

THE SIMPLE LIFE PROVERBS 23:1-35

By Pastor John Carlini, D. Mn.

M.I. LIVING A LIFE FILLED WITH EXCESS AND INDULGENCE LEADS TO EMPTINESS AND BROKENNESS. FINDING REAL SATISFACTION AND HAPPINESS COMES FROM LIVING A SIMPLE LIFE CHARACTERIZED BY WISDOM AND MODERATION.

I. BE CAREFUL OF AMBITION (Vs. 1-8)

UNBRIDLED AMBITION CAN CAUSE US TO CHASE AFTER THE WRONG THINGS

- A. SEDUCED BY THE “GOOD” LIFE (Vs. 1-3)
- B. SEDUCED BY RICHES (Vs. 4-5)
- C. SEDUCED BY POWER (Vs. 6-8)

II. BE CAREFUL OF PRIDE (Vs. 9-18)

THE MORE PRIDE WE HAVE, THE LESS HOPE WE HAVE OF FINDING TRUE SATISFACTION IN LIFE

- A. NO HOPE (Vs. 9-11)
- B. A GLIMMER OF HOPE (Vs. 12-14)
- C. A LOT OF HOPE (Vs.15-18)

III. BE CAREFUL OF LUST (Vs. 19-35)

LUSTING AFTER THE PLEASURES OF THIS WORLD WILL LEAVE US FINANCIALLY, PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, AND SPIRITUALLY BROKE

- A. PARENTS’ PRAYERS (Vs. 22-25)
- B. LUST FOR THE FAST LIFE (Vs. 19-21)
- C. LUST FOR SEX (Vs. 26-28)
- D. LUST TO GET HIGH (Vs. 29-35)

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This morning's passage has to do with a concept that we are not very familiar with. In fact, everything we are taught as we grow up in life mitigates against it. This morning the wisdom writer encourages us to carve out for ourselves simple lives. We are to live in moderation; our ambition should be to live holy lives, not to acquire worldly things.

From a very early age, we are taught to be ambitious. We should study hard, work hard, and climb the corporate ladder. If we were naïve enough or perhaps perceptive enough to ask, "Why," the answer would be, "So we can buy a nice house, live in a nice neighborhood, buy nice clothes, go on fancy vacations, and provide nicely for our families." We are raised to never be satisfied with what we have or where we are. We are taught to be ambitious for more, in fact, that is the basic principle that makes our economy work in the United States. The more we want, the more we work to consume. The more we consume, the better the economy goes. The better the economy gets, the more we want, and so on and so on. Greed is what makes capitalism work.

We are not very good at living simple lives. We are not used to setting moderate goals and people that choose to live the simple life are often characterized as unmotivated and lazy.

But let me give you an example of how our appetites can run wild and ultimately confuse our thinking. When I was a chaplain in the military, there were several of us who liked to eat. Since we had to pass a fat test and a physical fitness test, we used to keep an eye on each other; we also used to work out together. One night, we just finished working out, were showered and dressed when one of the guys suggested we go to an Italian restaurant and get a good dinner, something like pasta and salad. We all agreed.

When it came time to order, one of the chaplains ordered himself a medium pizza. The waiter asked if he wanted it cut into 4 slices or 6. He thought for a little, looked at us, and said, “You’d better cut it into 4 pieces. I don’t think I should eat 6.” Our appetites can get the best of us if we fail to learn moderation in the way we live.

I know this sermon goes against everything we are taught as we grew up, and it may sound as if I am promoting laziness, but that is not the case. We need to be ambitious about pursuing the right goals. Here is the main idea of this morning’s message: **LIVING A LIFE FILLED WITH EXCESS AND INDULGENCE LEADS TO EMPTINESS AND BROKENNESS. FINDING REAL SATISFACTION AND HAPPINESS COMES FROM LIVING A SIMPLE LIFE CHARACTERIZED BY WISDOM AND MODERATION.** I don’t know why, but I have found myself watching a lot of television lately and the message that comes across, is that I could be happy if I looked a little younger, bought a bigger house, a faster car, and found a younger woman. Now, if I for one moment believed that message, then I would have to make more money, wheel and deal my way into a bigger house and a faster car, leave my wife, and run away with a young woman. None of that is really possible for me because first, I don’t have the energy to pursue any of that, and second, well just look at me.

Nevertheless, many people in our culture believe those messages. People want to chase after the “good life” as television has defined it. People in our country are in credit card debt up to their eyeballs. People are cutthroat at work. People are hooked on pornography, having affairs, and leaving their families at epidemic proportions. And here is the saddest statistic; there is not much difference between the population at large and the incidents of these things happening in the

Christian Church. How is it that we become so easily confused and find ourselves chasing after worldly things?

