

# STOP YOURSELF!

PROVERBS 25:1-28

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# STOP YOURSELF!

Proverbs 25:1-28

This morning we are going to start a new section in the book of Proverbs. This section will start at verse 1 of chapter 25 and carry us through the end of chapter 29. These may be more Proverbs that Solomon edited into this collection or perhaps they were copied and added by wisdom writers about 250 years later.

The theme of the chapter we are looking at this morning has to do with self-control, which is really ironic considering the two kings involved. Both kings, King Solomon and King Hezekiah were good and righteous kings. In fact they were known for their wisdom and their dedication to God. However, both ended their lives tragically because of their lack of self-control. Hezekiah fell to a lust for fame, Solomon to a lust for sex.

You know I get up here week after week, year after year and preach about putting life in perspective. If we really want to mature in our Christian walk, then we must be warned by this morning's text and the failure of the authors to live up to their own message. I was reminded of this very message this past week. I had just completed my morning devotions and was ready to face the world, when I noticed that one of the jobs that was supposed to be completed on our house was done incorrectly. Right away, I went nuts. I was ranting and raving and going absolutely nuts; when in reality, it only took two phone calls and 5 minutes of my time to straighten it out. These messages are clearly for me. I hope you too will take them to heart.

Like I said last week, the problem with most of us is that we think the message is for someone else, but the tragic ending of Solomon and Hezekiah's lives should be a warning to all of us. But alas, that's not usually the case.

You remember the church I used to pastor, the one that was so tough? It was so tough that even the deacons were unwilling to take these warnings seriously. After preaching one of these convicting sermons about sin, one of my deacons came into my office and said, "Pastor, I been doing a lot of bad things and my conscience is bothering me." I said, "That's great. So you want me to give you some help on strengthening your will to do right?"

The deacon said, "Oh no. I'd rather you give me something that would weaken my conscience."

I'm hoping that's not the case here.

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You know, sometimes I think we Christians have become lazy in our Christian walk. Somehow we think we can just sit back, and things will magically happen. We often don't experience victory in our spiritual lives, because we don't exercise our spiritual muscles. Here is the main idea of this morning's text. **STRENGTH COMES FROM LIVING A SELF-DISCIPLINED LIFE.** In other words, we get physically strong by working and pushing our muscles further and further each day. If we don't use our muscles, they will atrophy and become useless. That's the same principle for strengthening our spiritual muscles. We must work them and push them. That takes a lot of self-discipline and self-control.

I know there are many people who hear and read my sermons who may think that I have it all together, that I am some sort of spiritual giant who has it all together. But for those of you who really know me, you know that is not the case at all.

In fact, I have to talk to myself regularly. For example, I make myself stop-cards to help me break my negative thinking patterns. When I catch myself thinking wrongly or negatively, I pull my stop-cards out. On one side, I have written, "Stop! Stop it John! Stop it right now!" I say this out loud, and then flip the card over. On the other side I have written Philippians 4:4-9. I then read it,

*"(John,) <sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again (John): Rejoice! <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*<sup>8</sup>Finally, (John), whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. <sup>9</sup>Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you (NIV)."*

We can only become spiritually strong if we are willing to be disciplined enough to work at it. Self-control is critical in our spiritual strength training.

## **I. SELF-CONTROLLED BEHAVIOR (VS 1-10)**

*We Must Be Disciplined Enough To Pursue Our Love For God,  
God's Word, And One Another.*

Verses 1-10 illustrate the need for us to exercise self-controlled behavior. In other words, **WE MUST BE DISCIPLINED ENOUGH TO PURSUE OUR LOVE FOR GOD, GOD'S WORD, AND ONE ANOTHER.**

### **A. LOVING WISDOM (1)**

Verse 1 is a strong reminder to love wisdom. Look at verse 1. It says, *“These are more proverbs of Solomon, copied by the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah.”* Two of the Hebrews’ greatest kings are mentioned in this one verse. King Solomon reigned over all of Israel from about 970-930 B.C. and King Hezekiah ruled over Judah from about 715-686 B.C. King Solomon built the temple for God and religion flourished under his rule. By the time King Hezekiah came on the scene about 250 years later, there was no interest in Judaism at all. The nation of Israel had started following all sorts of crazy religions. They had even started sacrificing their children. King Hezekiah brought revival to Israel. He started to worship the One True and Living God, Jehovah. He smashed all the altars of false gods, cleaned up the temple and remodeled it. He reestablished the priests and Levites as religious leaders and then held a Passover, blowout celebration, like none the nation had experienced since the days of King Solomon. There was military safety during both kings’ reigns and economic prosperity. Both kings pursued wisdom and righteousness. Both kings realized early in their tenures as king that dependence on God was what guaranteed wisdom and prosperity.

