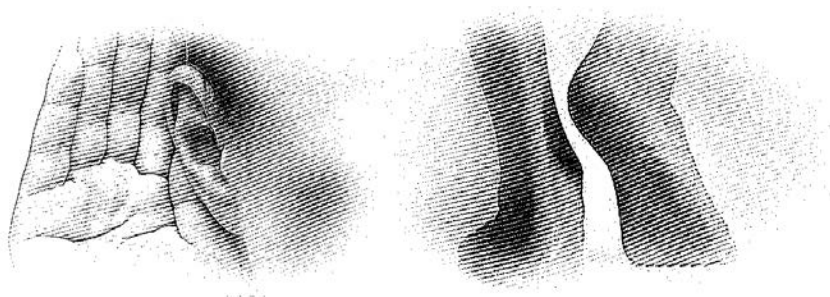


From Ears to Feet



SABBATH—JANUARY 3

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Proverbs 4; 1 Kings 3:9; Matthew 13:44; Proverbs 5; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Proverbs 6:1–19.

MEMORY VERSE: “Make level paths for your feet to walk on. Only go on ways that are firm. Don't [do not] turn to the right or left. Keep your feet from the path of evil” (Proverbs 4:26, 27, NIV).

WHAT WE LEARN IS VERY IMPORTANT TO HOW WE LIVE. “Wisdom is best,” says Proverbs 4:7, NIV.

No matter how good the instruction is, the student still must pay attention. An Egyptian teacher from Bible times said, “The ear of the boy is on his back. He listens when he is beaten.” (In Egyptian art, the student was often shown with big ears on his back.)

It is not enough just to know *about* right and wrong. We need to know *how to choose* right and not wrong. Training in wisdom means hearing proper instruction. It also means following and obeying what we have learned so that we do not end up walking in the wrong direction.

HEAR! (Proverbs 4)

Read Proverbs 4. What useful truth is found here? How can we use this in our own lives as we try to be faithful to God?



The first act of wisdom is “to listen.” This is because wisdom comes from outside us.



When Solomon prayed for wisdom, he asked for “a hearing heart.”

The act of “hearing” shows the first step in education. In Hebrew thought the center of wisdom is not in the brain but in the ears. This suggests that even before we seek to think about or solve a problem, we first need to hear it. This means we need to listen. When Solomon asks for wisdom, he asks for “a hearing heart” (1 Kings 3:9, JUB).

The first act of wisdom is “to listen.” This suggests that wisdom comes from outside of us (in this example, it comes from the parents). We cannot discover wisdom by ourselves. The self-made (independent) person is not a possibility, according to Bible wisdom. Wisdom is first of all something that we receive, not something we make with our own skills or brains. The ability to “pay attention” (in Hebrew, “to put one’s heart”) suggests that the heart is involved. The search for wisdom is not just cold (emotionless; without feeling) thinking. Instead, the heart is the center of the person and emotions. In Hebrew thinking, the heart takes part in the search for wisdom.

Read Matthew 13:44 and Jeremiah 29:13. What connection can you find between these verses and the search for the wisdom written about in Proverbs 4?

Emotions play an important part in our basic life as humans. So, they cannot and should not be forgotten in our relationship with God. How do we learn the proper place and value of emotions (strong feelings) in our spiritual life? How have your emotions guided you correctly or incorrectly? What have you learned from those experiences?

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY (Proverbs 5)

Once we decide to walk in the way of wisdom, we still need to be very careful because we will meet problems along that way (read 1 Peter 5:8). One of the greatest dangers we face deals with our families. Families are the most dear, sensitive, and close relations of life.

Read Proverbs 5. What dangers must we guard against?

The first danger begins with ourselves and our own words. We should watch our tongues to make sure that what we say does not give a wrong or a mixed message. Our lips should be united (joined as one) with our knowledge and should show our spiritual thoughts.

