

PROVERBS

VOLUME 2



FOUNDATIONAL DESIGN FOR LIFE

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מְשָׁלִים

FOUNDATIONAL DESIGN FOR LIFE

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To the reader,

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- Jonathan Cloud (joncloudabc@gmail.com)

A HEBREW PERSPECTIVE OF “FAINTING”

PROVERBS 24:10

If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.

הִתְרַפִּית בַּיּוֹם צָרָה צַר כֹּחֲךָ :

ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κακῇ καὶ ἐν ἡμέρᾳ θλίψεως ὥς ἂν ἐκλίπῃ

Summary of some key points

- This is not only a statement of truth about man’s life but a statement of revelation that illuminates the person of God.
- The words behind “adversity” and “small” are from the same root in Hebrew, an important fact for understanding Solomon’s statement here.
- The word “faint” in Hebrew is a reflexive verb, called a *hithpael*. This Hebrew verb means to relax and, being in the reflexive form, it means “to relax yourself.” So, the fainting spoken of is brought about by a decision on the part of the subject to seek escape from difficulty by withdrawing from the hardship in which he finds himself simply by “relaxing himself” instead of stiffening up and enduring patiently the season of “adversity.”
- The two parts of this proverb are equivalent, the one equaling the other. God Himself established this by the grammar He used.

This proverb documents one of the major facts of life. And what is this fact? It is the fact that if a person faints in the day of adversity or “pressure” (צרה) that person’s strength is small or “narrow” (צר).

While humans have numerous, even countless, ways of “fainting” when under pressure, each one of them and any variety of them are included in this statement by God. This is a “blanket statement” about fainting, giving God’s design in a readily applicable statement for life. It establishes the fact that no type of fainting is valid. Thus, all types and variations of fainting are invalidated by God here. Man is prone to fainting, even in a moment-by-moment manner. But consider, when did the Son of God ever faint? As a genuine human, under all the pressures of human life—and unspeakably more—He never fainted. For, as a humble human, He constantly depended upon the Father and received all that was needed to live as a human. So, man’s “fainting” problem is not innocent. He faints because he does not depend on God and receive what He is actively giving.

In this proverb, the word “adversity” and the word “small” are from the same root word in

Hebrew. The word “adversity” is *tsarah* and the word “small” is *tsar*. Both words relate to the idea of “narrow.” The ancient Hebrews readily saw the relationship between something being “narrow” and the pressure it caused by becoming narrow. Adversity comes about by the narrowing of a situation, which causes pressure, for narrowing is the basic cause of something being “pressed” or “squeezed.” So, this proverb of truth, this *likeness* (Hebrew word for “proverb”), is speaking of those times of pressure when life is being squeezed by some difficulty and man is tempted to deal with that pressure in one of a number of wrong ways. Each of the wrong ways being addressed is brought about by “fainting” (a seemingly innocent—even uncontrollable response—that God reveals to be otherwise).

Now, what does it mean to have “small” or, literally, “narrow” strength? First, it means to have strength that is in some way *restricted*. Seeing this Proverb in light of the Hebrew language and mindset in which the Creator God chose to give it is essential for proper understanding, and the word “small” being from the root meaning “narrow” enables an understanding of that Hebrew perspective. It produces this understanding: **fainting is produced by a restriction of one’s strength, not by the amount of pressure he is under.** So, what is restricting his strength? The human thinks it is the situation doing so. But...

