

The Book of Proverbs, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 11: More Proverbs of Solomon Copied by Hezekiah's Men

Proverbs 25:1–27:27

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

What is doctrinally at stake in this lesson is the radical ethic of returning good for evil, an ethic that runs against every natural instinct and that finds its source in the very character of God. The hinge text is 25:21–22, the command to feed and water your enemy. This is not a stray sentiment; it is the seed that Paul cultivates in Romans 12 and that Jesus brings to full flower in Matthew 5. The teacher must let students feel how strange and costly this is. We are wired to repay insult with insult and injury with injury. Proverbs, and then the gospel, calls us to break that cycle by refusing to let evil have the last word, leaving vengeance to the God who alone judges rightly, and treating even an enemy as someone made in God's image and beloved of the Father.

These chapters also guard the nature of a proverb itself. The diligent shepherd of 27:23–27 generally provides for his household, and the one who plans humbly generally fares better than the boaster, but these are wise observations of God's ordinary order, not unbreakable promises. The righteous can still suffer; Job was diligent and lost everything, and Christ Himself, the most righteous, was crucified. So the teacher steers away from any prosperity reading. There is also a sober warning embedded in 26:11, the dog returning to its vomit. Peter applies this very image in 2 Peter 2:20–22 to those who, having escaped the corruption of the world through knowing Christ, return to it and are worse off than before. A person can know the truth and fall away from it and be lost. This undercuts any notion that salvation, once received, can never be forfeited; the call to perseverance is real because the danger of returning to folly is real.

Formationally, the aim is that students would leave with a softened, more honest heart: quicker to take the lower place, slower to repeat a whisper, gentler with the tongue, more diligent in their daily stewardship, more open to the faithful wounds of a true friend, and above all more like their Lord toward those who wrong them. The deepest aim is to lead them to Christ, who did not merely teach enemy-love but embodied it, feeding His betrayer and forgiving His executioners. The fear of the Lord that runs through all of Proverbs comes to its fullest shape in following the One who overcame evil with good and calls us to do the same.

Question 1

Student Question:

In 25:6–7, why does true honor come from humbly taking the lower place rather than exalting yourself, and how does this wisdom expose the difference between seeking status and being given it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Proverbs 25 opens with a remarkable historical note: 'These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied' (25:1). Solomon had been dead for roughly two and a half centuries when Hezekiah's scribes gathered and copied this further collection of his sayings. It is a small window into how God preserved His word, working through faithful, careful hands across generations.

Hezekiah was one of Judah's great reforming kings, who tore down idols and called the nation back to the LORD. It is fitting that under such a king, men would labor to preserve and circulate the wisdom of an earlier age. The verse quietly testifies that Scripture did not drop from the sky in a single moment; God superintended its gathering, copying, and keeping over long spans of time.

For us this is a comfort. The words we are about to study reached us because God in His providence saw to it that they were not lost. The same God who inspired these proverbs watched over their transmission, so that what Solomon spoke and Hezekiah's men copied is the very word we hold today. We owe a debt to centuries of faithful scribes, and behind them, to the faithful God who guarded His own word.

This does not make the scribes inspired in the way the original authors were, but it does show that God's care for His word extends beyond its first writing to its careful preservation. The doctrine of Scripture includes not only its inspiration but God's providence over its survival. We can open Proverbs with confidence that we are reading what God intended His people to have.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- These proverbs were copied generations after Solomon by Hezekiah's men (25:1).
- Hezekiah was a reforming king who called Judah back to the LORD.
- God's providence extends to the gathering and preservation of Scripture.
- We hold today the very wisdom Solomon spoke, kept by faithful hands.
- The doctrine of Scripture includes its preservation, not only its inspiration.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to you that faithful men copied these words long after Solomon?
- How does God's providence over Scripture's survival strengthen your trust in it?
- Why is it fitting that a reforming king would treasure and preserve God's wisdom?

Question 2

Student Question:

Reflecting on 25:6–7, where are you tempted to push yourself forward or angle for recognition, and what would it look like this week to genuinely take the lower seat?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Proverbs 25:6–7 gives a vivid lesson in humility: ‘Do not put yourself forward in the king’s presence or stand in the place of the great, for it is better to be told, Come up here, than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.’ The picture is a banquet or court. The wise person does not seize the place of honor; he takes a lower seat and waits to be invited higher.

