

UNDERSTANDING YOUR NATURE

PROVERBS 27:1-27

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

OUR CHARACTER IS DEVELOPED AS WE LEARN TO UNDERSTAND AND INTERACT WITH PEOPLE AND SITUATIONS ACCORDING TO GOD'S DESIGN

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Last time we were together, we talked about 3 major obstacles that stand in the way of our becoming mature in Christ. We found out that pride, laziness, and apathy always seems to catch us by surprise. In other words, we really do want to enjoy that abundant life that Jesus promises, yet we often miss it because we are proud and arrogant, lazy or apathetic. We often get distracted by the things of this world.

On the other side of this coin is this morning's text. We are given some very practical tips on how we can develop our character. In other words, since we are to continually become more like Christ, this passage will help us to mature by examining our nature and the nature of helps God has given us.

Sometimes it is downright painful to examine our natures. 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 my first Sunday preaching was a good indicator of what my relationship with the congregation was to be. On the very first Sunday at the church, the deacons thought they would have some fun with me. Everybody in the church had nametags with their occupations written beneath their names. On my name tag, the deacons wrote, "Rev. John Carlini, 'Hog caller.'" During the service, the deacons came up, welcomed me, and pinned my nametag on. The whole congregation got a big laugh as the deacons pinned me. "Hog caller," I said, "I am usually referred to as the Shepherd of the sheep, but I guess you know one another better than I do."

We don't often like to be confronted with a good hard look in the mirror. I know that it is painful to examine my nature as well.

If we have a cavity or a toothache, it is often painful to think of going to the dentist. However, if we go, the dentist will fix the problem and we will no longer experience the pain of the toothache. If we want to grow and mature as believers, we need to take a look at where we are, where God wants us to be, and move forward. Once we get started, we find that the journey is not as painful as we first thought.

Here is the main idea of this morning's passage: **OUR CHARACTER IS DEVELOPED AS WE LEARN TO UNDERSTAND AND INTERACT WITH PEOPLE AND SITUATIONS ACCORDING TO GOD'S DESIGN.** That sounds simple enough. It almost sounds like a study in philosophy. In one sense that's true. We are going to learn about the nature of things. But unlike the world of academics, we are invited to look at where we stand in relation to these areas in regards to our character development.

I. THE NATURE OF THE OTHER (VS 1-6)

The Other Is Meant To Be An Objective Measure Of How Our Character Is Developing.

In verses 1-6 we are introduced to the nature of the other. In other words **THE OTHER IS MEANT TO BE AN OBJECTIVE MEASURE OF HOW OUR CHARACTER IS DEVELOPING.** I have some classmates who are pastors. When we get together, I ask them, "Now after about 25 years in the ministry, what do you think about it?" Some of them respond, "The ministry would be fantastic, if it just weren't for people." Existential philosophers talk about one of the primary ways of being we must live with is "being in the world with others." Why is this so important? Because "the other" tends to give us a perspective of the world that is not our own. For example, most of us think that the way we think and the way we do things are the right way. But when we are forced to live and interact with others, we often find ourselves in conflict because they think and act differently. Our natural inclination is to say that we are right and they are wrong but it seems as though God gave us one another as a means of developing our character.

Before we get into the study of these verses, let me just point out that the whole passage from verse one through verse 22 are meant to be read in pairs. In other

words, verses 1-2 go together, 3 and 4, 5 and 6, etc. Verses 23-27 make up a poem about the stewardship of creation.

A. PRAISE (1-2)

Verses 1 and 2 remind us that praise should come from the other. If you are a regular bible reader, you will notice that the New Testament book of James quotes verse 1 here. The principle in these two verses seems relatively straightforward. We shouldn't go around tooting our own horn. We should leave it up to others to promote us. In other words, we should be humble. We understand that, don't we? Nobody likes to be around a braggart. We have all been on dates in our lives where our date only wanted to talk about herself or himself and really wasn't interested in us at all.

But I think if we take time to read these two verses of poetry a little more closely there is a deeper lesson here. Remember, Hebrew poetry is based on the parallel thoughts and words of each line. Verse 1 tells us that we are not to boast about tomorrow. Verse 2 tells us we are not to boast about ourselves. Why are we not to boast about tomorrow? The second line in verse 1 says that we are not to boast about tomorrow because we have no clue as to what tomorrow holds. That begs the question, "Well who does know what tomorrow holds? Who does hold our future?" The answer is of course, "God." I can make all sorts of plans and promises concerning tomorrow, but in reality, I don't even know if I'll be alive tomorrow. Only God knows.