The Hebrew verb behind the English verb “faint” is the verb *raphah* (רָפָה). The verb means “to withdraw or relax one’s strength or effort from something,” and it is in the *Hithpael* stem, which is the intensive-reflexive stem. (“Reflexive” means an action that is done to oneself.) To give the meaning in non-technical language, the verb form in this context meant to withdraw or relax one’s effort from something and to actively choose to do so. This is the idea behind the word translated “faint.” **So, it is the human himself that is restricting his strength.**

Human nature, when in the error of its own thoughts, considers that the failure of its strength **is due to the immensity of its trial**, but God shows this to be false. **Man’s strength fails in the time of hardship because he refuses to turn to God for the strength which He is willing to give. So, not the difficulties but the self-will resident in his own heart is what causes him to relax his efforts and give up in some way.** This keeps his strength “small” (literally, “narrow” - צָר), restricted, though God, his Creator, has provided Himself for man’s strength to enable him to overcome all hardships and obstacles in the way of his accomplishing God’s will for his life on earth. **His true problem is not the hardship, the “adversity,” he faces but the person he is inside.** The problem is in his own heart. He makes the decision to faint, by not entrusting himself to God and receiving the grace of His strength. **So, his self-love prevents him from succeeding.**

Now, deception is behind every act of fainting. The mind is first deceived by forming its own opinion about the situation without consulting and believing God’s Word. This faulty opinion drives the mind to fail, for it deprives it of the everlasting strength of God’s person which He has made available to all those who will trust in Him.

Refreshing the Hebrew definition of the word “fainting,” the verb meant “to withdraw

or relax one's strength or effort from something." "Fainting," then, does not necessarily mean a "total withdrawal," as in "quitting," for even "easing up" is a form of withdrawing one's full effort from something. This is highly deceptive! To withdraw the full force of one's strength from pleasing God in any realm or occupation of life is to partake in this activity of "fainting." The negative conditions of life give no justification for "easing up" under hardship. To live a half-hearted life is to state by action that God's wise design for life is not completely reliable, not completely sufficient, not completely applicable, not completely worthy. The one who has "eased up" either does not deem God or His design worthy of his full effort or the design is not clear in his mind. In either case, he is to deal with the root cause in order to believe God with all of his heart and express this firmness by giving his full strength to what he has been given to do so that he can fulfill his purpose on earth: to love God with all of his being.

The Godly are surrounded by strength, for God has provided Himself for their strength, a strength that enables virtuous, selfless actions in the midst of pressures and "squeezings." David perceived this clearly: "My God, my Strength, in whom I will trust..." (Psalm 18:2), as Paul did: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in mine infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

For some, even the idea of behind "God is my strength" is a foreign idea, as demonstrated by their constant fainting. What does this lack of familiarity say about them? It states pointedly that they have little practical experience in God. Their head may be filled up to the brim with ideas about Him, but their habitual fainting and use of fleshly responses when it comes to hardship show that despite all their knowledge of Him they know Him very little. And what does this state about them? It states that they habitually act on their own thoughts. In other words, when it comes to the act of living, the knowledge of God that they have somewhere in their head is not actively controlling them, therefore they have little working knowledge of Him and gain very little strength from Him, regardless of how much they speak about Him. They think they know, but when they actually go to live, they show that they do not. James spoke much about the discrepancy between knowing and doing and the deception that comes when a discrepancy exists: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

Now, stepping back to include the broader context of this Proverb, it must be clear to the mind that right and wrong are always bound up in the person of God, God's very person defining what is right. For He is not only right; He is all that is right. His person makes up what is right and nothing outside of Him is right. And while His person defines what is right, secondarily, what is right defines His person. So, true knowledge of what is right comes from God but also, like a light, shines back upon God, making Him visible to the human mind. Now, while God dwells in "the light which no man can approach unto," this light is dim to man's mind. Man's mind is the dark. So, the light of revelation is not for God but for man. It is man's mind that is in the dark about God, not that God is in any kind of darkness Himself.

So, the truth documented perfectly in Proverbs 24:10 manifests the very person of God and, therefore, lights up His person to make Him visible. Though this proverb seems to

Since this is a statement of how faulty human nature normally reacts to life, each human should assume that this subtle tactic of the flesh to faint under pressure is seeking to operate somewhere in the life, in big and little ways. As a manifestation of God's wisdom and love, each human must be rooting out more and more of this "fainting reflex" to life's complexities by looking actively to God, watching for that temptation to do what is easy and avoid what is hard, being wary of retorting with biting words or sullen attitudes or impatient gestures (all fainting reflexes), listening to one's own mouth for fainting statements such as "I'm sick and tired of ____" or "I've had it with ____" or "I can't stand it when ____." The heart prompts these and innumerable other acts of relaxing and fainting under pressure, but God's strength does not faint.

