

Proverbial Relationships by Carl McMurray

Reading in Proverbs 17 this past week I was struck by how many references to relationships Solomon makes. This is the king who grew up on Bathsheba's knee, in David's court, the child of a tragic union. This is the man who, after gathering 900 women around him, declared he could not find one good in a thousand. Yet he gathers Proverbs on relationships.

In verse 1 is the relationship of merriness and feasting along with strife. Better, he says, a dry morsel and quiet. How many royal banquets do you suppose it took to bring that home to him? How many ceremonial marriages?

Verse 8 declares the grandparents natural feeling of joy in their children's children, and likewise the innocent pride of children in the leader of their home. While quoting proverbs about this "ideal" situation however, Solomon shows that he is not naive. Verse 21 is the other side of the coin. When a child will not accept the wisdom of caring and experienced parents he is a fool who brings no joy to his father, only sorrow. Verse 25 declares this child to be a grief to his father and bitterness to his mother. How many broken hearted parents would testify to this truth?

In verse 18 Solomon shows more financial wisdom than many today have as he speaks of the one who pledges for another (co-signing, in our vernacular) lacking sense. Not a wise relationship to enter into. Very similar to wasting fine speech on a fool (verse 7) or trying to help a fool who simply loves his folly (verse 12). These are a waste of time.

Amid this heap of relationship advice however, between trying to help the foolish and stand back from the evil, between the love of grandparents for their grandchildren and the soul sickness that the parents of foolish children feel, shines a jewel. At least it seems so to me. I wonder if there was one somewhere, at sometime that Solomon thought of when he wrote verse 17. "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." A friend is not necessarily the one who says he is, but the one who lives that he is. The one that doesn't walk away and can't be disappointed in you, no matter what, because they love you that much. He/she is the one who seems so naturally to pair up with you that it appears that for this reason, this problem, this adversity that this one was born and almost destined to stand beside you. What a wonderful relationship takes center-stage in this chapter. What an encouragement and salvation in time of great need. If you know this person, thank them. If you haven't met them yet, become one yourself for others around you. A real friend.