

The Book of Proverbs

Lesson 7: The Tongue, Diligence, and the Righteous Path -- Proverbs 13:1–15:33

Stand for a moment at a kitchen counter where an argument is about to begin. Voices are rising, shoulders are squaring, and someone is one breath away from saying the thing that cannot be unsaid. Then, against every instinct, one person lowers the temperature instead of raising it. A soft answer. A gentle word slipped into the moment like a hand on a hot stove. And the strangest thing happens: the wrath that was gathering simply loses its fuel and dies down. You have seen it. Maybe you have done it. Proverbs 15:1 has been hanging on that exact moment for three thousand years, watching wisdom turn away a fight that pride wanted to have.

These middle chapters of Proverbs are a long string of short observations, the kind of sayings you could fit on an index card and carry in your pocket. They are not a tidy outline. They circle back again and again to a handful of everyday battlegrounds: the words we speak, the work we do, the friends we keep, the children we raise, the path we choose. And the genius of them is that they refuse to let wisdom stay abstract. Wisdom here has a mouth and a calendar and a wallet. It shows up in how you answer your spouse, how you handle Monday morning, who you eat lunch with, how you discipline a child who has just broken a lamp.

Running underneath all of it is a quiet and unsettling truth that Proverbs will not let us forget. There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death (14:12). We are not nearly as reliable a compass as we think we are. Left to ourselves, we can feel completely certain and be completely wrong, walking confidently down a road that leads exactly where we never meant to go. This is why we cannot manufacture wisdom out of our own cleverness. We need a wisdom that comes from outside us, from the God who actually knows the end of every road from its beginning.

And that is the heart of these chapters. Twice over they name the one thing that holds a whole life together: the fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death (14:27), and the fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom (15:33). The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good (15:3). The God who sees everything is near to the righteous and not far off. So we come to these proverbs not to collect clever sayings, but to learn to live every ordinary moment, every word and task and choice, before the face of the God who is watching in love.

Group Discussion: Think of a time when a gentle word defused a tense situation, or a harsh word made one worse. What did that moment teach you about the power of the tongue?

Personal Reflection: Where in your life right now are you most confident you are right, and how would it change things to honestly ask whether this is a way that only seems right to you?

Read Proverbs 13:1–15:33

Study Questions

1. In 15:1–2,4, what does Proverbs teach about the power of the tongue, and why does a gentle, fitting word have such force to turn away wrath while a harsh word stirs it up?
2. Reflecting on 15:1, in what relationship are you most tempted to answer harshly, and what would a soft answer actually look like the next time tension rises there?
3. According to 13:4,11 and 14:23, how does Proverbs connect diligent work with reward and mere talk or hasty wealth with want, and what does this teach about the place of honest labor in a wise life?
4. Looking honestly at 13:4, where is the ‘soul of the sluggard’ at work in you, craving a result you are unwilling to work for, and what is one diligent step you have been avoiding?
5. In 13:20, why does the company we keep shape what we become, and how does walking with the wise grow us while the companion of fools is harmed?
6. Considering 13:20, who are the voices most shaping you right now, and is there a friendship drawing you toward wisdom or one quietly pulling you toward folly?

7. Proverbs 13:24 ties love to disciplined correction. How should we understand this as loving, formative shaping of a child rather than harshness, and how does it reflect the way God Himself corrects those He loves?
8. Thinking about 14:30 and 15:13,15, how is the state of your heart showing on your face and in your body lately, and what is feeding either a cheerful heart or a crushed spirit in you?
9. Proverbs 14:12 warns that 'there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death,' while 15:3 says 'the eyes of the Lord are in every place.' Taking these together, what do they teach about human self-deception, about our deep need for God's wisdom rather than our own, and about living all of life before the God who sees everything and draws near to the righteous (15:8-9,29)?
10. Looking back across Proverbs 13-15, name one specific way Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), is forming you through this passage, and what first step of obedience will you take this week?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: James 3:2-12, the tongue as a small but powerful fire; John 14:6, Jesus as the way against every way that only seems right; Hebrews 12:5-11, the Lord disciplines those He loves; Hebrews 4:13, all things are open and laid bare before the eyes of God; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, the link between willingness to work and daily bread

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