Word Study for *TsaR* (צַר/צָרַר)

The basic idea of this word appears to be “to narrow and, therefore, restrict” in some way.

“to let go,” relax, freed up, “forsake” (God will not, Dt. 4:31), “let alone” (Dt. 9:14), “fail” (Dt. 34:6), “slack not thy hand from thy servants” אַל־תִּרְךָ יָדֶיךָ מֵעֲבָדֶיךָ מὴ ἐκλύσης τὰς χειράς σου ἀπὸ τῶν παίδων σου (men of Gibeon writing to Joshua for help, Joshua 10:6), “Then their anger was abated toward him” אָז רָפְתָה רִיחָם τότε ἀνέθη τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτῶν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ (men of Ephraim to Gideon after he reasoned with them, Judges 8:3),

Working definition:

To add:

4

MEANINGLESSNESS: A CHARACTERISTIC OF WICKEDNESS

PROVERBS 10:20

The tongue of the just is as choice silver:

The heart of the wicked is little worth.

לְשׁוֹן צַדִּיק כֶּסֶף גִּבּוֹר
לֵב רָשָׁעִים כְּמַעֲטָה:

As soon as the word “wicked” is used, humans assume someone else is being spoken of, for only those who do very bad things are “wicked.” Certainly, the normal human attitude is that if the measure is a negative one, it must apply to someone else, especially a measuring stick labeled “wicked.” Yet, even God’s people will find by a comparison of their lives with this true measure that they may have more wickedness in them than their hearts would normally admit. This is not surprising, for seeing anything accurately in the dark is not possible, and God’s people are in the dark about much of God’s design.

Thus, human assessments have no value in themselves and must be evaluated in the light, under the illumination of God’s own revelation.

Godliness is manifest in the value of the things spoken and the manner in which they are spoken. The contrast to a just person is a wicked person... but God does not define wickedness by human notions about wickedness. Wicked people may be defined by “good things,” as humans view them, for things that are highly destructive and detrimental can appear “good” to humans.

God defines the wicked by His design, as wickedness is the contradiction of any portion of His design for life. Though surprising to some, even things that humans highly value and approve can be wicked, including things that God’s people have come to love and value. This is visible in the words of Proverbs 10:20. Speaking words that carry little value is a mark of wickedness.

By giving this revelation in parallel or corresponding statements of truth, the Creator enabled man to know the “true truth” about life in a manner that avoids ambiguity. Further, this particular statement of truth is set in the context of the entire book of Proverbs, with many such statements (“proverbs”). By relating these statements together, a complete picture of Godliness emerges, not one narrowly defined by any human standards of righteousness but by a clear picture given by the Creator Himself that leaves no question about what is truly pleasing to God and what true conformity to Him and to His design looks like. Further, the picture God has given to man is not a flat,

2-dimensional image, like a picture on a page. It is a picture that shows what Godliness is like from all angles so that it cannot be mistaken, including the inner angle, the angle of the heart and thoughts that form within it. Some things that are crooked can appear straight when viewed only from one angle, but crookedness cannot continue to appear straight if viewed accurately from all angles. Just such a view is given in the book of Proverbs, a view that turns life in its hand and views it from every possible angle to assure that Godliness and wisdom are seen as Godliness and wisdom and that error and folly are seen as error and folly. While humans are content to view only what appears straight about themselves and ignore the other “sides” of their life, God sees and desires man to see everything accurately. Accordingly, it is folly to think that any human assessment, no matter how Godly that human may appear to be, is accurate unless that assessment is God’s own assessment as established by His own revelation.

