



Proverbs - Chapter Twenty Seven

VI Proverbs 25:1-29:27 - Further Wise Sayings of Solomon (continues)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Seven

Faithful are the wounds of a friend. A loud blessing in the morning will be taken as a curse. A person is tested by being praised.

Introduction to Proverbs 27:1-2

These proverbs both concern boasting (boast in v.1 and praise in v.2 are different forms of the same Hebrew root). In v.1, a person should not boast of their prospects; in v.2, they should not boast of themselves.

- ¹ Do not boast about tomorrow,
for you do not know what a day may bring.

Proverbs 27:1

Do not boast about tomorrow. It is human nature to be overly confident in what future days hold. It is easy to boast about tomorrow, especially with modern arrogance giving a sense of continual progress.

For you do not know what a day may bring. No one knows what tomorrow may hold, so they should have a humble attitude towards the future, as James 4:13-16 also speaks of: *<<Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.' Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil>>.*

Charles Spurgeon considered what a blessing it was that people do not know what a day may bring. “To know the good might lead us to presumption, to know the evil might tempt us to despair. Happy for us is it that our eyes cannot penetrate the thick veil which God hangs between us and tomorrow, that we cannot see beyond the spot where we now are, and that, in a certain sense, we are utterly ignorant as to the details of the future. We may, indeed, be thankful for our ignorance.”

- ² Let another praise you, and not your own mouth —
a stranger, and not your own lips.

Proverbs 27:2

Let another praise you, and not your own mouth. People, and especially the people of God, should stay away from self-promotion in its many forms. Modern technology provides many more methods and opportunities to praise self, but people should avoid such self-praise.

A stranger, and not your own lips. Honour means much more when it comes from an outside source, even a stranger, than being the product of self-praise and self-promotion: <<*It is not good to eat much honey, or to seek honour on top of honour*>> (Proverbs 25:27). Jesus put it this way: <<*I do not accept glory from human beings. But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?*>> (John 5:41-44).

Introduction to Proverbs 27:3-4

Both proverbs have the same pattern (two items mentioned for comparison’s sake, followed by a single item that is worse than both of them). In v.3, the two compared items are physical (stone and sand), and in v.4 they are psychological (wrath and anger). Together, the proverbs suggest that a fool is more unbearable than any kind of physical or psychological malaise. The provocation a fool gives (v.3) could be from a variety of behaviours associated with this character type, e.g. laziness, verbosity, a tendency to promote discord, etc. Jealousy (v.4), unlike ordinary anger, will not yield to reason.

- ³ A stone is heavy, and sand is weighty,
but a fool’s provocation is heavier than both.

Proverbs 27:3

A stone is heavy, and sand is weighty. Solomon appealed to self-evident truths. It is in the nature of a stone to be heavy and in the nature of sand to be weighty.

But a fool's provocation is heavier than both. When a fool - someone who rejects God's wisdom - expresses their anger and wrath, it is a weighty, dangerous thing. The wrath of any person may have great consequence; how much more a fool?

Job had an interesting perspective on this type of issue: <<*Then Job answered: 'O that my vexation were weighed, and all my calamity laid in the balances! For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea; therefore my words have been rash'*>> (Job 6:1-3).

- ⁴ Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming,
but who is able to stand before jealousy?

Proverbs 27:4

Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming. In all its manifestations, anger is a dangerous and difficult expression to control - it overwhelms a person like a torrent.

Who is able to stand before jealousy? Solomon pointed out that there is a power and destructive capability in jealousy that can even go beyond wrath and anger. It can make a bigger torrent of evil. It was envy that motivated the religious leaders to arrange the death of Jesus: <<*For he realised that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over*>> (Matthew 27:18).

Derek Kidner notes that jealousy in the Scriptures is usually used in a positive sense; it is jealousy for - God's proper jealousy for his name, for human love and for rightful praise of him alone. Yet passages like this also acknowledge that there is a dark side of jealousy, jealousy of and not for.

Introduction to Proverbs 27:5-6

Open rebuke affords a person the chance to reflect on the course of the path he or she is walking, where hidden love perceives but fails to communicate the possibility of such a need (v.5). The wounds of a friend are meant to cut to the heart for the good of the person, whereas the kisses of an enemy are devised to appease the heart in order to hide the hurt that has or is to come (v.6). This is also seen in: <<*Whoever rebukes a person will afterwards find more favour than one who flatters with the tongue*>> (Proverbs 28:23).