Here is where it gets interesting. If verse 2 parallels verse 1, then the other who is supposed to praise us is God. There are two principles here. First, we are not the ones who make the rules. You and I are not gods in our own worlds. Ultimately, God is the judge. He will determine if what we are doing is worthy of praise or not. Secondly, God speaks through other people. Keep this in mind. We are all created in the image of God and if we are believers, God lives in us. Jesus identifies with us like this, "If you do it to the least of my brothers or sisters, then you have done it unto me." The other reminds us that we are not gods in our own world. We are accountable to God and to one another. The other is God's gift to us. Yes, we must remember the practical command here not to ever toot our own horn. If we have done something praiseworthy, we are to let someone else give us kudos. If we don't get them here, we must remember that God sees and He will take note. Praise is meant to come from a source outside ourselves.

B. ANGER (3-4)

Likewise, there is also a negative reminder that we are in the world with others. Verses

3-4 remind us to stay away from angry people. I don't know why this should be, but as uplifting and energizing as it is to be around people who give us praise, it is equally draining and demoralizing to be around angry people. If we compare the two verses, we can see that the poet is identifying fools as angry, cruel, furious, jealous people. Look how depressing it is to be around these people. It is like carrying a heavy stone in your arms in front of you and a load of sand on your back at the same time. Either one of those are a real burden to carry. But both together will kill you. As I talk with friends from my generation, we have made this observation over and over again. The young people today have a sense of entitlement, and since they can never get all they want, they are jealous, angry, cruel, filled with rage, and violence. Now this doesn't describe every young person, but this spirit permeates the youth culture of today. Stay away from people who are angry, filled with rage, and envious of others. They are dangerous to be around. If we relate this to the first two verses, we could say that in praise, the other reminds us of the existence of God. In rage, the other reminds us that Satan is alive and at work in the world.

C. CORRECTION (5-6)

In verses 5-6 we are reminded that in correction, the other reminds us that we have a long way to go. We live in a phony culture. We are all very careful to be politically correct. So for the most part, our natural way of being in the world is that we are all basically full of crap. We say nice things to everyone and compliment people when there is really nothing to compliment them about. Even in church we really do baby one another. These two verses say that we are really no use to anyone in this way.

The Apostle Paul stated very clearly that the Christian community is knit together by truth and by love. If we are going to mature, if we are going to build character in ourselves, then we must be willing to both speak the truth in love and receive the truth in love. That takes both courage and humility. We can not leave truth out because then we will be just trying to make one another feel better without any real growth. We must not leave out love, lest we become judgmental and self-righteous. The other is God's gift to us. We are God's gifts to one another. **THE OTHER IS MEANT TO BE AN OBJECTIVE MEASURE OF HOW OUR CHARACTER IS DEVELOPING.**

II. THE NATURE OF INHERITANCE (VS 7-12)

Our Character Matures As We Understand That Our Inheritance Is Much More

Than Money.

Verses 7-12 describe the nature of our inheritance. We have a very narrow view of inheritance in the United States. We tend to think of inheritance as money, property, and valuables. **OUR CHARACTER MATURES AS WE UNDERSTAND THAT OUR INHERITANCE IS MUCH MORE THAN MONEY.** The other night my wife and I were out with our children. Luing and I were talking about going on vacation. Maribeth said to Joe, “There goes another piece of our inheritance.” I responded, “What inheritance? I’m going to try to make my money and my life end at roughly the same time. In fact, I would like to die with a little balance left on my Visa bill.” You see, we tend to think of inheritance in terms of monetary wealth. However, the bible’s view of inheritance and value is much broader.

A. YOUR FATHER’S HOME (7-8)

Verses 7-8 remind us that your father’s home is a valuable inheritance. These two verses have a lot to do with understanding Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son. We all tend to be like the Prodigal Son. When we are young we think living under our parents’ supervision is stifling. We really don’t appreciate how good we have it. In Jesus’ story the Prodigal Son was bored living with his father. He wanted to go out into the world and live la vida loca. It was only when he went broke, when all his so-called friends deserted him, and he was eating with the pigs, that he realized how good home was. That really is true for children who come from good homes, but it is even truer when we apply this to our home in Christ. Jesus told this story for two illustrations. First of all, the Father was longing for His son to come home. If you are wandering around the world, confused, and eating slop with the pigs, know this. God is waiting for you to return home. Leave that crazy, self-destructive life, and come back to God. He is waiting for you. If you haven’t found home in God yet, give your life to Jesus this morning. God longs for you.