If these are actual proverbs of Solomon that the scholars are copying here, then these proverbs had been preserved for over 250 years. They had dedicated themselves to the pursuit of wisdom.

Now we have seen this theme throughout Proverbs. If we want to grow, if we want to mature, if we want to become strong in our faith, we must be disciplined enough to read, study, and memorize our Bibles. If we were to go to the gym, without a clue as to what we were doing, and just started picking up weights and doing crazy exercises, the chances are that we would hurt ourselves and do ourselves a lot of harm. If we want the most effective exercise, we should study up on it first, check our plans out with a knowledgeable trainer, and then exercise according to good, solid, safe routines.

That’s the way it is with our spiritual lives. There are so many phonies out there peddling spirituality, that we must be careful. I don’t even want you to take my word for it. That’s why I hand out outlines. You can take them home after hearing the sermon and check out in the Bible if what I said was true or false. If we want to become strong spiritually, we must love God’s Word. We get to know God and His will for us as we immerse ourselves in the Bible.

### **B. LOVING GOD (2-5)**

Verses 2-5 remind us that our primary relationship in life ought to be focused on loving God. Let’s deal with these verses in pairs. Verses 2 and 3 are a couplet and verses 4 and 5 form a couplet. Verse 2 begins and ends with the phrases, *“glory of God,”* and *“glory of kings.”* The

word “glory” in Hebrew means heavy. In other words glory means weightiness. In Greek the word glory means reputation. We are interested in what God is noted for and what kings are noted for. God is famous for being far beyond our comprehension. In another one of his poetic books, King Solomon wrote, *“God has set eternity in our hearts, but He has withheld from us the ability to understand it.”* In other words, since we are created in God’s image, there is this deep down desire in each one of us to understand God and be like Him. Yet because we are born into sin and earthbound, we don’t have the categories to even begin to understand Him. God is famous for being far beyond our ability to understand Him.

Kings are famous for their ability to get to the bottom of issues. For example, kings should set up judicial systems that ensure careful investigation of crimes and procedures for bringing criminals to justice. But if we were to quickly peek down at the end of verse 5, the primary concern of a king should be to seek out the will of God. Kings should be concerned about knowing God, loving God, and obeying God. It is in the nature of God to hide Himself from the world and to reveal Himself to people who diligently seek after Him. It is our job to dedicate our lives to knowing God, loving God, and serving Him. Jesus said that if we hunger and thirst to know God and His righteousness, we will not be disappointed.

And this is a lifelong pursuit. God is higher than the heavens and deeper than the seas. But look at this interesting statement at the end of verse 3. It says that the hearts of kings are unsearchable. It really is hard for us to look at others and figure what’s going on in their lives, isn’t it? We can never really know what’s going on inside of one another. Only God Who is higher than the heavens and deeper than the seas can look into human hearts to find out what’s going on. When people looked at King Solomon and King Hezekiah, they saw righteous and just kings. They were wise and they dedicated their lives to serving God. They both had great starts. They were humble and single minded. If that’s the case, how do we figure out their ends? King Solomon started marrying foreign wives and the Bible says they turned his heart away from God.

King Hezekiah had a fantastic reputation for being godly, humble, and single-minded in his service to God. However, one day, God told Hezekiah through the prophet Isaiah that it was time to die. Hezekiah pouted and bargained with God. God gave Hezekiah an extra 15 years. Hezekiah became proud and he wanted to become famous. He wanted worldly glory. So when the Royal Entourage came from Babylon, King Hezekiah showed them everything, the treasures in the temple, the treasures in the palace, all the military weapons, everything. The Bible says that he didn’t withhold showing them anything. God became angry with King Hezekiah for his pride and stated that after he died, Israel would be conquered by the Babylonians. Hezekiah told the prophet Isaiah that was acceptable and the Bible tells us what was in Hezekiah’s heart. He reasoned that it was all good since the Babylonians wouldn’t conquer Jerusalem until he was dead, buried, and gone.