- ⁵ Better is open rebuke
than hidden love.

Proverbs 27:5

Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Many are hesitant to rebuke others, especially others in God's family. However, there is a time and place where rebuke is not only good it is better than the alternative: <<*You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself*>> (Leviticus 19:17), <<*If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one*>> (Matthew 18:15), <<*But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?'*>> (Galatians 2:14), and: <<*As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest also may stand in fear*>> (1 Timothy 5:20). Love does little good when it is concealed. The honest love of an open rebuke can be much better than the carefully concealed love: <<*Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends*>> (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a).

⁶ Well meant are the wounds a friend inflicts,
but profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

Proverbs 27:6

Well meant are the wounds a friend inflicts. A mark of a true friend is that they will be willing to wound someone with loving correction. The correction may not feel good - as genuine wounds hurt - but it will be an expression of the love and faithfulness of a friend.

Profuse are the kisses of an enemy. This cautions that not all kisses are the greetings of friends. They may come from an enemy and be deceitful: <<*While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, 'Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?'*>> (Luke 22:47-48).

Introduction to Proverbs 27:7-10

These four proverbs each teach an element of wisdom that can stand on its own, but they have additional application when taken together. Verse 7 deals with honey, a pleasant treat, and v.9 deals with oil and perfume, luxuries that here represent a banquet; an ancient host provided perfumed oils for his guests at a

banquet. Also, v.7 says that something bitter is sweet to a hungry man, while v.9 speaks of the sweetness of earnest counsel.

Together, v.7 and v.9 suggest that it is good to have friends for the occasional party, but it is better yet to have a friend willing and able to give good advice.

Verse 8 speaks of someone who wanders far from his home, i.e. his immediate family, and leaves it unprotected, while v.10 concerns someone in need whose immediate family is far away. Together, they teach that there are benefits in remaining close to family, but a person should not hesitate to turn to a true friend or neighbour when in need.

⁷ The sated appetite spurns honey,
but to a ravenous appetite even the bitter is sweet.

Proverbs 27:7

The sated appetite spurns honey. When life is satisfied - either materially or physically - then people find it easy to hate and reject things that would otherwise be greatly desired, such as the honeycomb.

To a ravenous appetite even the bitter is sweet. When a life is truly hungry, they will eat almost everything and consider it sweet. This is true in the physical world, seen in those deprived of food for long periods, as was the Prodigal Son: *<<He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!">>* (Luke 15:16-17). It is also seen in the spiritual world, when those who are awakened as truly hungry souls are ravenous for spiritual food: *<<I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ>>* (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

Charles Spurgeon used this proverb as a basis to speak of the sweetness of Jesus and his work for humankind: "Sweet is liberty to the captive, and when the Son makes you free, you are free indeed; sweet is pardon to the condemned, and proclaims full forgiveness and salvation; sweet is health to the sick, and Jesus is the great physician of souls; sweet is light to those who are in darkness and to eyes that are dim, and Jesus is both sun to our darkness and eyes to our blindness."

⁸ Like a bird that strays from its nest
is one who strays from home.

Proverbs 27:8

Like a bird that strays from its nest is one who strays from home. With just a few words, Solomon painted a heart-touching picture of a bird away from its place of safety and security - the nest where it belongs: <<*Like fluttering birds, like scattered nestlings, so are the daughters of Moab at the fords of the Arnon*>> (Isaiah 16:2). All people have a place appointed by God, and they can be as out of place as a bird without a nest if they wander from it. Everyone needs to take care that they perceive their place not as the one that culture or community may assign to them, but truly the place God has assigned them. This may be close to their place of birth or it may be on the other side of the world.

- ⁹ Perfume and incense make the heart glad,
but the soul is torn by trouble.

Proverbs 27:9

Perfume and incense make the heart glad. Solomon stated a self-evident truth. It is in the nature of perfume to delight the heart through its pleasant smell: <<*The turn came for each girl to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their cosmetic treatment, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and cosmetics for women*>> (Esther 2:12), <<*Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions; your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia*>> (Psalm 45:7b-8a), <<*How sweet is your love, my sister, my bride! how much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!*>> (Song 4:10), and: <<*Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume*>> (John 12:3).

