

**MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU
PROVERBS 24:1-34**

By Pastor John Carlini, D. Mn.

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This morning's text completes the 30 sayings described in chapter 22 verse 20. Some think this section, starting at chapter 22, verse 17 through chapter 24 verse 22, was written to future politicians, religious leaders, and teachers, they think this because it seems these people will somehow be representing God and the King. I agree that these people possibly could have been the target audience of these teachings; however, they apply equally to all of us. Remember as Christians, we are the ambassadors of Christ. We are also priests, soldiers, and ministers of God's Kingdom. I would like for us to start thinking of ourselves as royalty, we need to start thinking, speaking, and acting as royalty. We represent the King of kings and Lord of lords.

So the lessons we are learning in Proverbs are meant to show us how to live as God's ambassadors on earth. Here is where the problem comes in; Jesus called us to be servants and we are reluctant to obey Him and be servants.

Let me give you an example. You remember that church I used to pastor, the one that was so tough. (How tough was it?) It was so tough that even the deacons didn't really want to hear and obey God. I had a deacon that used to pray fervently in board meetings; he would go on and on, praying passionately. But like all of us, he would sometimes doubt whether God really heard his prayers. One night he was filled with doubt and in the middle of his prayer he opened his eyes, looked to heaven and shouted out, "Hey up there, can you hear me? Hey God, if You can really hear me, tell me what you want me to do with my life!" To all our amazement, a voice came from heaven and said, "I want you to help the needy and give your life for the cause of peace!"

Faced with more of a challenge than the deacon wanted, he answered, “Actually, God, I was just checking to see if you were there.” The voice from heaven answered with disappointment, “That’s alright, I was only checking to see if you were there.” My hope and prayer is that when God calls each one of us, He’ll find us not only there, but eager to do His will.

I kind of picture the context of this passage as graduation day with the professor giving his graduation address to his students. It’s almost as if Yoda is through training all the new Jedi’s and says to them as he sends them out into the world, “And may the force be with you.” Each of us has to decide whether we will follow the light, or whether we will give in to the dark side. Here is the main idea of this morning’s text: **LIFE CONSISTS OF ONLY TWO PATHS: ONE LEADS TO LIFE, THE OTHER TO DEATH.** For all of us here this morning, we must make up our minds who we will follow. Will we follow Christ, or will we follow the Devil?

I. THE LIGHT SIDE OR THE DARK SIDE (Vs. 1-14)
GODLY PEOPLE ENERGIZE THE COMMUNITY.

As verses 1-14 put it, we will choose to follow the light side or the dark side? It is an important choice because **GODLY PEOPLE ENERGIZE THE COMMUNITY.** Foolish people suck the life out of the community. They are a drain.

A. FOOLS ARE USELESS (Vs. 1-2 / 7-9)

Verses 1-2 and 7-9 illustrate how fools are useless. Let us start with verses 7-9: Wisdom is out of the fool’s reach. When people gather together, the fool really has nothing positive to contribute to the conversation. If they keep their mouths closed, they may go unnoticed, but if they open their mouths, they will give themselves away as being fools. Now the context of verse 7 is interesting, it is political. The city gate was where the city’s leaders gathered to make important decisions and judgments. In fact, that was often the place where court cases were tried. If you

want to ensure the ruin of a country or a city, just place fools in leadership positions. The Apostle Paul warned Timothy to be very careful of whom he put in leadership roles.

Now go back with me to verse 2. Fools are defined as people whose hearts plot violence and whose lips talk about making trouble. Fools are people who are so self-centered and self-absorbed that they are against God. They are out only to promote themselves. They will gossip or plant ideas in peoples' minds about others. They are the masters of innuendo and they rarely have good things to say about anybody but themselves. Be very careful of having a fool close to you, because like the Proverbs have warned us over and over again, they will bring you down. They are filled with jealousy, ambition, and pride.

Look at verses 8-9. Fools are schemers, and because they are so subversive and divisive, their very lives mock God. I started this section by saying that fools are useless, but now that I have thought about it, they are worse than useless, they are downright destructive.

That is why the teacher warns us in verse one not to envy any success they may achieve or any talents they have. Don't aspire to be like them. But look at the further warning in the second line. We should not even desire to be in the same room with them. I think the teacher is warning us to stay as far away from fools as possible for they have great potential to divide and destroy the community.

