



PLEASING GOD

God's people should seek to please Him in their attitudes and actions.

PROVERBS 15:33–16:11

Children enjoy pleasing the people they love. They know no boundaries when it comes to showing their affection to their parents, grandparents, teachers at school, or neighbors across the street. Their love prompts them to give a hug, a kiss, or a smile. It also causes them to look for ways to please. They'll try to fix breakfast for their parents, sing a new song that they learned for their grandparents, and take gifts to their teachers.

When you were a child, how did you try to please the people you loved? What difference did it make to you?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

PROVERBS 15:1–22:16

In Proverbs 10–22, Solomon gave precept after precept of wise counsel—truth rooted in the very nature of God. Some have called this section “Solomon’s Proper Proverbs,” given in a series of singular truth statements wrapped in maxims, observations, and poetic reflections. The wisdom of God is both particular and general. Particular in that it addresses the issues of life often in great detail; general in that God’s wisdom is comprehensive in addressing a whole host of the challenges of daily living. God’s wisdom supersedes all other sources of wisdom.

The wisdom Solomon called God’s people to pursue was fully revealed and embodied in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The gospel of Jesus is “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). To know Jesus is to know the wisdom of God that changes how we think and act.

We respond to God’s pursuit of us by pursuing Jesus. Solomon wasn’t calling God’s people to pursue something extrinsic to God. One of the mistakes we often make when thinking about the wisdom of God is to separate the pursuit of wisdom from God Himself, as if the wisdom of God was distinct from the Person of God. To pursue God’s wisdom means to pursue God Himself. This one truth changes everything.

Read Proverbs 15:33–16:11, looking for common themes. How do the common themes you identified connect to each other?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

WISDOM DEMONSTRATED (PROV. 15:33; 16:8)

³³ **The fear of the LORD is what wisdom teaches, and humility comes before honor.**

⁸ **Better a little with righteousness than great income with injustice.**

CHAPTER 15, VERSE 33

Solomon called his readers to please God by pursuing and applying wisdom, coupled with two basic reminders. First, the basis of the pursuit of God's wisdom is the fear of the Lord. (See Prov. 1:7.) Here, the *fear of the LORD* is viewed as a teacher. Fear of the Lord teaches wisdom, and the wisdom of God teaches the fear of the Lord. Secondly, the pursuit of God's wise counsel humbles the believer. Solomon reminded God's people that in the pursuit of godly wisdom they were to demonstrate *humility*. They were to come to God as humble servants, knowing they were in need of Him and ready to please Him. Solomon emphasized that true *honor* is rooted in the kind of wisdom that is humble, contrite, and dependent on God.

CHAPTER 16, VERSE 8

Solomon declared that humbly revering God is more valuable than great wealth. He contrasted ill-gotten wealth with the value of true righteousness. Material wealth is neutral. How a person obtains and uses wealth is another matter. Solomon reminds us of the danger of confusing the pursuit of God with the pursuit of wealth. God Himself is valuable above all worldly riches. The wisdom of God, then, is demonstrated in fearing the Lord, trusting Him, and pursuing Him as the greatest treasure of life out of which all other treasures and blessings of God come.

What is easier to maintain—humility or a reverent fear of God? Explain.

ACCOUNTABILITY ESTABLISHED (PROV. 16:1,4-5,9)

¹ The reflections of the heart belong to mankind, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.

⁴ The LORD has prepared everything for his purpose — even the wicked for the day of disaster. ⁵ Everyone with a proud heart is detestable to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished.

⁹ A person's heart plans his way, but the LORD determines his steps.



VERSE 1

True wisdom calls for accountability. God is sovereign and will hold all people accountable. In other words, He is sovereign, and we are responsible at the same time. As an example, God's people are accountable for what they speak even as God orders their words.

The convergence of God's sovereign rule over all things and our accountability is one of the great mysteries of Scripture. Whether or not we understand how both can co-exist together, God is sovereign and we are accountable.

KEY DOCTRINE: *God*

God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures (Ex. 15:11-27).

VERSE 4

Solomon added *even the wicked* fall under God's sovereign rule. He wrote, *the LORD has prepared everything for his purpose*. All things—both good and evil—are under the sovereign control of God. Some may think that if God creates and orders everything according to His purpose, then humanity is free from any responsibility. Solomon addressed this when he declared that all people with a proud heart will be punished. In the end, all people are accountable for their responses to God.

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When these truths are applied to the work of God in Christ we are reminded of Acts 2:23: "Though he [Jesus] was delivered up according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge, you used lawless people to nail him to a cross and kill him." God had already determined to offer up Jesus as the sacrifice for sinners before time began. Yet, those who killed Jesus—all of us—will be held accountable. This means that the cross was not 'Plan B.' His plan from before the foundation of the world was to save repentant sinners from the penalty of sin by means of the cross.

VERSE 5

In verse 4 Solomon noted that *even the wicked* fall under God's sovereign rule. One expression of a wicked and sinful heart is pride. A **proud heart**, says Solomon, **is detestable to the LORD**, and anyone with a prideful heart will be held accountable: **he will not go unpunished**. This leaves no room for doubt. The arrogant and prideful can be assured that they will face God's judgment.