The logic is both practical and profound. To grab status is to risk public humiliation when someone more worthy arrives and you are asked to step down. To take the lower place is to leave room for honor to be given rather than grasped. True honor is bestowed, not seized; the moment you demand it, you have already lost something of it.

Jesus took up this very proverb in Luke 14:7–11, watching guests jockey for the best seats and telling them to take the lowest place instead, ‘for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’ He did not merely quote the wisdom; He grounded it in the way God’s kingdom works. The path up, in God’s economy, runs downward through humility.

This cuts against a culture obsessed with self-promotion, personal branding, and being seen. Proverbs and Jesus both call us to a different posture: to serve quietly, to let recognition come if God grants it, and to find our worth not in the seat we occupy but in the God who sees us. The lower place is not false modesty; it is genuine trust that God lifts up the humble.

The deepest model is Christ Himself, who, though equal with God, took the lowest place, the form of a servant, and was therefore exalted by the Father to the highest place. The one who literally deserved the highest seat took the lowest, and in doing so showed us the only path that truly leads up.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The wise take the lower place rather than seizing honor (25:6–7).
- Honor that is grasped is lost; honor that is given is real.
- Jesus grounds this in the kingdom: the humble are exalted (Luke 14:7–11).
- This cuts against a culture of self-promotion and being seen.
- Christ Himself took the lowest place and was exalted by the Father.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to angle for recognition or the best seat?
- Why does grasped honor lose its worth (25:6–7)?
- How does Christ taking the lowest place reshape your idea of greatness?

Question 3

Student Question:

According to 26:20–22 and 26:23–28, how does Proverbs portray the gossip, the whisperer, and the flatterer, and why does God treat these quiet sins of the tongue so seriously?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the wisdom of 25:6–7 inward. The temptation to push ourselves forward is rarely dramatic; it hides in small angling for credit, in the carefully placed mention of our accomplishment, in the quiet resentment when someone else is recognized and we are not. Wisdom names these gently and honestly.

Ask students to locate the specific arena where status tempts them: at work, in the church, in a friend group, on social media. The man who guards against grasping honor in one concrete place has begun to learn the lower seat. Vague humility rarely survives a real moment of overlooked credit.

Then ask what taking the lower place would actually look like there. Perhaps it is letting someone else get the credit, declining to mention an accomplishment, deferring to another's voice, or simply serving where no one will notice. The lower seat is a deliberate choice, not an accident.

Keep the tone hopeful, not shaming. None of us is free of the hunger to be seen. But a person who chooses, even once, to take the lower place and trust God with the rest has begun to walk the downward path that, in Christ, leads up.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The pull toward self-promotion is usually small and quiet, not dramatic.
- Naming the specific arena of status is the first step to humility.
- Taking the lower seat is a deliberate, concrete choice.
- The aim is trust that God lifts up the humble, not shame.

Discussion Prompts

- In what specific arena does the hunger for status tempt you most?
- What would taking the lower seat look like there this week?
- How can you trust God to give honor rather than grasp it yourself?

Question 4

Student Question:

Considering 26:20–22, when did you last carry a piece of gossip, even gently, and what would it mean to be the person who lets a quarrel die for lack of fuel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Proverbs 26 turns to the sins of the tongue that hide in the shadows. 'For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases' (26:20). The image is exact: gossip is fuel. A quarrel that would die for lack of oxygen is kept alive by the whisperer who carries the tale from one ear to the next.

Verse 22 adds, 'The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body.' Gossip is portrayed as a guilty delicacy. There is a strange pleasure in hearing and repeating secret things, and the words sink deep, lodging in the heart and coloring how we see another person. This is exactly why it is dangerous; it tastes good and it does lasting damage.

Then 26:23–28 exposes the flatterer and the deceiver: 'Like the glaze covering an earthen vessel are fervent lips with an evil heart.' Smooth, warm words can cover a heart full of hatred. 'A lying tongue hates its victims, and a flattering mouth works ruin' (26:28). Flattery is not kindness; it is manipulation wearing the mask of affection.