The second danger comes from a woman or a man who comes between us and our family. (The verse speaks of the danger coming from a “strange woman.” We should understand this to mean that temptation could come from either a man or a woman.) Either one could tempt a spouse into breaking the marriage vows. All of us have seen how the sin of unfaithfulness can break up and destroy marriage.

According to the verse, the best way to avoid these temptations is to not listen to words of flattery. Instead, we are to listen to the words of wisdom. This means listening to and obeying advice from God and the Bible.

Of course, we should keep ourselves from adultery.¹ But we should also avoid going to the place where the temptress² stays. We certainly should not go to her door (Proverbs 5:8).

Finally, perhaps the best protection of all against the temptation to love another woman or man is this: just love your own spouse, “the wife [or husband] of your youth” (Proverbs 5:18, NKJV). The author of Ecclesiastes supports this advice: “Enjoy life with your wife [or your husband], whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:9, NIV). Be thankful for what you have, so you will not be looking elsewhere.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. With this promise before you, what useful steps can you take to protect yourself from the desires that might be stirring up in you?



Avoid the place where the “temptress” stays (Proverbs 5:1).

DEFINITIONS

1. adultery—sex outside of marriage.
2. temptress—a woman who leads a man to break his marriage vow or who leads a man away from what is right.

PROTECT YOUR FRIENDSHIPS (Proverbs 6:1–5)

Someone once said: “Lord, protect me from my friends. I can take care of my enemies.” The book of Proverbs shows that friendships can often be fragile (weak). It gives advice on how to keep our friends. It also shows how to protect ourselves from them, if necessary. The Hebrew word for “friend” also means “neighbor.” The neighbor is the one who is close to us, the one who is already a friend or who may become one. Bible wisdom supports human relationships and encourages thoughtfulness and respect in these relationships.

Read Proverbs 6:1–5. What problem does Solomon bring up? What is the answer? What important spiritual principle (rule) do we find here?

The torah (the first five books of Moses, the law) encourages people to help the poor and to lend them money without charging interest (Exodus 22:25). But wisdom warns us against giving large amounts of money to a friend who is in debt. The duty of charity³ does not do away with the duty of justice (Exodus 23:2, 3). We need to be generous (kind) when we can. But we would be wise to make sure that our charity will not turn into a terrible mistake. (Read Proverbs 22:27.)

Wise advice is given to us in Proverbs 22:27. The first warning deals with our words. How important it is that we study the situation and make sure that we can afford to help our friend! If so, only then speak and promise. The warmth of friendship or a moment of emotion may influence our good judgment. And we may be sorry about it afterward.

No matter how well-meaning you might have been, it is important to think before you act and not agree to a promise you cannot keep. The point is that if we get into debt, we need to do what we can to fix it. Maybe we have to humble ourselves, admit our mistake, and ask for grace (forgiveness; mercy).

How do we learn to balance our desire to help carry one another’s load (problems) (Galatians 6:2) with the words given to us in this proverb?

DEFINITIONS

3. charity—the act of giving money, food, or other kinds of help to people who are poor, sick, or in need.

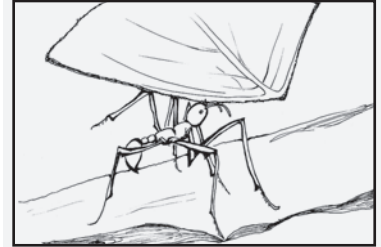
PROTECT YOUR WORK (Proverbs 6:6–8)**Read Proverbs 6:6–8. What can we learn from the ant?**

Ants work hard (even harder than humans because they can lift more weight than a human could if the human were their size). But ants also work independently and do not need to be supervised. The main reason for their hard work is the future. They expect times of trouble (winter) and prepare themselves for them. So, the ant teaches us the wisdom of thinking about the future when making plans. “This is a question that requires planning by every parent, every teacher, every student—by every human, young or old. No plan of life can be good or complete without thinking about the short years of this present life or the unending future.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 145.

