

Proverbs

Dealing With Fights

Lesson #7 for February 14, 2015

Scriptures: Proverbs 17-19; 1 Corinthians 13:5-7; John 8:1-11; Deuteronomy 24:10-22.

1. This lesson challenges us to think about our top priorities. For many in the world, their priorities are wealth, power, pleasure, fame, etc. As we know, these things can be fleeting and deceptive. An ancient Egyptian proverb said: "Better is bread with a happy heart than wealth with vexation."—Miriam Lichtheim, *The New Kingdom*, vol. 2 of *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), p. 156.
2. So, what are our priorities? Is having a good relationship with a number of friends and peace within our families more important than having a large bank account? What is the real basis for happiness?
3. Read Proverbs 17:9; 19:11. If you want to have friends, you must be willing to overlook their foibles. This certainly does not mean that we should encourage people to sin! But, when people do sin and especially when they sin against us, we must be willing to forgive them. Holding a grudge is one of the quickest ways to destroy a relationship. Losing one's temper does not help either.
4. One of the problems of dealing with sins in friends or acquaintances is that for many it is exciting to tell about someone else's faults! Proverbs 18:8 and 26:22; *GNB* say: "Gossip is so tasty – how we love to swallow it!" Is that the way we treat our friends?
5. I once saw a cartoon showing two ladies talking over the back fence. The first one said, "Have you heard...?" Her neighbor responded, "I'm sorry; but, I don't pass along gossip." Whereupon, the first lady responded, "So, you are the bottleneck!"
6. Gossips are right in the middle of one of the longest list of evildoers in the entire Bible. (Romans 1:28-32) Is gossip sometimes true? Or, is it always false?
7. So, what does it mean to cover the mistakes of our friends? This is not to imply that we do not know what happened or that the person never did anything wrong. What it means is to forgive them and move on. Our response to such cases should be to extend our love. (Proverbs 17:17; 1 Corinthians 13:5-7)
8. While this may not be the view of those standing at the marriage altar, anyone who has been married for some period of time will recognize that we do not love friends—or spouses especially—because they are perfect; we love them despite their problems, mistakes, and flaws. Haven't we ever messed up and been very thankful for those who freely forgave us?
9. True love is not blind. Sinning and even making mistakes has consequences. The Hebrew word for *justice* (*shalom*) also means righteousness, and includes the ideas of love and charity. Real compassion means that we put our arms around the sinner; but, we expect them to improve. Jesus said: "I do not condemn you either. Go, but do not sin again." (John 8:11, *GNB*) Why do we have such a hard time correcting our mistakes?
10. Read Proverbs 17:10; 19:25. What do we do with those who have a hard time correcting their mistakes? Why is it that fools seem to have such a hard time learning even from corrections including beatings?
11. The best example to follow is always the example of Jesus. While He felt pain every time He observed or even became aware of a wrong action being done, He was still very

considerate toward sinners. Read John 8:1-11. Look at what Ellen White said about that experience.

This was to her the beginning of a new life, a life of purity and peace, devoted to the service of God. In the uplifting of this fallen soul, Jesus performed a greater miracle than in healing the most grievous physical disease; He cured the spiritual malady which is unto death everlasting. This penitent woman became one of His most steadfast followers. With self-sacrificing love and devotion she repaid His forgiving mercy.

In His act of pardoning this woman and encouraging her to live a better life, the character of Jesus shines forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness. While He does not palliate sin, nor lessen the sense of guilt, He seeks not to condemn, but to save. The world had for this erring woman only contempt and scorn; but Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope. The Sinless One pities the weakness of the sinner, and reaches to her a helping hand. While the hypocritical Pharisees denounce, Jesus bids her, "Go, and sin no more."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 462.2-3.

12. Read Proverbs 18. This particular chapter focuses on the use of words and the results of the use of those words. Unfortunately, fools speak before they think. It is better to think first! It is interesting to note that the words *listen* and *silent* are spelled with the same letters! How many problems could be avoided if people would learn to listen carefully before responding?
13. Read Proverbs 18:4. Why is it that the words of the wise are sometimes compared to deep waters? Why do some words imply wisdom and others imply foolishness? We know that deep waters tend to run quietly and appear to be not moving very fast. Do we always consider carefully the consequences of our words before we speak them? (See Proverbs 18:21.) How words are understood also depends on the tone of one's voice, etc.
14. It is an old but true adage that there are at least two sides to every story. Read Proverbs 18:2, and compare Proverbs 18:17. Fools are described in these passages as people who have closed minds and open mouths. What a deadly combination!
15. The wise are those who are willing to listen to other people's opinions and consider them carefully before responding. Only God does not need a second opinion.
16. Have you ever been absolutely certain about something only to find out later that you were wrong about it? What should that teach us about judging others prematurely?