Why does God treat these quiet sins so seriously? Because they destroy in secret. The gossip and the flatterer rarely face the person they wound; they work behind backs and beneath smiles. They tear apart friendships, ruin reputations, and poison communities, all while seeming harmless or even pleasant. Scripture lists the one who 'sows discord among brothers' among the things the LORD hates (Proverbs 6:19).

For the church, this is a searching word. A congregation can be wrecked not by open scandal but by the steady drip of whispered complaints and flattering insincerity. The wise believer refuses to be the wood that keeps the fire burning, and refuses to trade in honeyed words that hide an unloving heart. Honest, gracious, truthful speech is one of the great gifts we give one another.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Gossip is fuel; a quarrel dies where there is no whisperer (26:20).
- Gossip is a guilty delicacy that sinks deep and does lasting harm (26:22).
- Flattery can mask a hateful heart; smooth words can ruin (26:23–28).
- These sins are grave because they destroy in secret, behind backs.
- A church can be wrecked by whispering and insincerity, not just scandal.
- The LORD hates the one who sows discord among brothers (Prov 6:19).

Discussion Prompts

- Why is gossip compared to fuel and to delicious morsels (26:20,22)?
- How is flattery different from genuine encouragement (26:28)?
- How can our congregation refuse to be 'wood' for the fire of quarrels?

Question 5

Student Question:

Looking at 27:1 alongside 27:23–27, how does Proverbs hold together the warning not to boast about tomorrow with the call to diligent, faithful stewardship of what God has placed in your hands today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question makes the warning of 26:20–22 personal and concrete. Few of us think of ourselves as gossips, because gossip rarely announces itself. It arrives dressed as concern ('I'm only telling you so you can pray'), as venting, as harmless conversation about someone not in the room. Wisdom asks us to look again.

Invite students to recall a specific recent moment when they carried a piece of news about another person, even gently, even with good intentions. The point is not to manufacture guilt but to recognize how easily the whisper travels through us, and how rarely we stop to ask whether repeating it builds anyone up.

Then turn to the better path: being the person where the quarrel dies for lack of fuel (26:20). What would it mean to receive a piece of gossip and simply let it stop with you, to decline to pass it on, perhaps even to gently turn the conversation toward the person's good or toward speaking to them directly?

Move toward a step. Perhaps it is a habit of asking before speaking, 'Is this true, is it kind, is it mine to share?' Perhaps it is going directly to a person rather than around them. The believer who becomes a place where rumors go to die is a quiet gift to everyone around them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Gossip rarely announces itself; it hides as concern or venting.
- Recognizing a specific recent moment is more honest than vague denial.
- We can choose to let a piece of news stop with us (26:20).
- A simple test of speech: is it true, kind, and mine to share?

Discussion Prompts

- When did you last carry a piece of news about someone, even gently?
- What would it look like to let a quarrel die for lack of fuel in you?
- What habit could help you speak to people rather than about them?

Question 6

Student Question:

Thinking about 27:1, how does honestly admitting that you 'do not know what a day may bring' change the way you hold your plans, your possessions, and your very breath before God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Proverbs 27 holds two truths that seem in tension but belong together. First, the warning: 'Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring' (27:1). We make plans as though the future were ours to command, but we cannot guarantee even the next hour. This is a call to humility before our own creaturely limits.

James takes up this very wisdom in James 4:13–16, rebuking those who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit,' when they do not even know what tomorrow holds. 'What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.' The proper posture is, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'

Yet the same chapter ends with a sustained call to diligent stewardship: 'Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds' (27:23–27). The wise shepherd attends carefully to what is in his hands, because riches are not forever, and faithful labor provides food for his household and his servants. Far from passivity, this is active, attentive responsibility.

How do these fit together? Precisely because we cannot control tomorrow, we are called to be faithful with today. Not boasting about the future does not mean drifting through the present; it means holding our plans humbly while working diligently in the place and with the resources God has actually given us. We do not own tomorrow, but we are responsible for today.