B. WISE PEOPLE ARE VALUABLE (Vs. 3-6 / 13-14)

On the other hand verses 3-6 and 13-14 illustrate how wise people are valuable to the community. Let's start out by describing what wisdom is, where it comes from and what the benefits are. Just as honey is sweet to the mouth and satisfies our urge for sweets, so is wisdom sweet to our souls and satisfies the cravings of our soul. In another book of gathered poems, the Psalmists refer to God's words and God's commandments as sweeter than honey; whereby we find

God's wisdom in the Bible. Is that the way we approach Bible study, Bible reading, and Bible memorization, as if we crave them more than sweets? This is an important lesson for the wisdom school graduates. They must come to understand that even though there are many counterfeit forms of wisdom out there, the only true source of wisdom is the Bible. Wisdom is being able to know and understand God's laws and God's ways for living life -- and being able to apply them to everyday life situations. So again, let me emphasize this point, we can't be of use to anyone if we are not reading, studying, and memorizing our Bibles. If we are not reading, studying and memorizing our Bibles, we are just plain useless. But, if we do understand God's word and know how to apply it, we become a very valuable asset to ourselves and the community. First, look at the last two lines in verse 14: If we are grounded in God's word, we will live with great hope for our future. No matter what life throws at us, we will be able to weather the storms because our hope is if we stay faithful and grounded in God's word, we will prevail.

Next, look at verses 3-6: The progression is that wisdom goes from building a home, to a city, and ultimately a nation. Godly couples establish godly households. There is nothing more beautiful to see than young married couples dedicating their marriage to God. They set up a Christian household built on Christian principles; if each individual is committed to serving God, then they are both focused on this one goal, and what a joy it is to see them bring children into that kind of atmosphere. The children grow up feeling loved, safe, and secure. They grow up in an atmosphere where it is easy to learn and mature.

Further, in the ancient setting, a city and nation's destiny rested solely on the leaders giving good advice. It would be critical to know when to go to war, when to make a treaty, or when to simply walk away. Wise people are not driven by lust for power, lust for wealth, or lust for fame. Wise people are interested in serving God and serving the best interests of the people they serve. It

would be nice to see godliness and wisdom as requirements for politicians but remember that is not very likely in our day. However, it should be our concern as we elect and appoint church leaders. In the book of Acts, the Apostle Peter laid down two requirements for people elected to the office of deacon. They were to be filled with wisdom and filled with the Holy Spirit. These kind of mature, godly people are a real asset to the community. If you are a leader in the church, then you need to keep these qualities in mind. Perhaps as leaders we need to ask one another constantly how our Bible study is going and how our spiritual walk is progressing.

C. THE LORD ASSESSES EACH PERSON'S VALUE (Vs. 10-12)

But in the end, as verses 10-12 point out, the LORD assesses each person's value. The scenario set up in these verses reminds us that we often go around doing and saying things for show. We want to give this facade of holiness, but really we are not holy at all. We try to fool others and we are even good at fooling ourselves.

Let me take us through the scenario: First let me address the situation in verse 10; almost all of the commentaries I consulted interpreted this as a negative quality. They indicate that the teacher is saying, "Look, when the going gets tough and you hesitate, that proves how gutless you are," but given the context of the next two verses, I don't think so. Here is what I think is going on; there will come a time when we all stumble in our faith. We are going to be afraid, we are going to be fooled by Satan, and sometimes we will just give into sin. I think that is a plain simple fact that all of us who have been Christians a long time can attest to.

The key is that we must understand and acknowledge this weakness in ourselves for two reasons. We will be willing to extend grace to those who have fallen, we will not be judgmental. If you want to see a Christian who is full of sin, just look for the judgmental ones. They give themselves away.

Second, and more to the point of these two verses, we are to help those who seem to be falling or headed for a fall. But again, that requires us to be steeped in wisdom. A fool cannot rescue another fool. The blind cannot lead the blind. Someone who has no concern for the things of God cannot keep someone from falling. They can encourage one another, and hold on to one another all the way to hell.