A king needed to appoint a new minister to the highest office of his kingdom. For this purpose, he organized a special contest on lying: who could utter the biggest lie. All his ministers applied, and each one came and spoke their biggest lie. But the king was not satisfied; their lies seemed lame. The king then asked his closest and most trusted counselor: "Why didn't you apply?"

The counselor answered, "I am sorry to disappoint you, Majesty, but I cannot apply."

"Why not?" asked the king.

"Because I never lie," the counselor replied.

The king decided to appoint him to the position.

As sinners, lying comes to us easier than we think; for this reason, again, how careful we need to be with our words. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Thursday, February 12)

17. Read Proverbs 17-19. Look at some of the comments about lying found in those three chapters. Quotations are from *GNB*.

17:4 - Evil people listen to evil ideas, and liars listen to lies.

17:7 - Respected people do not tell lies, and fools have nothing worthwhile to say.

17:19 - It is better to be poor but honest than to be a lying fool.

19:22 - It is a disgrace to be greedy; poor people are better off than liars.

19:5 - If you tell lies in court, you will be punished—there will be no escape.

19:9 - No one who tells lies in court can escape punishment; he is doomed.

18. Lying is a terrible trait. What do we gain by doing it? It may seem to provide a temporary escape from condemnation or consequences; but, it virtually never works out in the end.

19. The Bible speaks repeatedly about how we should deal with the poor among us. This applies especially to widows and orphans. Read Deuteronomy 24:10-22.

20. Consider what Proverbs 17-19 (*GNB*) say about riches and poverty.

17:5 - If you laugh at poor people, you insult the God who made them. You will be punished if you take pleasure in someone's misfortune.

18:4 and 19:4 - Rich people are always finding new friends, but the poor cannot keep the few they have.

18:11 - Rich people, however, imagine that their wealth protects them like high, strong walls round a city.

18:23 - When the poor speak, they have to beg politely, but when the rich answer, they are rude.

19:1 - It is better to be poor but honest than to be a lying fool.

19:7 - Even the relatives of a poor person have no use for him; no wonder he has no friends. No matter how hard he tries, he cannot win any.

19:10 - The LORD is like a strong tower, where the righteous can go and be safe. ¹¹Rich people, however, imagine that their wealth protects them like high, strong walls round a city.

19:17 - When you give to the poor, it is like lending to the LORD, and the LORD will pay you back. (Compare Matthew 25:31-46.)

19:22 - It is a disgrace to be greedy; poor people are better off than liars.

21. Notice these comments from Ellen White about the evil of gossiping.

The spirit of gossip and talebearing is one of Satan's special agencies to sow discord and strife, to separate friends, and to undermine the faith of many in the truthfulness of our positions. Brethren and sisters are too ready to talk of the faults and errors that they think exist in others, and especially in those who have borne unflinchingly the messages of reproof and warning given

them of God.

The children of these complainers listen with open ears and receive the poison of disaffection. Parents are thus blindly closing the avenues through which the hearts of the children might be reached. How many families season their daily meals with doubt and questionings. They dissect the characters of their friends, and serve them up as a dainty dessert. A precious bit of slander is passed around the board to be commented upon, not only by adults, but by children. In this God is dishonored. Jesus said: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me." [Matthew 25:40] Therefore Christ is slighted and abused by those who slander His servants.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 195.0-1. [Content in brackets is added.]