These are general principles of God's ordinary order, not iron promises. The diligent shepherd usually provides for his household, but Proverbs knows the righteous can suffer loss; Job was diligent and lost everything in a day. So we work faithfully and plan humbly, entrusting both our labor and our limits to the God who alone holds the future.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- We cannot guarantee even the next hour; do not boast about tomorrow (27:1).
- Life is a mist; plan saying 'if the Lord wills' (James 4:13–16).
- The wise diligently steward what God has placed in their hands (27:23–27).
- Not owning tomorrow frees us to be faithful with today.
- These are general principles, not promises; the righteous can suffer loss.

Discussion Prompts

- How does admitting you cannot control tomorrow change your planning (27:1)?
- What does diligent stewardship of 'your flocks' look like in your life (27:23)?
- How do humility about the future and diligence in the present fit together?

Question 7

Student Question:

In 27:6 and 27:17, why are the faithful wounds of a friend better than the easy kisses of an enemy, and how does 'iron sharpening iron' describe the kind of friendship that actually makes us holy?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses 27:1 into honest self-examination. We rarely think we are boasting about tomorrow, yet we live as if it were guaranteed: deferred apologies, postponed obedience, plans laid with no thought of God, possessions clutched as though they were permanently ours. The verse exposes the quiet presumption underneath our calendars.

Help students feel the weight of 'you do not know what a day may bring.' This is not morbid; it is clarifying. Every breath is a gift, not a possession. The person who truly absorbs this holds plans loosely, gives thanks daily, and stops postponing the things that matter most.

Then ask how this changes the way they hold their plans, their possessions, and their very breath. Perhaps it means saying 'if the Lord wills' and meaning it. Perhaps it means doing today the thing they keep telling themselves they will do later. Perhaps it means a fresh gratitude for an ordinary day.

End with hope, not anxiety. Living before God with open hands is not a fearful thing; it is a freeing one. The future belongs to a good and faithful God, and that is exactly why we can release our grip on tomorrow and live today in trust and gratitude.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- We often live as if tomorrow were guaranteed, postponing what matters.
- Every breath is a gift, not a possession (27:1).
- Holding plans loosely and giving thanks daily flows from this truth.
- Living before God with open hands is freeing, not fearful.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you living as though tomorrow were already yours?
- What have you been postponing that you should do today?
- How would daily gratitude flow from admitting your life is a gift?

Question 8

Student Question:

Considering 27:6 and 27:17, who in your life is allowed to wound you with the truth and sharpen you, and are you that kind of friend to anyone else?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Proverbs 27 gives us one of Scripture's most beautiful portraits of true friendship. 'Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy' (27:6). A real friend will sometimes hurt you with the truth, because love that never risks honesty is not love at all. The flatterer's kisses feel better in the moment but mean nothing.

This is a hard saying for an age that often equates love with unconditional affirmation. Proverbs insists that the friend who loves you enough to wound you, to tell you the hard thing you need to hear, is more faithful than the one who only tells you what you want to hear. The wound is faithful precisely because it aims at your good.

Verse 17 gives the companion image: 'Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.' Two blades grind against each other and both come away sharper. Real friendship involves friction, challenge, the rub of another honest life against ours. We are not sharpened in isolation but through relationships willing to push and refine us.

Together these verses describe accountability, the kind of friendship that actually makes us holy. Surface friendships affirm; deep friendships sharpen. The friend who will lovingly confront our sin, question our blind spots, and call us higher is one of the greatest gifts God gives. This is also why isolation is dangerous; the person with no one allowed close enough to wound them grows dull and unchallenged.

For the believer, this is the design of the church at its best: a community of friends sharpening one another toward Christ, bearing one another's burdens, speaking the truth in love. We need people who love us enough to wound us, and we are called to be that kind of friend to others.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A true friend will wound with honesty; an enemy flatters (27:6).
- Love that never risks honesty is not real love.
- Iron sharpening iron pictures friendship through friction (27:17).
- Surface friendships affirm; deep friendships sharpen and refine.
- Isolation leaves us dull; the church is meant to sharpen us toward Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- Why are the wounds of a friend better than an enemy's kisses (27:6)?
- How does 'iron sharpening iron' describe friendship that makes us holy?
- Why is isolation dangerous for the soul?