Read Proverbs 6:9–11. What can we learn from the sluggard (a lazy person)?

It is the sluggard who needs to learn from the ant. “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider [study] her ways and be wise” (Proverbs 6:6, NKJV). The ants are at work. But the sluggards are asleep. The ants are busy at the harvest. But the sluggards keep folding their two hands, a symbol of laziness. The ants surpass (do more than expected) themselves by carrying loads heavier than themselves and by preparing for the future. But the sluggards live in the present and only think about themselves.

Yes, hard work is important. But life requires more than work and earning money. How does the Sabbath help us to find this proper balance when we think about the workweek?



The ants teach us to work hard and to prepare for the future.

PROTECT YOURSELF (Proverbs 6:14, 18)

We have been warned about the evils that threaten three areas of life—our family, our friends, and our work. Proverbs gives us a picture of the wicked. It makes witty (clever and amusing) statements about the troubles of the wicked and gives clear understanding. The two poems (Proverbs 6: 12–15 and Proverbs 6:16–19) follow the same pattern, with the same poetic rhythm, and cover seven themes. The wicked person’s inside is described as what is in the heart. But at the same time, it all becomes clearly shown through what is done on the outside.

Read Proverbs 6:14, 18 and Matthew 15:19. What important point is being made here?

“Suppose you use vain [foolish] imaginations and permit your mind to dwell upon impure things. Then you are as guilty before God as if you acted out your thoughts.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, page 334.

What warnings are given in Proverbs 6:12–19?

The symbol seems strange. The walking wicked follows the lazy sluggard. The two attitudes (feelings) seem to be different. But they carry the same lesson. Both stay within themselves. Both the wicked and the sluggard are not interested in the instruction (lesson) coming from outside of themselves. They both follow their own wisdom and desires. The sluggards are sleeping. Their ears and their feet do not work. The wicked have only their feet and their mouths working, not their ears. The result is the same. They will both destroy themselves.

But evil has two results. It harms both the person who is sinned against and the sinner too. A liar will finally believe his or her own lies. The end result of wickedness is always quarreling (arguing) and fighting. This can influence other people too. Really, the results of sin are often not limited to sinners only. Others suffer, too, and often for the worse.

How have the sins of others influenced your life? Greatly, no doubt! What lessons can you learn from this about how careful you need to be so that your actions do not hurt others?

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “Moral [Right; Holy] Standards,” pages 326–339, in *The Adventist Home*; “In Contact With Others,” pages 489–491, in *The Ministry [Work Done for God] of Healing*; “Other Object Lessons,” pages 117–120, in *Education*.

“The student of the Bible should always study in the spirit of a learner. We are to search its pages, not for proof to support our opinions. But we should study to know what God says. . . .

“One of the chief causes of mental weakness and character⁴ weakness is the inability to study carefully. With the great flood of books and information, old and young form the habit of reading hastily and superficially, and the mind loses its power of connected thought and vigorous [strong] thinking.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 189.

“The homes that the ants build for themselves show skill and patience. They carry only one little grain at a time, but by hard work they succeed in doing wonderful things.

“Solomon uses the example of the ant’s hard work to scold those who waste their hours being lazy or ruining their souls and bodies. The ant prepares for future seasons. But many gifted and smart people fail to prepare for the future life in Heaven.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Counsels [Advice] to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, page 190.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think more deeply on this idea of how we can help others, even if we have to make some sacrifices. How do we compare what we learned in this week’s lesson about helping others with this verse: “No one has greater love than the one who gives his life for his friends” (John 15:13, NIV)?
- ② What other lessons can we learn from the natural world that we can use in our own lives? Yes, the world is fallen, but why must we be careful in the lessons we take away from what we see before us?
- ③ Read through the seven evils in Proverbs 6:16–19. Why do you think they look so bad to God?

DEFINITIONS

4. character—having to do with thoughts, feelings, and actions.