

Proverbs Week #71 (7:1-27)

Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call insight your intimate friend, to keep you from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words... and now, O sons, listen to me, and be attentive to the words of my mouth. Let not your heart turn aside to her ways (the forbidden woman); do not stray into her paths, for many a victim has she laid low, and all her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death. (Prov 7:4-5, 24-27)

In light of today's Torah portion (Num 22:41-25:9) it seems fitting to take a close look at the entire chapter 7 of Proverbs and seek to write its lessons on our hearts. Numbers 25:1-6 records Israel's moral failure and idolatry with the daughters of Moab. What Balaam could not do in pronouncing a curse on Israel he accomplished by providing counsel that enticed Israel to sin. He was hired to curse Israel and God kept him from pronouncing those curses. We have an account of the words that were spoken on various mountaintops. We do not know exactly what Balaam counseled Balak afterwards, but we do know that he did give advice. Speaking of the women of Moab Moses says, "Behold, these, on Balaam's advice, caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of the LORD." (Num 31:16) As far back as the garden, the enemies of God have sought to take things God meant for good and pervert them.

At what age do we prepare our children to be careful in relationships? I want to suggest that we learn, put into practice, and teach the principles of right relationships from the start. When my daughters were young I tried to emphasize that the things they were learning were not just for them alone. I wanted them to look to the day (Lord willing) that they had children of their own. The lessons we teach (or fail to teach) will impact our children's future relationships. They will be like seeds that grow into full plants. Our need is to make sure that we are selecting the right seeds and consistently demonstrating and teaching right relationships based upon God's revealed plan for marriage, family, and the wider community.

I struggled, again, in preparing this teaching with how to present this apparent adult idea as a family lesson. Its themes of a woman who is unfaithful and uses her words to tempt a young man seem like a lesson without application to those who are still young. It is not until they are older that we would expect them to face these types of temptations. Once again, the more I thought about the value of this lesson the more I was convinced that wisdom must be learned before the time comes when it is needed. The proverbial father didn't necessarily expect his son to understand the depth of everything he had to teach, but he did urge him to "be attentive to the words of *his* mouth" (Prov 7:24). As Joseph stored up grain in preparation for the famine that God foretold, we too must be wise and store up God's instructions for ourselves and especially for our children.

In Psalms we read, "Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together." (Psalm 131:1) In Genesis we read, "The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (Gen 2:18) This week the son is warned about a woman who is wicked and takes something God meant for good and perverts it. He is warned to stay away from her (a similar lessons might be taught to daughters concerning the dangers of strange men).

We as a community must always place a high value on strong marriages and families. Our children need to witness the power of God in relationships that start in covenant faithfulness and remain faithful. The marriage covenant is a foundational building block of community. May we as parents and grandparents set the best examples we can, with God's help, so that our children will see strong role models of faithfulness for them to follow and respect.