



PROVERBS

SKILL IN THE ART OF LIVING

PART NINE – “ON WISDOM & SILENCE”

By Pastor Ricky Stephen

Proverbs 10:19; 12:16; 15:28; 25:2-3

1. Noise

The New Creation, Heaven, is described as a place filled with music. The hosts of heaven praise at the throne with celestial songs. If hell has a soundtrack, though, it's got to be noise. In Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*, a senior demon writes:

“Noise, the grand dynamism, the audible expression of all that is exultant, ruthless, and virile...We will make the whole universe a noise in the end.”¹

Modern life can sound hellish. With the internet in our pockets, we're subjects to unending content which holds little lasting value.

T.S. Eliot asks of 'the Word', as in God's Word, Jesus:

Where shall the word be found, where will
the word Resound? Not here, there is
not enough silence²

Many of us wish every politician, programmer and influencer meditated on the words of Proverbs 10:19:

*Sin is not ended by multiplying words,
but the prudent hold their tongues.*

If hell's soundtrack is noise, then Proverbs asks us of our words, actions and intentions: *Am I adding to the noise or making music?*

Proverbs teaches us, to live in harmony with God's good order, those who are wise show restraint.

The wise show restraint in three key areas: emotions, words and opinions.

2. Emotional Restraint: Getting Hit and Keeping Cool

*Fools show their annoyance at once,
but the prudent overlook an insult.*
Proverbs 12:16

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¹ Lewis, C.S. (21 Apr 2015). *The Screwtape Letters*. HarperOne. Ch. 22.

² Eliot, T.S. (n.d.). *Ash Wednesday*. EnglishVerse.com. https://englishverse.com/poems/ash_wednesday

If you've ever watched great fighters, you'll have learned an important lesson:

Being tough isn't about how hard you can get hit, but how hard you can get hit without losing your head.

Wise people can take a hit. Jesus didn't scream insults from the cross; He begged for the forgiveness of His executioners (Luke 23:34).

We get hit all the time - cutting words from our partners, passive aggressive emails, hurtful outbursts from our kids.

Proverbs 12:16 calls the wise person 'shrewd.' A shrewd person is, merely, someone who gets things done. They are cunning and have forethought.³

The Proverb is not saying the wise accept abuse. It's insinuating the wise know when to address something and when to overlook it for the good of what needs to get done. They make space to make sure they are addressing things with a cool head.

The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint, and whoever has understanding is even-tempered.
Proverbs 17:27

'Even-tempered' in Hebrew is literally 'Cool of Spirit'. Wise people are cool of spirit. Fools blow a lot of hot air. Shrewd people are cool like autumn breezes. Hence the other Proverb:

*Better a patient person than a warrior,
one with self-control than one who takes a city.*
Proverbs 16:32

Jesus demonstrated what it meant to be shrewd. Jesus covered over offenses and insults without losing his cool. When the persecution of the Jewish leaders began to ratchet up, Jesus revealed the source of His cool:

*Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself;
he can do only what he sees his Father doing,
because whatever the Father does the Son also does.*

²⁰*For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does...*

³⁰*By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear,
and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please
myself but him who sent me.*

John 5:19b-20 & 30

Jesus is not seeking to please Himself or, He'll say later in John, to please people. He's rooted in the Father's

love. We can also learn to be un-defensive when we are deeply rooted in the Father's love. We can, then, take a hit without striking back.

One of Jesus' most important anthropological statements was:

A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

Luke 6:45

When frustration or anger are our default setting, Jesus' question might be: 'What is going on in my heart?'

Like Jesus, the one to invite into this conversation is the Father. It is always appropriate to share our feelings with our Father in heaven, and always helpful to find a few good friends to process with too.

Because to be wise, and shrewd, we live in harmony with God's good order by practicing emotional restraint.

3. Verbal Restraint: Shut Your Mouth or Meditate on Your Answers

Proverbs is wisdom handed down from generations. The wisdom of the generations tell us: when tension is thick, when every word counts and you don't know what to say - Shut your mouth.

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*Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent,
and discerning if they hold their tongues.*

Proverbs 17:28

Silence in the face of adversity often triggers reflection, even apology.⁴

But when we do speak, or when we need to speak, we carefully consider our words:

*The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer,
But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.*

Prov. 15:28 (NASB)

The Hebrew word *hagah* (הָגָה) (HAH-gah or HAG-ah) (ponder/meditate) literally suggests murmuring to oneself, as if mulling things over under the breath. To *hagah* something is to intensely consider it. To ponder it and mull it over.

Because words create or destroy in the Biblical worldview (Genesis 1). So, the wise observe:

*From the fruit of their mouth a person's stomach
is filled; with the harvest of their lips they
are satisfied.*

Proverbs 18:20

Jesus' example is powerful here. One of the greatest gifts we've been given is His words. Even His rebukes, like the Woes to the Pharisees (Matthew 23:13-39), must have come from a deeply pondered and prayerful space.

Wise people live in harmony with God's good order by showing verbal restraint.

4. Opinion Restraint: The Standard for Royalty.

Finally, the wise practice opinion restraint.

²*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter;
to search out a matter is the glory of kings.*

³*As the heavens are high and the earth is deep,
so the hearts of kings are unsearchable.*

Proverbs 25:2-3

This Proverb assumes it is a king's duty to seek the truth. It also assumes the king's own 'heart' is not on display for the common person.

Royalty has a different standard, they can't air their opinions.