Returning, then, to the pure truth of God found in Proverbs 10:20, the work of the Spirit in a human is characterized by adding value to his lips. A teachable spirit is manifest in less frivolity and more thoughtfulness in speech, for it is the accuracy and depth of the thoughts that give value to the words, for the words arise from within. This is where the value lies, in the depths of the heart. A lack of meaningful speech (as truly meaningful in the eyes of God) coming from the lips is a manifestation of a heart that is distant or alienated from God, who is meaningful in all of His being. So, it is impossible to draw near to God in the heart without the lips taking notice. And those lips that leave little meaning behind them when they close are giving away the heart’s lack of relationship with God.

Words that tear others down, that curse, that criticize unnecessarily, that spew bitterness, that complain and grumble about life... all of these things are manifestations of a wicked heart, of a heart that does not worship its Creator. Yet, God did not define the wicked here by a negative statement, as in, by the bad things that come out of their mouth. This should cause everyone to sit up and take careful note.

The wicked are defined by the good they do not speak rather than by the bad that they do speak. By stating it so, the Creator corrected a wayward thought in man’s mindset. Mankind thinks that wickedness is overtly hurtful or destructive, but the Creator corrected this. The wicked are characterized by the value that *they do not speak*. This speaks of worthless words as much as it speaks of harmful words, for wickedness is characterized by worthless words. Worthless words negate the words that could have been spoken to enrich the lives of those around with value. The wicked do not love or even recognize their responsibility to invest worth in the lives of those around them. Their focus is on gaining attention and approval of others, on exalting themselves, manifesting their own thoughts, whether in a silly, frivolous manner or in a somber one, which causes them to carry little worth in the words they speak. The wicked may be totally frivolous or somber, just as the Pharisees were not known to be frivolous, nonetheless, their words were not aimed at increasing the worth of those around them but on increasing their own worth in the eyes of those around them. Thus, to the Pharisees, their words were full of value and meaning, but, to God, their words were worthless, for they were not seeking to show His great value and to “honor all men” (1 Peter 2:17).

So, the value that the lips of the righteous offer to others is the words that align with the wisdom of God. Due to their attachment to God, He Himself adds meaning to the life of the righteous and this is communicated through their lips. God's personality and activity is the meaning that they have to share with others, being shared in a manner most helpful to the recipients' own growth in that knowledge. Established on what is right in His eyes, they have an unobstructed and growing view of Him. So, they see the true meaning of life and everything in it, with ever increasing clarity and meaningfulness. And the meaning that they store up within does not stay within. It consistently finds its way out their lips.

The most prominent societies in history demonstrate that departure from God increases frivolous communication and self-centered communication, words that carry little value or worth before God and eternity. While believers have become accustomed to thinking of wickedness as blatant wrongdoing and overtly destructive activity, this portion of God's absolute revelation reveals that wickedness is actually manifest in something much more "docile," namely, thoughtless speech that produces little or no value for others.

Ephesians 5:4

Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient:
but rather giving of thanks.

καὶ αἰσχρότης, καὶ μωρολογία ἢ εὐτραπεία, τὰ οὐκ ἀνήκοντα·
ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον εὐχαριστία.

Proverbs 15:7

The lips of the wise disperse knowledge:
but the heart of the foolish doeth not so.

What is wisdom? Wisdom is the criteria of God by which the creation relates to the God in which it exists, in all realms of life (physical or spiritual). Wisdom reveals the interconnectedness of life by demonstrating that man's entire existence is bound up within the person of God and his actions are each and all expressions of his relationship to God. Nothing in the life of man is so small that it escapes this relationship, and nothing is so significant that it exceeds it. Wisdom shows that life is not random or scattered but all connected and integrated in God. The boundaries of wisdom are the bounds of God's own nature and rejection of the one is equally rejection of the other. Thus, a person's relationship to God's wisdom is the essence of his relationship to God Himself.