Who could ever figure that after all this wisdom, Solomon would be brought down through sexual scandals and Hezekiah through a lust for power and fame? Both were self-absorbed and self-serving. The results were devastating to the country. After Solomon died, there was civil war and the country split in two. After Hezekiah died, the country was conquered by Babylon. Does it all sound too modern for us?

Politicians are easy targets in our day. But let's continue on with the next couplet. Gold and silver become valuable as all the impurities are burned out and removed. Pure gold and pure silver become very valuable to the jeweler. If a king wants to be a good king who serves God faithfully, he must remove all the evil advisors around him. People who want to serve the king come with all sorts of motives, but perhaps the most common motive is ambition: the lust for power. If a king or a president could surround themselves with advisors with pure motives, the country would flourish. But as long as there are self-serving advisors and politicians, there will never be justice in a country.

If we want to become strong and if we want to become a force for righteousness, then we first must come to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength. We must discipline ourselves to love God. Part of this discipline should be to filter out ungodly messages. We need to learn to turn off the television, to surround ourselves with godly men and women who encourage us to do good. We must carve out time in our schedules to pray and develop a rich devotional life.

### **C. LOVING OTHERS (6-10)**

Verses 6-10 remind us that Jesus taught us that loving others is one way we can demonstrate our love for God. These verses contain warnings through negative commands. The warnings are, do not exalt yourself, do not be presumptuous, do not be in a hurry to accuse someone, and do not betray someone's confidence. The consequences for such behavior are public humiliation, public disgrace, and a long lasting bad reputation. If we were to state these in the positive, we should be humble, forgiving, and confidential with one another's problems. If we follow this course of action, we will find ourselves being publicly praised, publicly acclaimed, and we will find a good reputation following us around. We must be disciplined in loving and reaching out to our neighbors. In this age of self-gratification, we are called to put our own lusts aside to love others. The Apostle Paul tells us the way to develop this type of attitude is to first of all focus on the life and death of Jesus, then consider others more important than ourselves. We are to love others with as much intensity as God loves us. If we want to get strong and stay strong spiritually, **WE MUST BE DISCIPLINED ENOUGH TO PURSUE OUR LOVE FOR GOD, GOD'S WORD, AND ONE ANOTHER.** This type of exercise requires us to read, study, and memorize our Bibles. It requires us to spend time with God in prayer and meditation. It requires us to find ways to serve

one another in love. This portion of the exercise requires us to bring our behavior and our attitude under control.

## II. SELF-CONTROLLED SPEECH (VS 11-15)

*We Must Be Disciplined In How We Speak.*

Verses 11-15 encourage us to be self-controlled in our speech. In other words, **WE MUST BE DISCIPLINED IN HOW WE SPEAK**. This has also been a theme repeated throughout the book of Proverbs. We have said this before but it's worth repeating here. What comes out of our mouths is a direct reflection of what is going on in our hearts. Whatever our hearts are filled with, will ultimately make its way out of our mouths.

### A. THOUGHTFUL WORDS (11-12)

Verses 11-12 remind us that our words should be thoughtful. The rest of this chapter is going to be characterized by the poetic formula, "This is like that." Look at verse 11 as an example, "*A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.*" In order to catch the full force of the truth taught, we must understand what it's being compared to. The phrase, "Gold apples in settings of silver," is describing some sort of valuable ornament. It could be a pure silver basket, containing solid gold apples. You can imagine how costly that is. Or it could be an exquisite piece of jewelry, perhaps a cluster of golden apples surrounded by silver. At any rate, it is extremely beautiful, exquisite, and valuable. That's how priceless thoughtful words are. Knowing what to say in a particular situation brings real joy to those around us. And by thoughtful I don't just mean words of praise or words of comfort. Sometimes thoughtful words are words of rebuke. I can tell you in my own case, I don't like to be in superficial relationships. I like my friends to be straightforward. If I have boogie on my nose, I want them to just tell me, "John, you got boogie on your nose." I like to be in relationships where we share joys, successes, and failures together. I like relationships that are straightforward. If you can help me be a better person, and see something that I can correct, by all means just tell me. There are not many things in this world that are more valuable than thoughtful words, spoken to the right situation in love.