SIX THINGS GOD HATES

(PROV. 6:16-19)

- arrogant eyes (v. 17)
- a lying tongue (v. 17)
- hands that shed innocent blood (v. 17)
- a heart that plots wicked schemes (v. 18)
- feet eager to run to evil (v. 18)
- a false witness (v. 19)
- one who stirs up trouble (v. 19)

Note: The first five items move from the top of the body (eyes) to the bottom (feet). At the center of the list is the heart.

VERSE 9

It is in **a person's heart** that **plans** take shape. Therefore, we decide the **way** we'll go based on what's in our hearts. But with our decision comes accountability to God. The Hebrew word translated **plans** can refer either to evil schemes or good plans. Proverbs reminds us that even our best-made plans are established by the Lord, who **determines** our **steps**.

This truth is repeated in Proverbs 19:21, "Many plans are in a person's heart, but the LORD's decree will prevail." Again, in Proverbs 20:24 Solomon said: "Even a courageous person's steps are determined by the LORD, so how can anyone understand his own way?" Jeremiah confessed, "I know, LORD, that a person's way of life is not his own; no one who walks determines his own steps" (Jer. 10:23). All things are in God's hands. He determines our steps because He alone can see the path from beginning to end, yet He does so without infringing on our liberty or erasing our responsibility for the steps we choose.



What does living with the reality that we will face God one day look like? Why do people resist being held accountable?

BIBLE SKILL: *Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.*

Read 2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 51:16-17; Isaiah 2:11-17; Micah 6:8; Philippians 2:5-11; James 4:6-10; and 1 Peter 5:5-6, noting the role humility plays in each passage. How would you define humility based on these passages? What critical actions increase true humility? How do these passages help you better understand Proverbs 16?

MOTIVES MATTER (PROV. 16:2,10-11)

² All a person's ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs motives.

¹⁰ God's verdict is on the lips of a king; his mouth should not give an unfair judgment. ¹¹ Honest balances and scales are the LORD's; all the weights in the bag are his concern.

VERSE 2

Pleasing God involves right motives as well as right actions. The two cannot be separated. Even a right deed can be done out of the wrong motivation. Our love for God is the only true motivation.

Romans 14:23 states that “everything that is not from faith is sin,” even if it is a good thing. Solomon challenged God’s people to always check their motivations—even if the deed they were doing was right and good.

It is easy to think that because we do the right thing that God will bless us, even if our reason for doing the right thing is wrongly motivated. It is obvious when evil deeds are done out of a sinful heart. What is not so obvious to us is when our motivations for doing what is good are not God-honoring.

Why are our motives so important? To what degree might our motives be more important than our actions?

VERSES 10-11

Two examples of God-pleasing, properly motivated actions are a king’s delivery of decisions and a merchant’s use of honest measures in dealing with his customers. Verse 10 states: ***God’s verdict is on the lips of a king; his mouth should not give an unfair judgment.*** Verse 11 states: ***Honest balances and scales are the LORD’s; all the weights in the bag are his concern.***

Before customers used coins, they weighed pieces of gold or silver to make their purchases. Merchants would use *balances and scales* to weigh the precious metals. Dishonest merchants sometimes manipulated the balances and scales so they could collect a little more from the customer. A merchant’s honesty said something about his motive. The Lord nourished honesty in the merchant’s heart. He would be the reason the weights in the bag of the merchant would be correct. Anyone who wanted to please the Lord would share God’s concern for honesty. When merchants practiced deceptive methods to steal from their customers, they verified that they had rejected God’s wisdom. Proper motivation for right actions comes out of a heart that has been saturated with the wisdom of God.



BLESSING ASSURED (PROV. 16:3,6-7)

³ Commit your activities to the LORD, and your plans will be established.

⁶ Iniquity is atoned for by loyalty and faithfulness, and one turns from evil by the fear of the LORD. ⁷ When a person's ways please the LORD, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

VERSES 3,6-7

Great blessings await those who live within the contours of the wise counsel of God. Solomon codified this truth in verse 3: ***Commit your activities to the LORD, and your plans will be established.***

The constant surrender of our choices and decisions to the wise counsel of God establishes the way of the righteous. God bestows His blessings among His people in several ways: the forgiveness of sins; His faithful love that challenges us to turn from evil; peace with others.

Living for God does not mean things always turn out the way the world defines success. Yet to live within the safety of God's wise counsel is to know that God is at work among His people in all things to bring about their good for His glory (Rom. 8:28). Deliverance from evil is found only in our deliverance from sin through Jesus Christ.

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To live within the safety of the wise counsel of the all-sovereign God is foundational to the Christian life. The believer demonstrates his or her commitment to God by pleasing Him, responding to the calling of God in Jesus Christ, by managing and monitoring his or her motivations, and by resting assured that God blesses His people in manifold ways.

How does each promise given in this passage give assurance to a believer?

IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers demonstrate wisdom by seeking to please God in all they do.
- All people are accountable to the sovereign God.
- Pleasing God is borne out of a right relationship with Him and is seen in right attitudes and actions.
- God's blessing on those who please Him are seen in Him giving stability, rescuing from sin, and peaceful relationships with others.

As a group, discuss the spiritual benefits and cost of following or not following God. What insights did you gain as a result of this discussion?

Ask God to reveal areas in your life that are dominated by pride. Confess your pride and ask Him to help you grow in humility toward Him.

Evaluate your life in light of stability, God's forgiveness, and peaceful relationships with others. How can you grow in each of these areas?

Prayer Needs