The soul is torn by trouble. However, trouble and strife in life tend to wear a person down until it destroys even the inner being. It weighs heavy on the heart and can prove a burden too much to bear.

- ¹⁰ Do not forsake your friend or the friend of your parent;
do not go to the house of your kindred on the day of your calamity.
Better is a neighbour who is nearby
than kindred who are far away.

Proverbs 27:10

Do not forsake your friend or the friend of your parent. People should hold the bonds of friendship as dear and obligating, even beyond generations. Friends should not be forsaken, whether they are personal friends or trusted friends of the family: <<*A friend loves at all times, and kinsfolk are born to share adversity*>> (Proverbs 17:17), and: <<*Some friends play at friendship but a true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin*>> (Proverbs 18:24). Adam Clarke commented, "A well and long tried friend is invaluable. Him that has been a friend to thy family never forget, and never neglect." Spurgeon added, "Now, inasmuch as the Lord Jesus is 'your own friend, and your father's friend,' the injunction of the text comes to you with peculiar force: 'Forsake him not.' Can you forsake him?"

Do not go to the house of your kindred on the day of your calamity. People should not assume that family are the best ones to help in times of trouble or grief, especially if the family live far away. Better is a kindly neighbour or friend who is nearby than a blood relative that is distant.

God expects there to be love in the extended family of God, in fact he commands it: <<*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*>> (John 13:34-35).

Introduction to Proverbs 27:11-28:1

This section opens with a paternal appeal similar to those in Chapters 1-9 and then has an inclusio, i.e. literary bookends, made up of v.12 (the simple plunge heedlessly into danger) and Proverbs 28:1 (the wicked flee when there is no danger). Between these two are various pieces of advice for the young man on prudence and integrity. The point of the whole section is this: the one who has both prudence and integrity will neither stumble into trouble nor live in fear of retribution.

¹¹ Be wise, my child, and make my heart glad,
so that I may answer whoever reproaches me.

Proverbs 27:11

Be wise, my child, and make my heart glad. Solomon gave a simple encouragement to his son to be wise and therefore bring gladness to his father: <<*The proverbs of Solomon. A wise child makes a glad father, but a foolish child is a mother's grief*>> (Proverbs 10:1), and: <<*My child, if your heart is*

wise, my heart too will be glad. My soul will rejoice when your lips speak what is right>> (Proverbs 23:15-16).

So that I may answer whoever reproaches me. A foolish son is a cause of insult and reproach to the parents. In some way, the son who rejects wisdom makes the parents look bad and, often, feel even worse.

Introduction to Proverbs 27:12-14

It takes wisdom to distinguish between rightful courage and foolish walking into danger. One should not co-sign a loan for a stranger or a foreigner, a repeat of Proverbs 20:16.

¹² The clever see danger and hide;
but the simple go on, and suffer for it.

Proverbs 27:12

The clever see danger and hide. Wisdom will lead a man or woman to anticipate danger and to take action, such as to hide from the coming evil.

The simple go on, and suffer for it. Those who are naïve and untrained in wisdom are blind to the potential danger around them. They will eventually bear the bad consequence of their blindness and be punished.

This is a repeat of Proverbs 22:3.

¹³ Take the garment of one who has given surety for a stranger;
seize the pledge given as surety for foreigners.

Proverbs 27:13

Take the garment of one who has given surety for a stranger. If someone is a bad credit risk and foolish enough to be surety for a stranger, then the creditor should hold a deposit as security against anything guarantor may owe, i.e. take the garment in pledge.

Seize the pledge given as surety for foreigners. The law required that a garment taken as a pledge against a loan from a fellow Israelite had to be returned each night for it provided warmth during the night: <<*If you take your neighbour's cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down*>> (Exodus 22:26). However, there were no such restrictions placed for loans made to foreigners where interest on the loan could be charged or garments kept if the loan repayment was not met.

- 14 Whoever blesses a neighbour with a loud voice,
rising early in the morning,
will be counted as cursing.

Proverbs 27:14

Whoever blesses a neighbour with a loud voice. The sense here is of an over-the-top greeting and blessing, meant to flatter and manipulate. It is loud and it starts early in the morning. Something is amiss in such excessive praise.

A loud voice early in the morning. Friendliness can seem obnoxious to a neighbour. Even in being sociable, one should be tactful.

Will be counted as cursing. Normally a friendly greeting is a blessing. Yet if that blessing is flattery or meant to manipulate it can be counted as a curse.