### B. TRUE WORDS (13-14)

Part of the formula for speaking thoughtful words is learning to speak true words in verses 13-14. I think that thoughtful words focus on how we say things and addressing the correct issue. These verses focus on speaking the truth. These two verses contrast one another. Verse 13 illustrates the refreshing effect people who tell the truth have. Now keep in mind, it is telling the truth in love. These are people who are not pretentious, they don't try to hide the truth, and they don't misrepresent themselves. They are humble, gentle, and straightforward. How refreshing is it to be around these genuine people? Have you ever been outside doing yard work on a hot summer

day? You are dry and dirty. There is nothing like a cool drink. The taste, the sensation, and the satisfaction you get from that drink are how refreshing it is to be around genuine people.

Let me speak frankly to all of us here this morning. Let's quit pretending we're something we're not. Let's quit pretending that we're smart, or successful, or self-sufficient. Let's quit flattering one another. Let's get into some real meaningful relationships, and learn to be honest, open, and genuine. Why?

Look at verse 14. Pretentious people and fake people are like clouds that look like they'll produce rain, but don't. This is kind of hard for us to understand as city dwellers, but people who come from agricultural areas understand it. If they don't get rain during the growing season, the crops will die. Just think if you needed to depend on what you could grow to eat. And let's say there hadn't been rain in a while. Your crops are in danger of dying and you are in danger of starving to death. All of a sudden, the air gets cool, dark clouds roll in, and you are relieved only to be disappointed as the clouds pass over and don't drop a bit of rain. That's how disappointing pretentious people are. That's how spirit-breaking proud, self-centered people are. They talk a good game, but in the end, they can never hold up their end of a good relationship. These people are like prostitutes. They hold out the promise of love, but in the end, can never really deliver.

### **C. TIMELY WORDS (15)**

Genuine people are humble, transparent, loving, and truthful. In addition to that, their sense of timing is perfect. Verse 15 describes timely words. I can always tell when people are not really interested in what I'm saying. Why? Because they're not listening. It seems as though they are simply thinking about what they want to say when I'm through talking. People have pat answers for everything. You will be spilling your guts out to them, and before you're even finished, they have the answer. And there are people with all sorts of agendas. They want to accuse you of things before they even have the facts. Good timing is everything. Being good empathic listeners will enable us to speak the right word at the right time. It takes a lot of practice and it takes a lot of self-control to be genuine and speak the truth in love. **WE MUST BE DISCIPLINED IN HOW WE SPEAK.** Wouldn't it be nice to be surrounded by people who knew the Bible and how to apply it to everyday situations? Wouldn't it be nice to be around people who loved God and loved one another? Wouldn't it be nice to be around people who were genuine and spoke the truth in love? Sure it would. We can identify these people by the way they live.

### III. SELF-CONTROLLED LIFESTYLE (VS 16-28)

#### We Must Be Disciplined In How We Conduct Ourselves in Everyday Life

Verses 16-28 remind us that we must demonstrate self-controlled lifestyles. In other words, **WE MUST BE DISCIPLINED IN HOW WE CONDUCT OURSELVES IN EVERYDAY LIFE**. Have you noticed that this morning's message is a lot about self-control? Just think about this with me for a moment. Self-control is included in the fruit of the Holy Spirit. If we are believers, then we have the Holy Spirit. If we have the Holy Spirit, we have the fruit of the Spirit. If we have the fruit of the Spirit, we have self-control. If that's the case, then all we need to do is be disciplined enough to exercise our self-control. Before we get into this whole section, look at verse 16 and verses 27 and 28. They frame this section. If you stuff yourself with too much of any good food, you'll vomit. People, who don't know how to control their appetites, whether they are food, alcohol, sex, or any other appetite, will end up swimming in their own vomit. We must learn to exercise discipline and self-control in our lives.

#### A. BE SENSITIVE (16-20)

Verses 16-20 remind us to be sensitive. Verse 17 warns us not to overstay our welcome. In some sense this is literal. Don't always be going over to your neighbor's house. You will overstay your welcome in a hurry. The Italians have a saying that company is like fish. It's nice for a couple of days, but after that it starts to stink. I think that goes for paying our way as well. Pastors used to have a notorious reputation for being freeloaders. I make it a practice to always pay my way. Don't be a mooch. Don't be a freeloader. Learn to carry your weight. Verse 18 again reminds us to be truthful. That is to be coupled up with verse 19. Be dependable. I want to be a person that other people can count on. I want to be the type of person that when the chips are down, you can count on me. How about you?

