

Gaining Wisdom by Savoring Proverbs

The purpose of this seminar is to gain wisdom. The elderly are reputed to have more wisdom than the young, but the consolations wisdom brings to life diminish if we do not cultivate this gift. We need to taste the sweetness of wisdom and savor its goodness. As divine Scripture says, “The wise man savors the proverb.”

Proverbs are a literary device that directs our attention to the consequences of following or disregarding a rule of our life. For example, “A stitch in time saves nine” urges us to attend to and mend a fault right away, lest it become greater. The wisdom is not in knowing how to sew, but in the knowledge that some things in our life, a relationship perhaps, require constant monitoring and maintenance. Savoring a proverb means mulling over its implications for our lives.

The wiki article “Proverb” gives you background information on the nature of proverbs. More useful perhaps is the Wikipedia article “Book of Proverbs.” I recommend you use this article to guide your selection of proverbs to present and discuss in the seminar. A simple, but very useful interpretation of Proverbs can be found in the book Proverbs: Pathways to Wisdom, by Dominick S. Hernandez. It is inexpensive (about \$10 new, \$3 used) and should be easy to obtain.

Of course, you may wish to present proverbs from other, more contemporary sources. I recommend “The 50 Most Useful English Proverbs You Should Learn Right Now” by Kerry Sullivan.

Poor Richard’s Almanac by Benjamin Franklin is a readily available source of proverbs. You may have to separate the proverbs from other items in the Almanac such as weather predictions, recipes, and jokes.

Here is a sample of seven proverbs from **Wit & Wisdom From Poor Richard’s Almanack**. How much wisdom do you find in this selection?

1. Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.
2. Haste makes waste.
3. Love your Neighbour; yet don't pulldown your Hedge.
4. He that lies down with Dogs, shall rise up with fleas.
5. Hunger never saw bad bread.
6. He's a Fool that makes his Doctor his Heir.
7. He that has not got a Wife, is not yet a compleat Man.

By contrast examine seven proverbs taken from The Book of Proverbs:

1. The way of the wicked is like darkness
They know not on what they stumble.

2. The stranger-woman's lips drip honey,
smoother than oil her open mouth.
But in the end she's as bitter as wormwood,
sharp as a double-edged sword.

3. My son, if you stood pledge for your fellow man,
gave your handshake to a stranger,
you've been ensnared by your mouth's sayings.
trapped by your mouth's sayings.

Do this, then, my son, and escape,
for you have fallen into your fellow man's grasp,
go grovel, and pester your fellow man.
Give no sleep to your eyes
nor slumber to your eyelids.
Escape like the deer from the hunter,
and the bird from the fowler's hand.

4. Go to the ant, you sluggard,
see its ways and get wisdom.
For she has no foreman,
no taskmaster or ruler.
She reaps her bread in summer,
stores up her food at the harvest.

These proverbs are told by a father to his son. The message of the first is religious. The wicked walk in darkness, they stumble on their way because they do not see the light of God. Proverbs numbered 2, 3, and 4 however, are down to earth. They urge the young man to avoid common mistakes, and to be diligent in providing for his needs. Do they speak wisdom or common sense?