And secondly, Jesus wanted to teach that we must have a heart to come home. God will not force us. As much as He loves us and longs for us, the choice to come home is up to us. If you want to come home and be in a right relationship with God, simply do this:

1. Confess to God that you are sorry for doing things your own way and ignoring Him.
2. Ask Him to forgive you of all your sins.
3. Ask Him to come into your life and take over as Lord.

4. Believe that Jesus died for your sins and rose from the dead.

That is the road to home. We stand to inherit the family home. We will live in heaven for an eternity. But from the Proverbs practical point of view, we must learn to appreciate all the benefits of growing up in a Christian home.

B. YOUR FATHER'S FRIENDS (9-10)

Verses 9-10 remind us of the value of your father's friends. When our children were young, they never wanted to spend time with my friends or my contacts. They were bored, and since my kids grew up being the center of attention, they usually didn't like being with me and my friends because the focus of attention was not on them.

But now that they are grown and have cars and things that need to be serviced, they call me up and ask me for one of my "guys." I think my daughter really understands how valuable her father's friends can be. She always says, "Dad, before you die, you need to pass on your Palm Pilot with all your 'guys' in it." The point is that we need to realize that we live in community. We need to be noble enough to contribute to the community and humble enough to draw from the community. The poet warns us not to look for distant relatives for help. If we have assimilated into the community, then we should have all the support we need in place. Think about how this can multiply as the generations go on. Your father passes on his guys. You develop relationships and now add your guys to your father's guys, and pass all of them down to your children who will hopefully add more to this list. It takes character to belong to and participate in a community.

But again, let me take some liberty with the text and apply it to the Christian community. God has His "guys" too. If you are a believer, then God has given you a spiritual gift, natural talents and abilities, and all sorts of resources. We belong to His body, His community, the church. We are to contribute to the community by serving one another with our strengths, and we are to draw on the community for our weakness. What an inheritance we pass on to our children if we can introduce them to the community of faith. We pass on our "guys" to them.

C. YOUR FATHER'S WISDOM (11-12)

And verses 11-12 remind us that your father's wisdom is a valuable inheritance. Here the practical and the spiritual are one. As believers, we have received God's Holy Spirit. We have the bible and we have the church. When parents live godly lives before their children and when they introduce their children to the godly life, they are passing

down something infinitely more valuable than silver or gold. Again, God has given us His Spirit, His Word, and His church to assist us in living holy lives. If we live holy, upright lives, we will find joy, bring joy to our parents, and joy to God our Father. **OUR CHARACTER MATURES AS WE UNDERSTAND THAT OUR INHERITANCE IS MUCH MORE THAN MONEY.**

III. THE NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS (VS 13-22)

Learning to Embrace Good Relationships While Staying Away From Bad Ones Develops Character

All of us have experience in the next topic the poet brings up. We know the joy of being in good relationships and the pain of bad relationships. Verses 13-22 describe the nature of relationships. **LEARNING TO EMBRACE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WHILE STAYING AWAY FROM BAD ONES DEVELOPS CHARACTER.**

A. BAD RELATIONSHIPS (13-16)

Let's look at what constitutes bad relationships in verses 13-16. Now again, I want you to get the hang of reading poetry. Verses 13-14 are a pair. What does lending money to a guy who is involved with a prostitute have to do with a neighbor who is loud and making a lot of noise outside your window early on a Saturday morning? They both lack good sense and discretion.