22. How should we deal with problems that we detect or that affect our families, spouse, or friends? Some people try to deal with these things by pretending that they never happened. Is that the best way to do it? We need God's help in this area. If you pretend like it did not happen, are you encouraging them to sin with impunity?
23. One of the most serious problems in our world today is the problem of divorce. God hates divorce. (Malachi 2:16) Why do you think it is that the divorce rate among Christians and even among Seventh-day Adventists is virtually the same as the divorce rate in the world? Does that say something about how we choose our partners to begin with? Or, is it a better indication of how selfish we really are? Why were Nehemiah and Ezra separating husbands and wives in their day? (Ezra 10:1-17; Nehemiah 13:1-3, 23-31) What happened in Noah's day? (Genesis 6:1-4)
24. How often do we lie without even thinking about it? Have you ever gone to work or to school feeling quite sick and had someone ask you, "How are you?" Perhaps you responded, "I'm fine." Is that a lie? It is certainly not revealing the full truth!
25. Read Proverbs 19:3. How often do we do foolish and stupid things and then find ways to blame the Lord? I deal every day with people who have serious medical problems. One of the most common problems in America today is obesity. There is a famous quotation from a doctor discussing the problems of obesity with one of his patients. He asked the patient what he was going to do about the problem. The patient responded by saying: "I'm sorry, Doc. Obesity just runs in our family." Whereupon the doctor responded by saying, "No! The truth is that nobody runs in your family."
26. After studying this lesson, can we identify words that stir up strife? Are we prepared to make the changes necessary in our lives that will allow us to live happier, healthier lives?
27. Why do people fight over money? Is money ever the source of happiness? In our society, we all need at least some money. Let us not question that point. But, beyond meeting our basic needs, money so often leads to contention. Are there some things that are worse than poverty? Why is it that marriages and family relationships among the rich and famous so often end in divorce court?
28. Human relationships are built on words and attitudes and all that goes into our communication. Are we choosing words that build up and do not tear down?
29. How many of our troubles are self-created? Do we take full responsibility for everything we say and do? Are we ever tempted to lie or bully? No one likes a liar or a person who bullies. Could you put together a list of the most dangerous words that people use in

fighting with their spouse, families, or even friends? Should we try to avoid such words? What words personally offend us the most?

30. For those of us who believe in the great controversy over God's character and government and Satan's attack on God, it should be clear that the basic problem that leads to fights is selfishness. Try to think of the contentious encounters that you know about or that you have been personally involved in recently. How did things work out? Or, did they?
31. Proverbs 17 can be divided into three sections: (1) Good words that build relationships (Proverbs 17:1-10); (2) Evil words that destroy relationships (Proverbs 17:11-22); and (3) The cause of evil words (Proverbs 17:23-28).
32. Thoughtful Christians often ask themselves, "What would Jesus do?" But we do not like to discuss the fact that Jesus basically lived a life of poverty. Now, it is true that He had a lot of friends, and they were more than happy to care for Him financially. (Luke 8:1-3) It is also true that He had the resources of the universe available to Him. But, He began His ministry without even a place to lay His head. (Matthew 8:20) And when He died, He apparently owned nothing more than a few pieces of clothing. Why do you think that was?
33. Read Proverbs 18. This chapter is organized into groups of two or three statements. See Proverbs 18:10-12. How foolish is it for a Christian who knows what the Lord can do for him to turn instead to depending on his wealth? If we could learn to be totally trusting of God and having faith in Him, would we need to worry so much about having enough money? Proverbs 18 assures us that a good family (Proverbs 18:19), a good wife or spouse (Proverbs 18:22), and good friends (Proverbs 18:24) are precious gifts from the Lord and worth more than gold.
34. Rich people often flaunt their wealth and presume power because of it. Why do we not like that behavior but still want to be like them in having more money?
35. Read Proverbs 19. What virtues are extolled in this chapter? What kind of lives do the people live that are honest, patient, educated, willing to forgive, and have good marriages? Wouldn't that be a recipe for happiness?
36. In light of what we have read in Proverbs 17-19 and studied in this lesson, why is it that there are so many people in our world still acting like fools? How many people end up sacrificing their eternal lives for wealth, status, security, and power?
37. One day, hopefully not far in the future, the Devil will try to destroy everyone who is on God's side by preventing them from buying or selling. (See Revelation 13:16-18. Compare 14:9-11.) What good will our money do us then? Or, in order to hold onto our money, will we be willing to accept the mark of the beast? Remember the words of Jesus who said: "Will you gain anything if you win the whole world but lose your life? Of course not! There is nothing you can give to regain your life." (Matthew 16:26, *GNB*; See Mark 8:37.)
38. So, what do you think? Would you rather be rich? Or, happy, with lots of friends? Is that a choice that we have to make?

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