I don't always get things right in my own life, but I think this is one area where I'm on track. I have several friends who ask me to consider pastoring some high profile churches. I would make three to four times more money, have more time off, and preach to large numbers of people. I always turn them down. Why? Because God called me here to Devon Church. My daughter always says to me with some mild contempt, "You're not very ambitious are you?"

My answer is, "I'm very ambitious. I'm ambitious to get my prayer life in order. I'm ambitious to conquer the sin in my life. I'm ambitious to be a good pastor here at Devon. I'm not ambitious to make more money, or pastor a bigger church. I'm not ambitious for prestige or notoriety. I'm perfectly content to be where God has placed me."

I. BE CAREFUL OF AMBITION (Vs. 1-8)

UNBRIDLED AMBITION CAN CAUSE US TO CHASE AFTER THE WRONG THINGS

And that brings us to the first point of the wisdom writer. Verses 1-8 warn us to be careful of ambition: **UNBRIDLED AMBITION CAN CAUSE US TO CHASE AFTER THE WRONG THINGS**. If we fill our minds with things we see on television, hear on the radio, read in the newspapers and magazines, we may be seduced by the world.

A. SEDUCED BY THE "GOOD" LIFE (Vs. 1-3)

Verses 1-3 demonstrate how easy it is to be seduced by the "good" life. Chapter 22 ended by stating that the king notices diligent workers. This chapter starts out by describing us as invited guests of the king. Here we are, sitting at the king's table, for us, we may find ourselves at Mayor Daley's house for a formal dinner, or even at the White House. Look at verse 2 carefully: Even though food is used as the example, the meaning carries over into a hunger for all worldly things. But the example is this: If we have big appetites and love food, we need to be careful when all this

food is placed before us. First of all, we may make complete fools of ourselves. Can you picture us stuffing our faces with appetizers, licking our fingers, then getting to the table, tucking our napkins under our necks and stuffing our faces? Then we dive into the dessert table like there is no tomorrow? Is there anyone out there who can relate to this besides me? If you have ever gone to a buffet and had to unbutton your pants, then you know what I'm talking about. But it would truly be embarrassing to act like that at the Mayor's house.

But second, and more importantly, I think the writer is warning us not to be seduced by the delicacies and lifestyles of the rich and famous. Because we watch so much television, we have developed big appetites for worldly things. We need to be aware of politicians' motives. The wisdom writer is saying to us, "Don't start to develop a taste for this type of lifestyle because you will be easily distracted from the things of God." Look at the words "given to gluttony" in verse 2. It can also be translated as a possessor of a soul. When we start to crave the things of this world, when we start to develop an appetite for worldly pleasure, we are to the point of losing our souls. The "good" life as portrayed on television is really a shortcut to death.

B. SEDUCED BY RICHES (Vs. 4-5)

In verses 4-5 the writer warns us about being seduced by riches. Again, we have come to believe that money can buy us happiness. We think if we have enough money to buy nice clothes, nice cars, nice houses, nice vacations, and nice toys, we will be happy. Even in church, people judge one another on how they dress, what kind of cars they drive, what kind of jobs they have, and other worldly things. People work all kinds of hours so they can get ahead. But look at the warning here, the minute you set your eyes on wealth as happiness, it will sprout wings and fly away. Like all seductions, we will never leave satisfied. We will always want more, and we will always need more to make us happy.

C. SEDUCED BY POWER (Vs. 6-8)

We have all been seduced by the “good” life and we have all been seduced by money, and increasingly today, we can see the writer’s warning is timely. Verses 6-8 remind us that we can be seduced by power. Look at the star power in our culture. People want to get close to people with power. People desire to go to restaurants and nightclubs where celebrities hang out. But here is the seduction; powerful people and celebrities don’t care about us. Look at verse 6. It says, “Do not eat the food of a stingy man.” Stingy man is a good translation, but the word can mean much more; literally the word is “person of evil eye.” This person is powerful, but this person is selfish and self-centered. Think about when you were in school. The girls all wanted to go out with the star athletes and the boys all wanted to go out with the cheerleaders, but the truth was all these athletes and cheerleaders were often shallow and extremely self-centered. The poet’s point is this: If powerful people engage you in any way, be careful, many people today are self-centered and self-absorbed and everything they do is calculated. In the end, we will gag on the food we have eaten with them because they always have an ulterior motive. Here is a warning for all of us in today’s culture; many, many people are self-centered and self-absorbed. We should hear the poet’s warning here: Stay away from self-centered and self-absorbed people whether or not they are considered to be powerful by society’s standards. Their negative energy is so powerful; it will suck the life right out of us. Do not be seduced by television’s “good life”, by money, or by powerful people or people you desire to be with. These seductions will suck the life force right out of us. We are to hunger and thirst for righteousness: **BUT UNBRIDLED AMBITION CAN CAUSE US TO CHASE AFTER THE WRONG THINGS.**

