

INTRODUCTION

I absolutely devoured the book of Proverbs when I was a teenager. It was so relevant to my everyday life. It called me to purity versus immorality. It advocated diligence instead of sloth. It warned me to avoid drunkenness, debt, and wicked friends. It told me to control my temper and my tongue. As a high school kid struggling to swim upstream among my peers, I needed its practical teaching.

But then I went to college and seminary. I became spiritually sophisticated. I took Greek and theology. I kind of outgrew Proverbs. For many years I looked askance at the book—seeing it as a sort of “self-help” book, analogous to Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People* or Covey’s *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. True. Useful. But... yawn. Pedantic. Basic. Even a bit behavioristic. I wanted to study deep theology, not sanctimonious advice or proverbial platitudes. I wanted *meat*: justification, propitiation, and so on. You know, *serious* Christianity.

How foolish I was. How pompous. How wrong.

For starters, my thinking was an offense to the God Who inspired the book of Proverbs. Beyond that, as a new husband, father, and pastor, I needed the practical wisdom of Proverbs informing my view of business, conflict management, integrity, and virtue.

But there’s more. I was wrong to dismiss Proverbs as a self-help book. Proverbs, rightly understood, abounds with gospel truth. It details what it means to be born again, and what the life of those who have been born again looks like. It’s not merely a self-help book or an anthology of good advice. It’s ingenious. It deals with the soul’s connection to God and with the wise, skillful living that results. I was being a prig, and I needed to repent of my gross ignorance and arrogance.

Yes, Proverbs, much like James in the New Testament, deals with the rubber-meets-the-road realities of godly living. It is vastly useful regarding progressive sanctification. Self-control. Virtue. Obedience. But it’s also full of remarkable truths about regeneration—how the Christian life *begins*. It’s full of practical, life-changing doctrine.

Many believers have made a habit of reading one of the thirty-one chapters of Proverbs every day. With that in mind, we’ve organized the book to take you through the entire book in a month. This isn’t a commentary, so we’ve not commented on every verse. Still, we’ve done our best to highlight key texts and themes. To profit as much as possible from this little book please—*please*—take the time to look up the verses we cite throughout the articles. We want you to have a firsthand engagement with the biblical text.

My co-laborer in this *Gospel Meditations* endeavor is Joe Tyrpak, whose life exemplifies biblical wisdom. Together, we’ll labor to help you understand and apply the book of Proverbs. We want to prove that Proverbs is full of gospel truth and essential to gospel living. We’ve labored to make this devotional so Jesus-saturated that it will be unlike any resource on Proverbs you’ve read. We will learn that Jesus is *the perfection of every virtue and the solution to every vice*. Join us in discovering—or rediscovering—the gospel-saturated genius of this astounding book.

Grace to you, my friends!

Chris Anderson

DON'T STAY DOWN!

“Lie not in wait as a wicked man against the dwelling of the righteous; do no violence to his home; for the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity.”
(Proverbs 24:15-16)

Proverbs 24:16 is one of my favorites. We’ve noted throughout this little book that Proverbs *shows* us truth rather than just telling us. This is one of those vivid proverbs. In my mind it conjures images of Rocky Balboa. He may not be the best fighter, but he’s the most tenacious. Christians get back up when they blow it. For three decades, I’ve cited Proverbs 24:16 alongside verses like 1 John 1:9, urging Christians who sin to get back up. That’s valid, as we’ll see below. But that’s only part of the lesson. What exactly is happening in this well-known proverb? I’m going to suggest three things.

Proverbs 24:16 is a warning: Don’t mess with the righteous! Pay close attention to the context of the proverb; it starts with “For...”—a clear indication that it’s drawing a conclusion from the preceding verse. When I checked out verse 15, it actually made me laugh. The text counsels you on the sort of people you shouldn’t pick a fight with. The principled man won’t give up; he’ll just keep coming at you. I imagine Solomon explaining, “Now, I’m not saying you should burglarize *anybody’s* house. But if you do, choose a fool, not the righteous. The righteous don’t quit.” There’s some humor here, I think.

Proverbs 24:16 is an encouragement: When you fall, get back up! This is how I’ve generally used the verse, and rightly so. It teaches us that godly wisdom brings deep-rooted endurance. That applies to every area of life. When those who are trusting Jesus lose a job, have a financial setback, or get frightening medical news, they don’t quit. When school is harder than they expected, they *work* harder than they expected. Christian, set high goals. Do hard things. Persevere under pressure. Run with endurance, eyes fixed on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-2). Such tenacity is a virtue developed by the Holy Spirit as a Christian matures—usually through trials (James 2:1-4). Believers, grow your *resilience* muscles!

But even more, the text gives Christians who are fighting sin great hope. First, recognize that your struggle isn’t unusual. The righteous aren’t perfect—not yet. Second, rather than wallowing in your failure, get back up. Even better, get to *Christ* (1 John 1:9; 2:1-2). God has determined, Christian, that you will be victorious, inherit glory, and shine like the sun (1 Corinthians 15:57; Romans 5:2; Daniel 12:3). However bad it gets, don’t quit!

Back to my movie illustration: Rocky isn’t the kind of champion who is immune to pain. He can take a punch. Honestly, he usually gets the brain cells beaten out of him. But he doesn’t stay down. As the crowd screams and the music swells, he pulls himself off the canvas. And his tenacity is downright demoralizing to his opponents. Apollo Creed and Ivan Drago visibly slump a bit every time he gets back up. *Seriously? Not again. I can’t knock this guy out.* I want to get up so much that Satan has to shake his head.

Proverbs 24:16 is a prediction: The immaculately Righteous Man would rise again in triumph. Proverbs’ virtues always point us Christ-ward. I’m not saying that we artificially “shoehorn” Jesus into every passage. But He is *perfect* wisdom. He is *ultimate* perseverance. He is the *completely* righteous One. *And He knows how to get back up.* No, He never fell into sin the way we do. But He did *die* for our sins, suffering infinite wickedness and infinite wrath. His lifeless body was laid in a tomb. Finished. Then He got back up again. Hallelujah.

Let the gospel help you grow in godly perseverance. —Chris