1. Immoral

Immoral people make for bad relationships. Look at verse 13. The warning is not directed at the person having sex with a prostitute. The warning is aimed at the friend of the guy having sex with the prostitute. This guy is looking to borrow money from his friend to pay off a prostitute he has already had sex with. Why is being in a relationship with an immoral person a bad proposition? Because an immoral person has little or no morals. He is playing by a whole different set of rules. I have been a pastor now for well over 25 years, and this is one phenomenon I will never understand. A husband will cheat on his wife, and perhaps give her a sexually transmitted disease. He will even lie and vehemently deny it. But in the end, he will confess it, and ask to be forgiven. I want to say that in virtually every case, the wife took him back. The guy has proven himself to be an adulterer, a cheat, and a liar; yet, the woman closes her eyes and goes

on as if nothing happened. And in almost every case, the guy is going to cheat and lie again. As a chaplain in the military, I have had to watch women suffer and die because their husbands had affairs and then came home and gave them the AIDS virus. In my opinion, any man or woman having an affair should be tried for attempted murder. Immoral people have no morals. For them “right” is what benefits them and “wrong” is what makes life difficult for them. Stay away from immoral people.

2. Self-Centered

Secondly self-centered people make for bad relationships. Really, they are not much different from the immoral people. They are only concerned for what makes them feel good, valuable, and important. They really don't care about others. They have no problem just using others. Don't get involved with self-centered people.

3. Negative

Thirdly, negative people can kill a relationship quickly. Look at verses 15 and 16. Again, let me emphasize this as we study through these examples. This is not directed at women. In general, this is about being with people who never seem to be content. Being with negative people can drain you. They complain about this person or that circumstance. They will always find something wrong, no matter where they are or what they are doing. It is impossible to fight back the draining affect their negativity has. I like verse 16. Trying to be in a happy relationship with a negative person is like trying to hold back the wind. Today we would say something like, “Trying to be happy in a relationship with a negative person is about as smart as spitting into the wind.” And the second illustration is just as graphic. Just think about the contests we have seen where kids chase greased pigs and try to hold on to them. Or we have all had oily hands and unsuccessfully tried to pick up a spoon or something. Well take that one step further. Hold your hand out, pour oil on it and try to catch the oil. It is doubly impossible. The Proverbs have said this over and over again. Negative people suck the joy right out of life. It is impossible to enjoy life while being in a relationship with a negative person.

B. GOOD RELATIONSHIPS (17-18)

But Verses 17-18 give us some characteristics of a good relationship. Verse 17 says that good relationships are built on accountability. In other words, we should be in equally yoked relationships.

1. Accountable

Deep relationships must be built on mutuality, and the primary thing we must hold in

common in an accountable relationship is the Lord Jesus Christ. I have many non-Christian friends, but in the end, they cannot give me what I need. Good relationships are built on helping one another become better people in Christ. That is why we are so emphatic and passionate about the fellowship department here at Devon. It is our passion that everyone be involved in a one to one discipleship relationship and a small group. We grow as we challenge one another.

2. Diligent

Secondly, diligence is a quality that builds good relationships. Did you ever have people who promised to do something for you and then never seem to quite get around to it? Relationships take a lot of hard work. If people are not putting as much into the relationship as you are, then you need to be out of that relationship. So if you want to be a good candidate for a relationship, learn to be available, accountable, and diligent. As we learned last time, that applies to our relationship with God as well.

C. TESTED RELATIONSHIPS (19-22)

As verses 19-22 point out, all relationships will be tested. Verse 19 describes one test as looking into a mirror. Verse 21 describes the furnace as a test to determine the purity of precious metals. Verses 19-20 call on us to do self-reflection. The test is contentment. We are invited to get quiet before God and ask ourselves, “Am I content with life? Am I content with where God has placed me and with what He has given me?” If my heart is content, that indicates that I am right with God and headed for eternal life. On the other hand, if I am not content with life, that is a good indication that I am not right with God. Satan is the one who fills us with lust. We want more and more of the earthly things. We will never be satisfied. Death and Destruction, Hell and Hades are never satisfied. They always want one more soul. Don’t let them have yours. Learn to be content with where you are. The only thing that really matters is who you’re with. Being with God should bring complete contentment.

This brings us to the second test, the fire. Going through difficult situations has a way of bringing out our true nature. Keep this in mind. If we are believers, if we are truly God’s children, then no suffering that we are facing has caught God by surprise. Even though God is not the cause of all our suffering, it cannot be in our life without His permission. And if He has allowed it in our life, it is to develop our character. God gets rid of faulty thinking, faulty behavior, and faulty attitudes in our suffering. He develops patience, perseverance, confidence and love in us during these times. The Apostle Paul tells us that God works all things for good to those who belong to Him. James tells us to rejoice when suffering comes our way because God can build character in us

through it.