II. BE CAREFUL OF PRIDE (Vs. 9-18)

THE MORE PRIDE WE HAVE, THE LESS HOPE WE HAVE OF FINDING TRUE SATISFACTION IN LIFE

As I looked at this next section, I asked myself what makes the difference why some people are able to find peace in life, and others are not. I think the poet is warning us in verses 9-18 to be careful of pride. I think this principle is important to God since we find it so often in the Bible. **THE MORE PRIDE WE HAVE, THE LESS HOPE WE HAVE OF FINDING TRUE SATISFACTION IN LIFE.** Did you catch that? I think it is a proportional relationship. The more pride we hang on to, the less chance we have of finding satisfaction. The less pride we hang on to the more chance we have of finding satisfaction. But like our attitudes towards ambition, the world again steers us in the wrong direction. The world teaches us to be ambitious and to be proud. Again, I know all of us pretty well; we come from proud heritages, proud traditions, proud cultures, and proud families. Many of us have worked very hard to get where we are and we think of ourselves as pretty independent. We don't like to admit any weakness nor do we like to ask for help. The world may value our success and people around us may be impressed, in fact we may be impressed by our own accomplishment. But here is the poet's warning.

A. NO HOPE (Vs. 9-11)

Verses 9-11 say there is no hope for the proud. Proud people do what they want to do, say what they want to say, and think what they want to think. Look at verse 9; the wisdom writer says, "Don't waste your time talking to a fool. They won't listen anyway." For all of you out there with the gift of mercy, beware of this type of person. People want you to comfort them, console them, and be with them, but we must be discerning enough to know when we are wasting our time. Proud people, stubborn people, manipulating people will waste your time, your energy, and your resources. Look at verses 10-11: Often times they are in outright disobedience to God. In this case, the proud, stubborn person is stealing from God. Remember we talked about the land being a gift from God and the land was to be a family inheritance throughout the generations. To steal

someone's land was to steal from God. Look at verse 11: God is their Defender. The word here is a technical term that means a kinsman redeemer. God Himself will take a stand against the proud, the arrogant, and the stubborn.

People, who are proud, stubborn, and arrogant, are no friends of God; and all the time we spend with them is a waste, because in reality, there is no hope of them ever finding satisfaction and happiness in life.

B. A GLIMMER OF HOPE (Vs. 12-14)

Verses 12-14 describe a glimmer of hope. The fool described in verses 9-11 was just plain rebellious and wanted to live life the way he wanted he was proud, stubborn and arrogant. The type of fool described here is one who lacks knowledge, experience, and discipline. These types of people have not found satisfaction in life nor have they found happiness or fulfillment because they have not yet found the way. Hopefully, when life slaps them around a little, they will humble themselves and find satisfaction. Here is where we must have a willing attitude: God often uses bad situations in life to drive pride, arrogance, and stubbornness out of our lives. Foolishness is in every one of us and God will attempt to drive it out of us, with the rod if necessary. However, the decision is up to us whether we humble ourselves or remain defiantly proud.

I want to go back for a moment to chapter 22 verse 6, because I think this verse has caused a lot of parent's undue grief. The verse says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he gets old, he will not depart from it." Many parents who have adult children who are not walking with the Lord blame themselves, and let me add that parents who have adult children walking in the Lord somehow think their good parenting is the reason. Let me point out that God was the perfect parent, to Adam and Eve, to King David, to King Solomon, and to you and me. In the end, all we

can do as parents is try to put our children on the right path. Ultimately each child, each person that includes you and me, must make a conscious decision to humble ourselves and follow God.

Other than God, there are no perfect parents. We are all sinful. We all make mistakes. All we can do is try to consistently love our children. But in the end, the choice is theirs. If and when God applies the rod to our lives, we humble ourselves, and then there is hope that we will find satisfaction and happiness in life.