Verse 12 shows how God will judge us. He looks at our hearts, knows our thoughts, and He sees our motives. We may ignore those who are weak or down and out and try to rationalize our failure to help. We may even have some pious reasoning, but God sees our hearts. We can fool others, hide from others, and perhaps even fool ourselves, but we cannot fool God. God judges us by our love. Do we love God's word, God's people, and God Himself? Or do we love ourselves, this world, and our lusts? Society, culture, and even church people may think we are all wise. But they don't count. God is the One who assesses value. It's important to be wise because: **GODLY PEOPLE ENERGIZE THE COMMUNITY.** So just like in the "Star Wars" saga, fools – people who have given themselves over to folly, the dark side -- are dangerous and harmful to the community. But further, those who align themselves with the force -- God's Kingdom and purpose -- are a real blessing to the community. Let us devote ourselves this morning to being good Jedi's - - ambassadors and soldiers for Christ.

II. THE SOURCE OF LIGHT (Vs. 15-22) **GOD ENERGIZES THE RIGHTEOUS.**

As we look at all these movies that talk about spirituality, supernatural forces and powers, we must be careful to identify the One and Only True Light, Jesus Christ. Verses 15-22 help us to identify the source of light: **GOD ENERGIZES THE RIGHTEOUS.** It is God, the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is God, existing as One -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- that we

worship. When God is the One energizing us, there is nothing or no one in all of creation that can keep us down.

A. KNOCKED DOWN BUT NOT OUT (Vs. 15-16)

Verses 15-16 remind us that there will be many times when we will be knocked down but not out. One of the characteristics of an authentic Christian is not how many times we get knocked down, but how many times we get up. Look at verse 15: This is a warning to people, angels, demons, and Satan himself. Do not find yourself standing against God's chosen children. Why? Because as verse 16 points out, we will always get up to serve God again. For those of you out there, who have come to believe in this health and wealth type of gospel, please look at this verse? The number 7 in the Bible represents fullness and completeness; in this case it is infinite. But God has infinite power and if we are knocked down an infinite number of times, God will see to it that we get up an infinite number of times ... plus one! In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul says that nothing in this world or the next -- not death, not sickness not poverty, not persecution, not angels, not demons, not hell -- can ever separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus. We are more than conquerors.

Life will knock us down, we will get sick, people will betray us and we will struggle with sin. But each time we get knocked down, we will get up, because God energizes His children, and empowers us to go on. He will complete the good work He started in each one of us.

B. PAY NO ATTENTION TO THE WICKED (Vs. 17-20)

But we must not get confused, sometimes we think we can or must do it on our own. Verses 17-20 command us to pay no attention to the wicked. I think these four verses contain a very important principle for us to get straight: When I say, "Pay no attention to the wicked," I really do mean, "Pay no attention to the wicked." Sometimes we get caught up in being jealous or

envious of what others have, especially if they are wicked people. We envy movie stars, singers, sports' celebrities, and politicians, and then we wonder why we don't have much.

Look at verse 17 because this is really the test of whether we are content with God or if we are still drawn to this world. It says that we are not to be happy or gloat when these rich or powerful people fall. If we are happy when rich and powerful people crash, then that means we have been envious of them the whole time.

Here is the point, plain and simple; do not pay attention to the wicked, to the rich and the powerful. We must learn to be content with where God has placed us and what He has given us. We should never look around to see who has more. That creates envy and it creates a desire to get more and be more like them; it entices us to the dark side.

Instead, we should be constantly looking to see who has less than us so that we can

Share our blessings with them. Pay absolutely no attention to the wicked.

C. PAY ATTENTION TO GOD (Vs. 21-22)

Verses 21-22 encourage us to pay attention to God. We are to fear God and be faithful to those we serve, whether at home, at work, or in our public life. Paul said to obey the laws of our land and Jesus said to give due respect to our government. The message is that we are to keep our eyes focused on Jesus. In another one of his poetic books King Solomon said, "Fear God and keep His commandments, for that is the whole meaning of life." Again, we have been seduced by our dark side into thinking all the things in this world can make us happy. We need to continue to force ourselves to take our attention off this world and off the rich, the powerful, and the wicked and fix our eyes squarely on Jesus. That will put all of life into perspective. Remember and let us continually look to see who has less than we do so that we can share all our blessings with them. That is what leads to a righteous lifestyle, and remember: **GOD ENERGIZES THE**

RIGHTEOUS. Referring back to our “Star Wars” analogy, if we keep our eyes focused on Jesus, it will enable us to feel the force of righteousness. And no matter how many times we get knocked down, we will always have one more “stand up” in us. God’s children will always get up one more time.

