates. How do you speak to your children and spouse? Roughly or kindly?

How do you expect them to speak to you? Power games are the fastest way to destroy relationships. Do we not resent those we are forced to speak up to, especially if we think they do not deserve our respect? Proverbs calls upon us to speak kindly and truthfully to everyone.

Bible Commentary

I. Good and Evil Words *(Review Proverbs 17 with your class.)*

The proverbs in this chapter, with the exception of the last verse (*vs. 28*), come in couplets composed of two verses. In each of the couplets, the first verse mirrors the thoughts contained in the second verse. Verses 1 and 2 of chapter 17, for example, follow this structure. The thought of a servant inheriting the wealth of a household in verse 2 mirrors the thought of an unhappy and discordant household in verse 1. The point is that a stranger, such as a lawyer, will end up with much of the wealth if brothers in a rich family keep fighting over the inheritance.

Chapter 17 can be divided into three sections: (1) good words that build relationships (*vss. 1–10*); (2) evil words that destroy relationships (*vss. 11–22*); and (3) the cause of evil words (*vss. 23–28*). In the first section, good words are described as words of truth made pure by life's trials (*vss. 3, 4*); excellent speech, which is a gift (*vss. 7, 8*); and reproofs that go down to the heart (*vss. 9, 10*). The family that speaks good words will live in harmony for generations (*vss. 5, 6*).

In the second section (*vss. 11–22*), evil words are described as contentious words (*vss. 11, 12*), false judgments (*vss. 13–16*), and words coming from a cold and arrogant heart (*vss. 19, 20*). These evil words can divide a household and bring sorrow to one's own heart (*vss. 21, 22*). Yet, in hard times, there is no friend like a good brother or a sister (*vss. 17, 18*).

The third section (*vss. 23–28*) reveals that the cause of evil words is often a dispute over money and large gifts (*vss. 23, 24*). The love of money perverts justice and brings sorrow to one's own loved ones (*vss. 25, 26*). And where there is contention over money, silence makes even fools appear wise (*vs. 28*).

Consider This: Jesus began His ministry without a place to lay His head (*Matt. 8:20*). In fact, He left behind only a pair of thongs (footwear), a cloak, and a tunic when He died. Of course, not every homeless person is like Jesus, but in this competitive world people often have to choose between friendship and their need to get ahead in life. Jesus always chose friendship. Which do you choose, and why?

II. The Mind-Set of a Loser *(Review Proverbs 18 with your class.)*

The proverbs in this chapter are arranged in couplets and triplets (three-verse units). In a triplet, the middle verse is the most important. At the heart of the chapter, there is a triplet (*vss. 10–12*) whose middle verse (*vs. 11*) reveals the selfish mind-set that produces contention and greed. A person of this mind-set believes that a “rich man’s wealth is his strong city” (*NKJV*). The two outer verses (*vss. 10, 12*) dismiss this baseless theory by asserting that God is “a strong tower.” The first nine verses of the chapter describe the lives of the rich and foolish. Their lives are isolated (“*separated*,” *vs. 1*), unintellectual (*vs. 2*), and unproductive (*vs. 9*). When they run out of money, people will treat them with “contempt” and “reproach” (*vs. 3*). The fool’s arrogant words (*vss. 5–8*) stand in stark contrast to the life-giving words of the wise (*vs. 4*).

The latter half of the chapter (*vss. 13–23*) reveals the secrets of finding true wealth. Success comes from two sources: the ability to “sustain” people in their “infirmity” and expert knowledge and understanding in things (*vss. 13–15*). Unlike these, bribery and flattery have no staying power because the winds of power change directions by chance (*vss. 16–18*). Verses 19–24 return to the opening theme of isolation. A good brother or a sister (*vs. 19*), a good wife (*vs. 22*), and a good friend (*vs. 24*) are precious gifts from God—they are worth gold. But believing themselves to be powerful (*vs. 23*), rich fools speak “roughly” to those who love them, driving them away.

Discussion Questions: Why do we not like people who flaunt their wealth and power? Why do people who do not like them still want to be like them? What is it about money and wealth that can wield so much power over us?

III. Defining Wisdom (*Review Proverbs 19 with your class.*)

Chapter 19 seeks to define wisdom by contrasting the behaviors of the wise with those of the fool. The purpose is to encourage the reader to seek wisdom and avoid folly. Some of the high points are as follows: lying is, like luxury (*vss. 9, 10*), something that is not necessary. Lying is as unsightly as the luxury in the house of the fool. A patient and well-tempered person has the glory of a king who bestows favor (*vss. 11, 12*). Anger is a show of power because people generally explode at those who have a lower status than theirs. Compassion brings one close to the heart of God (*vss. 17, 18*). So, be firm but show compassion when disciplining a child. You cannot listen when you are angry (*vss. 19, 20*), because listening takes humility. The most excellent thoughts a person can think are thoughts of compassion and understanding for the feelings of the poor and downtrodden (*vss. 21, 22*). The opposite of “the fear of the LORD” is slothfulness (*vss. 23, 24*). For the person who fears the Lord will not “abide satisfied” in one place but promptly move forward to do the Lord’s bidding (*vss. 23, 24*).

Consider This: How does Proverbs 19 define wisdom? In what ways does

the chapter contrast wisdom and folly? What should we avoid? What kind of behaviors does Proverbs 19 encourage us to embrace?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Some things do not change. We still see the foolish behavior described in Proverbs 17–19 around us every day. As in the days of Solomon, people want wealth because they think it will give them status, security, and power. Yet, wealth has failed to deliver on these promises. These ideas live on, as those who have wealth put on a show of power with their nice clothes, big homes, and luxury cars. But the Bible tells us that those who display wealth and speak “roughly” to people actually live isolated lives, spent in idleness and strife. It is the wealth of wisdom and understanding that enriches our thoughts, builds our homes, and imparts happiness. Money certainly has its role in life, and we do wrong to say that it is not important. The danger comes from placing so much emphasis on it that we make it into a god, and by thus doing so, place ourselves on very dangerous spiritual ground. After all, what good is it to be very rich, to have all the world offers, but lose your soul as a result?

Application Questions:

- ❶ How can you have the good things of life and still speak as a wise person speaks?
- ❷ Have you ever seen a person become a beggar because he or she followed the commandments of God? Why, or why not?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Were you ever surprised by a good outcome when you courageously lived honestly, according to the wisdom of God? Please share with the class.

Activities:

- ❶ Describe Bible personalities who risked all by living according to the wisdom of God. What were the outcomes of their decisions to risk all for God?
- ❷ Discuss how the church can become a community of wise people whose lives stand in sharp contrast to the follies described in Proverbs 17–19.