C. A LOT OF HOPE (Vs.15-18)

But verses 15-18 illustrate that there is a lot of hope for people who are humble and teachable. Humble and teachable people will find satisfaction, happiness, and contentment in life. They will find the abundant life that Jesus promised. Look at verse 15 and verse 18 because they frame this section. If we are wise, humble, and remain teachable, we have a bright future. Godly, humble, teachable people are not jealous of what worldly people have. Godly people have hearts that are content and at peace. I will emphasize this in the next section but for now, just look at the second line in verse 15 and the first line in verse 16. For godly parents, there is no greater joy than to see their children following God in wisdom. On the other hand, there is no greater pain for godly parents to see their children acting the proud, arrogant, stubborn fools, chasing after the things of this world.

I hope we all saw the direct proportional relationship between pride and satisfaction: **THE MORE PRIDE WE HAVE, THE LESS HOPE WE HAVE OF FINDING TRUE SATISFACTION IN LIFE.**

III. BE CAREFUL OF LUST (Vs. 19-35)

LUSTING AFTER THE PLEASURES OF THIS WORLD WILL LEAVE US FINANCIALLY, PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, AND SPIRITUALLY BROKE

Two enemies of our finding lasting satisfaction, happiness and contentment in life are unbridled ambition and stubborn, arrogant pride. Another enemy is an all too familiar enemy to those of us who live in the Western world. Verses 19-35 warn us to be careful of lust. Addictions to sex, pornography, alcohol and drugs are not only killing our society, they are killing the church. If we were to stop and examine the devastation, we would have to wonder why so many Christians continue to get caught up in these addictions. The fact is this: **LUSTING AFTER THE PLEASURES OF THIS WORLD WILL LEAVE US FINANCIALLY, PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, AND SPIRITUALLY BROKE.** Drugs, alcohol, sex, and violence are tearing our families, our cultures, and our churches apart.

A. PARENTS' PRAYERS (Vs. 22-25)

Let me start with the hope of every godly parent by describing parents' prayers first of all in verses 22-25. Look how the poet has put this section together. The first line in verse 22 says, "Listen to your father, who gave you life," and the last line in verse 25 talks about the rejoicing of your mother who gave you birth. Good mothers and fathers are not self-centered or self-absorbed. They are focused on helping their children find satisfaction, happiness, and contentment in life. Those of us who are Christians know that our children can only find happiness when they commit themselves to pursuing holiness. We know that the abundant life can only be found as we follow Jesus. Using business terms, the father tells his son in verse 23 to find God's wisdom, get it, hang on to it, and don't part with it. Look at what is valuable in life. God's wisdom is valuable, living life with understanding and discipline is valuable. The father doesn't say, "Chase after riches, power, and prestige." He doesn't say, "Get to the top of the corporate ladder and buy all sorts of things that will make you happy." No! The father is talking about living a life of modesty, of humility, and of godliness. When godly parents see their children following God, they rejoice.

There is nothing more exciting as parents than seeing their children walking with, and serving God. There is nothing more disheartening as godly parents than to see their adult children not walking with the Lord. Somehow, if parents of ungodly children are to enjoy the abundant life, they too have to let their children go and emotionally detach themselves somehow from them. I know that sounds difficult, but at that point all we can do is pray for them. Remember what we said in the last section, talking to them, preaching to them, trying to convince them is a waste of breath.

B. LUST FOR THE FAST LIFE (Vs. 19-21)

Why is it so hard for young people to make a choice to follow God? Because as verses 19-21 point out, many young people have a lust for the fast life. Kids watch a lot of MTV; the station portrays big houses, exotic locations and vacations, sexy people, and wild sex. We at church are preaching and teaching modesty, purity, sobriety, and self-control while the world is taking and perverting all our legitimate needs and encouraging us to follow our lust. I'm wondering how effective the poet's warning was to youth in his day: He warns them to stay on the godly path because following the world will leave you financially drained and emotionally bankrupt. We know from Israel's history that this warning was not taken to heart because the nation got involved in sexual immorality time and time again. Again, let me remind us that King Solomon ended his life in disgrace because he didn't follow his own advice concerning sexual purity and moderation. Too many young people have allowed MTV to define what is desirable and what is not. Most young people can identify every band and artist out there, but they cannot name the 12 disciples.

The sad thing is that even adults have followed the wrong path. We have let our friends, co-workers; cultures and society define for us what's valuable and what's not. We can tell you what neighborhoods are good investments and what stocks are on the rise, but we fumble through the Bible when looking up books, chapters and verses. We all have developed a lust for the fast life.