III. WALKING IN THE LIGHT (Vs. 23-34) **GOD’S ENERGIZED PEOPLE WALK SUCCESSFULLY THROUGH LIFE.**

Really, this next section summarizes the point of wisdom literature. Verses 23-34 instruct us on the topic of walking in the light. The promise of following wisdom is this: **GOD’S ENERGIZED PEOPLE WALK SUCCESSFULLY THROUGH LIFE.** If we continue to let God’s Holy Spirit control us, guide us, and empower us, we will live successful lives. Here, success is defined as living lives that are pleasing to God. The “Thirty Sayings” were completed in verse 22 and verses 23-34 seem to be a summary of these teachings.

A. WALKING IN THE LIGHT (Vs. 23-29)

In this chapter, verses 23-29 describe people walking in the light. Again, I want to point out that many commentators think this whole section, starting in chapter 22, verse 17, has to do with the training of future political and religious leaders -- especially as interpreted in verses 23-26; it appears to be directed to those who have civil and religious authority. The warning here is twofold: First, if we find ourselves in any position of authority, we must be fair in our decisions. In church especially, there should be no cliques or favored groups. We are to minister to all people as they have need. There should be no partiality in decision-making.

Second, we are to work for social justice, we should stand up and speak against all forms of prejudice, whether racial, gender, economic, or cultural. I am not advocating political activism, but I am saying wherever we meet injustice, we need to stand up against it. Look at verse 26: The kiss was a form of community and familial intimacy; it represented love, loyalty, and care. When we

stand up for one another, when we help one another, and when we make fair decisions, we are welcoming one another into the community of love. So these verses seem to be directed to future leaders of the community.

But let us go on. If we look carefully at verses 27-29, we can easily see that these commands apply to us common folk as well. Verse 28 is connected to verse 26 by the way we use our lips (speech). When leaders insure justice, people are welcomed into the community. We as citizens of heaven must be honest in our testimony as well. Just as leaders are not to show any favoritism, or prejudice, so too we are called to be honest in our dealings with each other. We are not to lie about neighbors, gossip about others or talk about others behind their backs. Watch out for people who talk about others because when you are not there, you can be sure they are talking about you. I have become more and more convinced that I, as a leader and as a member of the community, need to call people on this. We need to be honest and loving towards one another.

Second, there is absolutely no place for personal revenge in the Christian community. Not only are we not to take revenge, but as we discussed earlier this morning, we are not to be happy when our enemies get what they deserve. Jesus told us never to take revenge. Jesus told us to pray for our enemies and love them. When Jesus was being tortured and killed by His enemies He prayed, "Father forgive them." Jesus was able to do this because He was filled with power from heaven.

Which now brings us to verse 27? We need to use our energy to clean our own house. I don't know about you, but I really don't have enough time or energy to worry about the sins of anyone else. Identifying, acknowledging, and defeating the sin in my own life is a full time job that takes all of my time and energy. I need to finish the work on my own house. I must plow the fields of my heart so that when the gospel seed falls on it, it is soft enough to receive it. I must continue

to keep my house swept clean. Jesus said that when the demons leave our lives, we must keep the house full of the Holy Spirit and His word, lest the demons come back with friends.

People, who are walking in the light, rarely have time to focus on the sins of others. Let us keep singing the old gospel song to ourselves over and over again, “It’s not my brother, not my sister, but it’s me O LORD, standing in the need of prayer.” If all of us were individually getting closer to God, we would naturally be getting closer to one another. If we walk in the light, we will find our way.

B. WALKING IN DARKNESS (Vs. 30-34)

However, if we continue walking in darkness as described in verses 30-34, we will continue to wander around lost. This section is rich with all the characteristics of great proverbs, they are pithy, they are clever, and they drip with sarcasm. The teacher says, “I took a little walk around town the other day, and it struck me, as I passed by the house of this lazy fool, that all I saw was a garden overgrown with weeds and no vegetables. His house was in shambles and even his fence was broken so all the farm animals ran away. How could someone be so stupid?”