- 15 A continual dripping on a rainy day
and a contentious wife are alike;
16 to restrain her is to restrain the wind
or to grasp oil in the right hand.

Proverbs 27:15-16

In light of v.12, these proverbs encourage a man to be careful, for a quarrelsome character would likely be evident before marriage. A husband should also examine the way his behaviour affects his wife, since marriage is a mutually formative relationship. The fact that the husband tries but fails to restrain his wife pictures the consequences of a marriage working against itself, rather than each person working with and for the other, which can be seen in the contrasting description of Proverbs 31:11-12, 31:23, 31:28, and 31:31.

A continual dripping on a rainy day and a contentious wife are alike. The scene is in a house with a bad roof, where a rainy day means continual dripping. That dripping shows there is a problem, it causes damage, and it greatly annoys. That is the same effect as a contentious woman in the house. The same principle would be true for the wife of the contentious man. One would be better off in a more humble living situation and have peace in the home.

To restrain her is to restrain the wind. To correct or reform a contentious woman can be a fool's errand. She can be as difficult to restrain as the wind or as hard to get a hold of as oil in the hand. Instead of trying to change a contentious woman, a wise and godly husband loves her as Jesus Christ loves his church and leaves the changing up to God; refer to Ephesians 5:25-31.

- 17 Iron sharpens iron,
and one person sharpens the wits of another.

Proverbs 27:17

Iron sharpens iron. A piece of iron can sharpen another piece of iron, but it happens through striking, friction, and with sparks. One may think of the iron of a blacksmith's hammer working on a sword to make it sharp.

One person sharpens the wits of another. A man can be used to sharpen, i.e. improve and develop his friend, but it may happen through a bit of friction and with sparks. Christians should not be afraid of such and expect that true sharpening can happen without the occasional use of friction.

Another is, as the ESV footnote reads, 'the face of another.' Since the word 'wits' or 'face' (Hebrew *panim*) can refer to the edge of an axe or sword: <<*If the iron is blunt, and one does not whet the edge, then more strength must be exerted; but wisdom helps one to succeed*>> (Ecclesiastes 10:10), and possibly: <<*Attack to the right! Engage to the left! – wherever your edge is directed*>> (Ezekiel 21:16), the image is that interaction with a good man, both as he encourages and corrects, hones one's skill in handling challenges.

Person translates Hebrew *'ish*, a word that specifically refers to a male human being. However, such concrete examples in Proverbs invite broader application; refer to the comments made on Proverbs 31:10-31, 31:26, 31:28-29, 31:30, and 31:31.

- 18 Anyone who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit,
and anyone who takes care of a master will be honoured.

Proverbs 27:18

Anyone who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit. The worker is worthy of his reward. If a man keeps a fig tree, it is appropriate for him to eat its fruit. It is cruel and unfair to keep the fruit of a man's labour from him. Faithful servants will eventually eat the fruit that comes through their labour.

Anyone who takes care of a master will be honoured. The appropriate fruit from properly serving one's master is to be honoured. It is not right to keep honour from the one who has faithfully waited on his master. God promised to reward those who wait upon him. Christians are called to do their work diligently and leave promotion and reward up to God. This is reflected in the work of those who were faithful in The Parable of the Ten Pounds in Luke 19:11-27. The servant who were faithful with their master's property were rewarded but the one who was not was called wicked.

In a sermon on this proverb Charles Spurgeon mentioned many ways that God, as the Master of all creation, may choose to honour his servants:

- Christians are honoured in their Master's honour.
- Christians are honoured by being given more to do.
- Christians are honoured in the eyes of their fellow servants.
- Christians are honoured by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Introduction to Proverbs 27:19-22

Just as water reflects a person's actual appearance, so the heart reflects a person's true nature (v.19). Looking at a reflection in water is an experience common to all people, but who is able to see into the heart? Proverbs indicates that while a person may conceal or reveal his heart through speech and actions, it lies open and transparent only before God: <<**All deeds are right in the sight of the doer, but the Lord weighs the heart**>> (Proverbs 21:2). The comparisons of vv.20-22 draw attention to the state of the person's heart: dissatisfaction and greed that always want more (v.20), the fostering of either humility or pride in response to receiving praise (v.21), and folly that is so deeply rooted in a fool that it is unaffected even if he is ground to a pulp (v.22). This focus on the heart as known and weighed by God is also evoked by the images of v.20a (Sheol and Abaddon) and v.21a (crucible and furnace), particularly since, in the one place where each of these phrases is found elsewhere in Proverbs 15:11a and 17:3a respectively, it is followed by a second line that refers to the heart as either open before the Lord (Proverbs 15:11b) or tested by him (Proverbs 17:3b).