But that is certainly the catch. Self-reflection and suffering build strength and character in those who are in a good relationship with Christ. But for the fool, no amount of self-reflection or suffering will help. You can beat them to dust and they will still be proud, lazy, apathetic, and angry. The self-reflection and suffering will only make them bitter. When testing comes, make sure to be in a right relationship with God. **LEARNING TO EMBRACE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WHILE STAYING AWAY FROM BAD ONES DEVELOPS CHARACTER.**

IV. THE NATURE OF STEWARDSHIP (VS 23-27)

Learning To Care For God's Creation Develops Character.

The poet has summarized the nature of many things. In verses 23-27, he will summarize the nature of stewardship. This is something we have forgotten.

LEARNING TO CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION DEVELOPS CHARACTER. We are consumers. We don't care much about the environment. We live in a throwaway society and when we ask people to be environmentally conscious it is as if we are violating one of their God-given rights. Let me just remind us that it is our God-given right and God-given command to care for the creation. God created and has placed us as stewards of this creation.

A. THE PRINCIPLE OF STEWARDSHIP (23-24)

The principle of stewardship is described in verses 23-24. The principle is that nothing lasts forever. Resources are not unlimited. And this principle can be observed in the human order as well. Empires as powerful as the Egyptian, the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the Greek, the Roman, and the European empires only lasted a short time in history. Even our own country is a little more than 200 years old. Empires rise and fall. The usual reason they fall is that they are not cared for or looked after. The leaders and elite drain the empire of its resources, putting nothing back into them, and because of neglect and abuse, they fall. Nature is the same way. We can see all sorts of things happening to our world because of our abuse and greed. Animals are becoming extinct, the rain forests are disappearing, wars are being fought over oil, and there are great famines worldwide. In reality, there is plenty of food to feed every person on the planet but because of politics, religious fanaticism, and wars, food will never reach

many people. We have worldwide AIDS epidemics and no one really cares. The principle is this. Resources are limited and need to be cared for. There is plenty to go around if we are not simply callous and greedy. Take care of the world and your neighbor. I know that my wife has a heart for orphans in the United States and around the world so she supports some. We can sponsor children through World Vision and other reputable organizations. We need to learn to recycle. One of my friends taught me not to take a bag when I don't need one. I know this is very hard for many of us to stomach, but we are stewards of God's creation. We own no part of this earth. It belongs to God.

B. THE RESULTS OF GOOD STEWARDSHIP (25-27)

Think about the results of good stewardship as described in verses 25-27. If we learn to harvest, replenish, and use the principles of biblical Sabbath, there will always be crops. If we properly care for animals, we will have plenty of food and clothes. There will be plenty. **LEARNING TO CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION DEVELOPS CHARACTER.**

As we learn to be good stewards, we demonstrate our humility in confessing that everything in all of creation belongs to God. As we learn to embrace good relationships while avoiding bad relationships, we demonstrate a desire to pursue holiness. As we learn to value the things God values, we will spend our time chasing after the right things. And as we start to value the other, we will learn to truly love God and one another. Understanding the nature of the other, of our inheritance, of relationships, and of stewardship, and relating to them God's way makes us more like Christ. **OUR CHARACTER IS DEVELOPED AS WE LEARN TO UNDERSTAND AND INTERACT WITH PEOPLE AND SITUATIONS ACCORDING TO GOD'S DESIGN.**

Listen, we live in a culture where it is not fashionable to be godly. In other words, our culture does not value things like humility, mutual concern for one another, godliness, honesty, and good stewardship. In fact, if we are truly living like Jesus wants us to, we will probably be mocked. Kent Keith gives us the attitude to have †:

- 1. People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. Love them anyway.*
- 2. If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Do good anyway.*
- 3. If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies.*

Succeed anyway.

4. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.

5. Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway.

6. The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest people with the smallest ideas. Think big anyway.

7. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.

8. People really need help, but may attack you if you do help them. Help them anyway.

9. People favor underdogs, but follow only top dogs. Fight for a few underdogs anyway.

10. Give the world the best that you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you have anyway.

Discipleship is not a popular concept in our culture because it requires hard work, humility, and diligence. People will tell us we are crazy for allowing God to build character in us so that we start to look like His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Follow hard after Christ anyway.

Bibliography

† *The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council*
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