But as verse 20 points out, in order to be these types of people, we must be sensitive to what each other's needs and state of mind are. Listen. It's impossible to be sensitive to others if we are all caught up in our own little world. If we are self-absorbed, we cannot rejoice with those who are rejoicing and mourn with those who are sad. That's why I have warned us over and over again to stay away from self-absorbed people. They are as painful to be around as someone pouring salt into a wound or taking your coat away on a freezing Chicago winter day. They will leave you exposed and hurt.

#### B. BE GRACIOUS (21-22)

Verses 21-22 encourage us to be gracious. We have come across this theme before. It is not for us to look for revenge. Judgment is in the hands of God. This verse doesn't say that we should keep making ourselves vulnerable by people who have hurt us allowing them to hurt us again. It

encourages us to forgive them and allow God to deal with them. We ought to be kind to those who have hurt us, but again, that doesn't mean we allow them to hurt us again. The principle is that we forgive them in the sense that we don't seek revenge and that we will do them no harm. However, it doesn't mean we open the door for them to hurt us again.

### **C. BE AGREEABLE (23-26)**

Verses 23-26 remind us to be agreeable. It is very unpleasant to be around disagreeable people. If this is not wrong, that's wrong. They don't like this. They don't want to do that. It's really a pain to be around these types of people. Listen. Let me give us all a reminder. If you are a disagreeable person, please go off somewhere and live life by yourself. You're a drain to be around and you suck the joy out of life for everyone around. Oh and please be sure and not tell anyone you are a Christian. Look at verses 25 and 26. We expect Christians to be pleasant. We expect Christians to be full of joy, sensitive, gracious, loving, and agreeable. We expect Christians to be a breath of fresh air and a drink of refreshing water.

But if we're not, then we are like the spring that has been muddied or the well that has been polluted. We go to a spring or a well expecting to find a drink of cool, refreshing water. But instead we find dirty, smelly, polluted, undrinkable water. Being disagreeable and a pain to be around are not expected of a Christian. Here is a clue. If people shun you or don't want to be around you, the chances are you are a disagreeable person. Learn to be agreeable. It shouldn't be hard if we just stop and think about all the blessings God has given us.

### **D. BE DISCIPLINED (27-28)**

And again, to sum it all up in verses 27-28, we must be disciplined. Look, it's easy to just let our appetites and our lusts drive us. It is easy to be selfish, self-centered, and self-absorbed. It's easy to be proud and pretentious. But the wisdom writers warn us not to take the easy road. We must draw on the self-control given to us by God's Holy Spirit. We must learn to work at living self-controlled lifestyles. Because the church's reputation is at stake, **WE MUST BE DISCIPLINED IN HOW WE CONDUCT OURSELVES IN EVERYDAY LIFE.**

I think this morning's message is meant to demonstrate to us that it takes a conscious effort to live godly lives. We must be self-controlled. We must be disciplined because **STRENGTH COMES FROM LIVING A SELF-DISCIPLINED LIFE.**

The Bible warns us over and over again that we must be diligent in living the Christian life. Not being self-controlled and not taking seriously the warnings of the wisdom writers can lead to tragic endings. In his book ***A View from the Zoo***, Gary Richmond, a former zoo keeper says this:

*“Raccoons go through a glandular change at about 24 months. After that they often attack their owners. Since a 30-pound raccoon can be equal to a 100-pound dog in a scrap, I felt compelled to mention the change coming to a pet raccoon owned by a young friend of mine, Julie. She listened politely as I explained the coming danger.*

*I'll never forget her answer. 'It will be different for me. ... He just wouldn't.'*

*Three months later Julie underwent plastic surgery for facial lacerations sustained when her adult raccoon attacked her for no apparent reason. Bandit was released into the wild.”*

The wisdom writers have warned us that it takes self-control and discipline to live a strong, healthy Christian life. Many of us think we can dodge the bullet and are lazy in our approach to our spiritual lives. But like Julie found out with her pet raccoon, sin will jump up and bite us as well.