*Fools find no pleasure in understanding
but delight in airing their own opinions.*

Proverbs 18:2

When leaders air their opinions, it can create anxiety and confusion in a system. It undermines truth.

*A king who sits on the throne of judgment winnows all
evil with his eyes.*

Proverbs 20:8 (ESV)

To lead is to be in a place of judgment and requires the effort to winnow chaff from wheat. To winnow signal from noise.

This standard applies to all of us who belong to Christ. Scripture calls believers 'heirs' (Romans 8:17) and a 'royal priesthood' (1 Peter 2:9).

A lot of us get into trouble when we air our opinions on big issues. A wise person once told a friend:

'Don't own what God hasn't given you.'

We might be more respected and admired if we focused our greatest attention on the places God has given us authority—our families, our neighborhoods, our places of work.

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⁴ Waltke, B.K. (14 Oct 2004), New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1-15. Eerdmans. P. 95

Jesus practiced this opinion restraint to live in harmony with God's good order:

³⁰ *By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.*

John 5:30

5. In Harmony with God's Good Order

The Stoics compared human life to a dog tied to a moving wagon. The wagon represents providence—God's order. The dog can resist or cooperate, but it goes where the wagon goes.⁵

Proverbs offers a similar perspective. There is an order to the universe, there was a Word written from the beginning which governs this place, sure as gravity or the speed of light. When we speak of wisdom, we're not just speaking of hot tips to kill it at living. We're talking about running with the wagon and not against it. We're talking about going along the grain of creation.

We're talking about singing in harmony with God's good order.

I took a little bit of jazz in university. If you don't know, Jazz is a musical form based in improvisation. To 'solo' is to compose live, in the moment. My guitar teacher came to a few early performances, and I asked him how I did.

"Ricky, my wish for you is just that you'd go play in a weekly jam somewhere so you can get all the notes out of your system and then, when its time to perform, you could really think about what you're playing."

That's not the glowing review I was hoping for...

Thelonius Monk, Jazz Pianist, once told a saxophonist:

"You've got to dig it to dig it, you dig? Some music is just imagined. What you don't play can be more important than what you do play."⁶

Wisdom shows restraint to live in harmony with God's good order.

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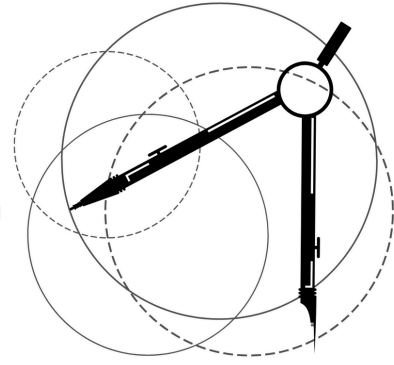
⁵ Attributed to Chrysippus (3rd Cent), quoted in various sources such as Cicero's De Fato.

⁶ Thelonius Monk's advice to a new sax player.

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Discussion



Reflection

1. Which of the Proverbs quoted above spoke most to you? How can you put it in a place where you can continue to ponder it?
2. How are you struggling with self-control in emotional outbursts? What is going on in your heart to make this happen?
3. Where might you practice silence in difficult situations? How can you remind yourself?
4. Where have you seen the damage of flippant opinion airing? Where do you feel tempted to do the same?

APPENDIX: HOW TO USE PROVERBS

This summer, our hope as a church is to steep ourselves in the wisdom of Proverbs. But this book invites a different approach than most others. The Book of Proverbs isn't meant to be speed-read—it's a book to sit with, to meditate on, to 'chew the cud,' as the rabbis would say.

- Chapters 1–9 serve as the introduction. They give us the book's purpose, a guiding epigraph (1:7), and ten speeches from a father to a son about wisdom. This section works well with a 'chapter-a-day' reading rhythm.
- Chapters 10–30 contain collections of short, poetic couplets. These proverbs are often loosely connected but are mostly designed to stand alone—ideal for slow, focused meditation and memorization.

GENERAL GOALS FOR READING THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Go Slow	Stop when something grabs your attention. Sit with it. If it takes three years to get through the book, that's perfectly fine.
Memorize Individual Proverbs	These sayings are written poetically so we can remember and apply them. Like the phrase "fail to plan and you plan to fail"—it sticks because of the way it's worded.
Read in Multiple Translations/Versions	English versions vary in how they handle the poetry. When meditating on a proverb, read it in several translations. While the King James Version isn't always clearest elsewhere, it often preserves the poetic force of Proverbs well, thanks to its translators' classical training.
Be Biased Toward Action	Proverbs are meant to be lived. The goal of meditation is obedience. If all you do this summer is live out one proverb, that's a win.

STRATEGIES FOR INTERNALIZING PROVERBS

Rewrite Proverbs in a Journal.	Use a general journal or a dedicated wisdom notebook. Rewriting helps with memorization and makes the proverb more personally accessible. You might even blend a few translations into a version that sticks best for you.
Put Them in Front of Your Eyes	Use sticky notes or other visible reminders. Place proverbs on your fridge, your desk, your mirror—anywhere you'll see them often.
Practice Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)	<p>Read: Slowly read a chapter or section of Proverbs several times. Look for a verse that 'leaps off the page.'</p> <p>Meditate: Reflect on that proverb. What is it saying? Have you seen this truth in your life? Why might God be highlighting it now?</p> <p>Pray: Talk to God about what you're noticing. Ask for wisdom and strength to live it out.</p> <p>Contemplate: Spend a few quiet moments in God's presence, letting the proverb stick to your soul.</p>