C. LUST FOR SEX (Vs. 26-28)

And I am almost ashamed to deal with the next section because all the recent studies show that the lust for sex described in verses 26-28 have infected the Christian community as well as the secular. I am really tired of preaching this so let me summarize it: Our goal in life is to pursue purity, not substitute one worldly lust for another. Pornography is sin. Any sex outside of marriage is sin; that includes sex with your hands, oral sex, or any other kind of stimulation. If you are married and you are flirting with someone who is not your spouse, it is sin. Being sexually immoral is foolishness. Here is where the last section comes into play: Since most people want to keep doing what they're doing, they proudly, stubbornly, and arrogantly refuse to humble themselves to God in purity. In their case, they have no chance of finding lasting satisfaction, happiness, or contentment in life. Not only that, the lust for sex leads to brokenness, disease, and death. The lust for sex is addicting and only humble submission and confession to God, and accountability to others, can break the hold.

D. LUST TO GET HIGH (Vs. 29-35)

I don't know what it is about the addictions we face today, but it seems, as described in verses 29-35, there is a lust to get high. If you take time to read these verses carefully, you will see that the poet uses seductive language as if the alcohol or drug is a seductive woman. Again, I have talked so much about the dangers of alcohol and drugs that I don't want to preach it any more, but look quickly with me at the fate of a fool. The interesting thing about people with drinking problems is that they never want to admit it. Look at people who drink a lot and see how stupid they are. Look at verse 29, "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes?" The answer! Verse 30, those who indulge themselves in alcohol and drugs.

Verse 31 describes how easily the alcohol goes down, but verse 32 talks about the bite. Verse 33 describes people with the D.T.'s

Any of us who have ever tried to go to bed after getting drunk know the feeling described in verse 34; you lie down in bed but the room won't stop spinning, you get so nauseous that you have to make a trip to the bathroom to throw up. It really is like being seasick.

Look at verse 35. Are people who drink a lot or people who take drugs this stupid? They say, "Yeah, people hit me, but I'm not hurt. They beat me, but I don't feel it." The beating doesn't have to be physical. Maybe you got drunk and had an accident, maybe you fell, or maybe you just made a fool of yourself." If you haven't quit drinking or taking drugs, look at the last two lines in verse 35. The chances are you are the fool who says, "When will I wake up so I can find another drink?" Lust of any kind is addicting and addictions lead us to misery and death. Lust for the fast life, lust for sex, lust to get high will destroy our lives. Instead, let us set our minds on holiness and purity. Let us set our desires on serving God because whatever we give to God, He will give it back to us with interest. On the other hand: **LUSTING AFTER THE PLEASURES OF THIS WORLD WILL LEAVE US FINANCIALLY, PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, AND SPIRITUALLY BROKE.**

I know this morning's message is hard for us to swallow. We are so used to chasing after the things of this world; we have come to accept ambition and pride as desirable qualities in our lives, especially since they can help us fulfill our lust. But Jesus lived a simple, humble, modest life. If we are followers of Jesus, then we should do the same: **LIVING A LIFE FILLED WITH EXCESS AND INDULGENCE LEADS TO EMPTINESS AND BROKENNESS. FINDING REAL SATISFACTION AND HAPPINESS COMES FROM LIVING A SIMPLE LIFE CHARACTERIZED BY WISDOM AND MODERATION.**

In his book on Prayer, Richard Foster describes this simple attitude as we find the holy in everyday life. He says, “Ignatius Loyola notes, ‘Everything that one turns in the direction of God is prayer.’”

Then, too, we are praying the Ordinary when we see God in the ordinary experiences of life. ... Waiting is part of ordinary time. We discover God in our waiting: waiting in checkout lines, waiting for the telephone to ring, waiting for graduation, waiting for a promotion, waiting to retire, waiting to die. The waiting itself becomes prayer as we give our waiting to God. In waiting we begin to get in touch with the rhythms of life – stillness and action, listening and decision. They are the rhythms of God. It is in the everyday and the commonplace that we learn patience, acceptance, and contentment.

Saint Benedict’s criterion for allowing a visitor to stay at the monastery is that ‘he is content with the life as he finds it, and does not make excessive demands ... but is simply content with what he finds.’”

Foster goes on to say, “I am attracted to this ‘contentment without excessive demands’ because it is the way I would really like to live. In a world in which Winning Through Intimidation is the order of the day, I am attracted to people who are free from the tyranny of assertiveness. I am drawn to those who are able to meet people where they are, with no need to control or manage or make them do anything. I enjoy being around them because they draw the best out in me without any manipulation whatsoever.”

That is the message of this morning’s text. Let us learn to be content without excessive demands. Let’s not be high maintenance children to God. Always demanding more demonstrates that we are not satisfied with God alone. Developing simple lifestyles will help us to always find contentment.