¹⁹ Just as water reflects the face,
so one human heart reflects another.

Proverbs 27:19

Just as water reflects the face. Smooth and clear water can give a wonderful reflection of a man or woman's face. Kidner observed, "The Hebrew is very cryptic: literally, 'As the water the face to the face, so the man's heart to the man.'"

So one human heart reflects another. The feelings and thoughts that come from the heart reveal a person's true character just as the reflection in smooth water reveals the face. Who a person is will eventually be evident to others as their words and actions reveal the heart.

²⁰ Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied,
and human eyes are never satisfied.

Proverbs 27:20

Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied. The grave and the world beyond will receive humanity and never become full. They are used here as figures of something that can never be satisfied: <<*The leech has two daughters; 'Give, give,' they cry. Three things are never satisfied; four never say, 'Enough': Sheol, the barren womb, the earth ever thirsty for water, and the fire that never says, 'Enough'*>> (Proverbs 30:15-16), and: <<*Moreover, wealth is treacherous; the arrogant do not endure. They open their throats wide as Sheol; like Death they never have enough. They gather all nations for themselves, and collect all peoples as their own*>> (Habakkuk 2:5).

Human eyes are never satisfied. Human longing to look upon things that they desire will never be satisfied: <<*All things are wearisome; more than one can express; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear filled with hearing*>> (Ecclesiastes 1:8), and: <<*All human toil is for the mouth, yet the appetite is not satisfied*>> (Ecclesiastes 6:7); it must be controlled and brought under God's dominion. A man will never see enough alluring images of women or enough beautiful machines. The answer is having the need channelled and satisfied in God and what he provides.

Clarke noted, "As the grave can never be filled up with bodies, nor perdition with souls; so the restless desire, the lust of power, riches, and splendour, is never satisfied. Out of this ever unsatisfied desire spring all the changing fashions, the varied amusements, and the endless modes of getting money, prevalent in every age, and in every country."

²¹ The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold,
so a person is tested by being praised.

Proverbs 27:21

The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold. There is an appropriate place for silver and gold to be refined. It does not happen just anywhere, but in the refining pot: <<*The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, but the Lord tests the heart*>> (Proverbs 17:3).

So a person is tested by being praised. A person's value more is often known by what others say of him rather than of what he thinks of himself. Human self-estimation can be unreliable irrespective of whether people think too highly or too lowly of themselves.

²² Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle
along with crushed grain,
but the folly will not be driven out.

Proverbs 27:22

Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain. Solomon used a striking and vivid image. Like crushed grain in a mortar and with a pestle, he pictured a fool being ground up - crushed: <<*O Lord, do your eyes not look for truth? You have struck them, but they felt no anguish; you have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to turn back*>> (Jeremiah 5:3).

The folly will not be driven out. Despite the rough treatment mentioned in the previous line, foolishness does not depart from the fool. One of the sad marks of the fool is that he never learns.

- 23 Know well the condition of your flocks,
and give attention to your herds;
- 24 for riches do not last for ever,
nor a crown for all generations.
- 25 When the grass is gone, and new growth appears,
and the herbage of the mountains is gathered,
- 26 the lambs will provide your clothing,
and the goats the price of a field;
- 27 there will be enough goats' milk for your food,
for the food of your household
and nourishment for your servant-girls.

Proverbs 27:23-27

Know well the condition of your flocks. Solomon wrote this with images from the world of agriculture, but the principle applies in many other areas of life. Christians should work hard and be diligent to know the state of whatever God has given them stewardship of. If they do not know the condition of something, they cannot effectively manage or lead it. Although a person may think their wealth will last for ever (v.24), it will not. Therefore even those who have flocks and herds (v.23) should keep careful account of them in order to be wise stewards: <<*Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms*>> (1 Peter 4:10).

Kidner commented, "This country scene is not designed to make farmers of everybody, but to show the proper interplay of man's labour and God's nurture, which a sophisticated society neglects at its peril."