As a pastor, I see this every day. I see proud fools, arrogant fools, stubborn fools, going about their everyday lives as if everything is fine. The problem is that their lives are in shambles. They are spiritually bankrupt. I really want us to think about this because it is critical. The fool in this proverb thought everything was fine, but in the end he was going to starve to death.

Many of you come here week after week and say, “That was a good message.” But the problem is that not many of us come to realize that the message is for us. We think the message is for my mother or father, my son or daughter, my sister or brother, a friend, a neighbor, or coworker. But the message is for you. The message is for me. There are many of us who come to church week after week and think we are so holy, but in reality we are walking on the dark side. I don’t

want anyone to raise his or her hand but how many of you can say that your primary and your single focus in life is serving God? If you cannot, then let us continue with verse 32. The teacher says, “After seeing the state of affairs of this fool, I reflected on it and learned some lessons.” I am really hoping that we take some time to reflect on these truths as well.

Verses 33-34 contain a proverb of real distinction in my mind, it says it all. Are you lazy about reading your Bible? Are you negligent in studying your Bible? Are you lax in praying? Do you make all sorts of excuses for not memorizing your Bible? I’m sure this applies to many of us here this morning. We have Sundays school before church each Sunday, not many attend. We have many small group bible studies, not many attend. We have Wednesday evening prayer meeting, not many attend. We have all sorts of discipleship opportunities, not many participate. We have plenty of opportunities to serve. We will see how many attend the job fair dinner in October.

Oh I know we are very busy people and we don’t have time for all this religious stuff. We need some down time, some rest. Please listen to the master poet: “A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest – and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.”

Putting our spiritual lives on hold is a clear recipe for disaster. I don’t know what we are waiting for. Perhaps single people are out there living the worldly life. They say, “I’ll get my spiritual life in order when I get married.” Married couples say, “I’ll get my spiritual life in order when we have children.” Parents with children say, “When the kids grow up, I’ll have time to get my spiritual life in order.” And, I don’t know what retired people are doing, but they still don’t have time to develop spiritually. I don’t know what your excuse is this morning and God knows I’ve had plenty of them during my lifetime. But it is critical to walk in the light because walking in

darkness leads to misery, confusion, and death. It is only: **GOD'S ENERGIZED PEOPLE WHO WALK SUCCESSFULLY THROUGH LIFE.**

Again, let me reemphasize this; we are expected to pursue God's wisdom. We are expected to get it and live it. **LIFE CONSISTS OF ONLY TWO PATHS: ONE LEADS TO LIFE, THE OTHER TO DEATH.** Choose wisely, and may the force be with you. Or I should say may God be with you?

I have said that a good test of how we are doing is to see if we are looking at those who have more than we do and envy them, or if we look to see who has less and try to bless them.

In his commentary on Proverbs, Paul Koptak tells this story of Michael J. Fox's battle with Parkinson's disease.

In a recent television interview, the actor Michael J. Fox spoke about coming to terms with his diagnosis of Parkinson's disease. He went through all the stages of grief: denying, raging, bargaining, drinking to beat depression, and finally coming to accept the limitations of his life. He said the illness shook him out of the fantasy of living in a world that only answered "Yes," and pushed him to confront the conflicts he had with friends and family that the fantasy produced. Recognizing that his powers were not unlimited, he turned his attention away from the world of accomplishment and acquisition toward starting a foundation to keep the disease from exacting its toll on others.

Fox also identified the irony that the losses that came with the illness also brought gains of insight and maturity. Purposefully moving in his seat to minimize the involuntary motions that come with Parkinson's, he said, 'When I could not be physically still, I finally learned to become inwardly still.' If the fantasies of a powerful and acquisitive life can seduce an actor to a sense of exaggerated self-importance, we can see that it would easily tempt others to actually wish others evil or even plot violence and harm. "It is better," say the sages, "To steer clear of any envy of power that destroys; instead, embrace the power that builds and establishes."

The theme of walking in the light is, "It's not my brother, not my sister, but it's me O LORD... standing in the need of prayer."