Question 9

Student Question:

Proverbs 25:21-22 commands, 'If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will

reward you.’ Paul takes up these very words in Romans 12:20–21, and Jesus presses even further in Matthew 5:43–48. Taking these together, what do they teach about overcoming evil with good rather than repaying it, about leaving vengeance to God, and about how a child of the Father is to treat an enemy?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal and ethical summit of the lesson, and it begins with a command that overturns our deepest instincts: ‘If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you’ (25:21–22). We are told not merely to refrain from harming an enemy, but to actively do him good, to meet his real needs.

The puzzling phrase ‘heap burning coals on his head’ is best understood not as secret revenge but as the burning shame of conviction that kindness can produce in a wrongdoer, a heat that may melt hostility into repentance. And the outcome is left with God: ‘the LORD will reward you.’ We do good and entrust the result to Him.

Paul lifts these very words into the heart of Christian ethics in Romans 12:19–21: ‘Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God... To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.’ Here is the key: we leave vengeance to God, who alone judges rightly, and we break the cycle of evil by refusing to add to it. Evil is not overcome by more evil but by good.

Jesus presses further still in Matthew 5:43–48: ‘You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.’ The Father sends sun and rain on the just and the unjust alike. To love only those who love us is to be no different from anyone else. Enemy-love is the family likeness of the children of God.

This is not weakness or the denial of justice; God’s justice is real, which is exactly why we can leave vengeance to Him. It is the strength to refuse the natural cycle of retaliation, to treat even an enemy as one made in God’s image and loved by the Father. The deepest model is Christ Himself, who fed His betrayer at the table and prayed for His executioners, ‘Father, forgive them.’ The seed planted in Proverbs 25 flowered fully at the cross, and the call to us is to live this same overcoming love toward those who wrong us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- We are commanded to actively do good to an enemy, not just avoid harm (25:21–22).
- ‘Burning coals’ is the shame of conviction kindness can awaken, not revenge.
- Vengeance belongs to God, who judges rightly (Rom 12:19).
- Evil is overcome not by more evil but by good (Rom 12:21).

- Enemy-love is the family likeness of God's children (Matt 5:43-48).
- This is strength, not weakness, and it does not deny God's justice.
- Christ embodied it, feeding His betrayer and forgiving His executioners.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it cost you to actively do good to someone who has wronged you?
- How does leaving vengeance to God free you to overcome evil with good?
- How does Christ's love for His enemies shape how you treat yours?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across Proverbs 25-27, name one specific way Jesus, who fed and forgave His enemies even from the cross, is forming you through this passage, and what first step of obedience will you take this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the whole sweep of Proverbs 25-27 and asks how the Lord is using it to form us in Christ. We have walked through the humility of the lower seat, the secret sins of gossip and flattery, the limits of tomorrow and the diligence of today, the faithful wounds of a friend, and the towering command to love and feed our enemies. Now the question is simply: how is the Lord shaping me through all of this?

Point clearly to Jesus, in whom every theme of these chapters comes to life. He took the lowest seat and was exalted. He spoke only truth and never flattery. He held tomorrow in the Father's hands and was diligent to finish His work. He was the friend who wounds faithfully and lays down His life for His friends. Above all, He is the One who fed His betrayer and forgave His executioners, embodying the enemy-love that Proverbs 25 first planted as a seed.

Press for one specific step. Vague intentions evaporate. Perhaps it is a concrete act of kindness toward someone who has wronged you, a refusal to pass on a piece of gossip, a humbler posture at work or in the church, a hard but loving word to a friend, or a fresh holding of tomorrow with open hands. What single truth searched the student most deeply, and what will obedience look like this week?

End in hope. The fear of the LORD that runs through all of Proverbs finds its fullest form in following Jesus, who not only taught this wisdom but lived it to the death and rose again. Every student who leaves with even one settled step of obedience has begun to walk more closely in the steps of the Lord who overcame evil with good.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The themes of Proverbs 25-27 find their fullness in Christ.

- Jesus embodied humility, truthful speech, diligence, and enemy-love.
- He fed His betrayer and forgave His executioners from the cross.
- Formation requires one specific, concrete step of obedience this week.

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from Proverbs 25–27 searched your heart most?
- How is Jesus, who loved His enemies, forming you through this passage?
- What is your first concrete step of obedience this week?