

## Wise Advice on Leadership (Part 1)

Prov 31:1-9 and Selected Proverbs 7/5/09 a.m. CBC

**ENGAGE:** As we talk about leadership today I'm thankful for the many fine examples of leadership we have from some of the more elderly in our congregation. At the same time, **sometimes the elderly teach us what NOT to do.**

Did you hear about the elderly couple who awoke one morning and as the wife looked in the mirror she **sighed** and said, "I'm getting **HEAVY**. I have **wrinkles** and **creases, double chin,** and I am just plain **ugly!**" Then she turned to her husband and demanded, "Can't you tell me something **GOOD** about **me** to make me **feel better**???" The husband thought for a moment before he said, "Well 'Honey,' **YOUR EYESIGHT ... IS JUST ABOUT PERFECT!** ☺  
[Thanks Betty for sharing with us what we men, and Earl, are NOT supposed to say!]

**FOCUS:** Now in the message today and next week we are going to see that Proverbs has much to say about rulers, our relationship to them, and their relationship to God.

**What a difference A GOOD LEADER makes!** Whether this be a coach on a ball team; a choir with a good leader (such as we enjoy here at CBC); a boss or supervisor at work; a teacher or administration at a school; the chairperson of a committee. Wherever we look, good leadership is essential. Good leadership is needed in our homes as well. All of us have areas where we take responsibility. **What basic action can help us be better leaders?**

**SET THE STAGE biblically:** We continue today our series on Proverbs, **Living Wisely**. The word "proverb" [derived from the root מִשְׁלָּה (*meshal*) which means "likeness"] as used in the book of Proverbs (cf. 1:1) is **an object lesson setting out courses of action**. God has given us the book of Proverbs **to help us choose the course of action to follow or avoid**.

Now since most of the book of Proverbs was written by a king, Solomon, **there are many proverbs that have to do with rulers and authorities**. Though the form and manner in which "kings" rule today is different than in Solomon's day, **the principles for wise leadership have not changed**. Whether one rules over a country, a state, a county, a city, a township or borough, **or some other realm of authority, Solomon's wise advice is profitable**. [Cf. D. Jeremiah, *Powerful Principles from Proverbs*, 20.]

**PREVIEW:** In today's message we will begin a two-part look at Solomon's wise advice on leadership. **This morning we will consider Solomon's wise advice on leadership from the leader's perspective**. What counsel does God give through King Solomon for leaders? How should leaders conduct themselves? And for each of us the question is, How should we conduct ourselves? We are going to see this morning that wise leaders HEED God's instructions in how they conduct themselves. Then we'll look at **three characteristics of a wise leader**.

Then next week after we look at two additional characteristics of a wise leader we'll consider leadership **from the subject's perspective, as well as God's perspective**.

Now this morning let's look at leadership from the leader's perspective. We are going to see this morning that wise leaders HEED God's instructions in how they conduct themselves. Then we'll look at **three characteristics of a wise leader**.

**ANNOUNCE the passage:** Now the three characteristics of a wise leader we are going to look at today are given to us through **wise advice a queen mother gives to her son who is king**. This

mother warns her son of **two destructive dangers** her son should avoid, **as well as one positive instruction he must remember**. For the Scripture reading this morning please turn with me in your Bibles to **Prov 31:1-9 [p. 586]**

How should rulers (and leaders) conduct themselves?

## **Wise leaders heed God's instructions in how they can conduct themselves.**

Wise leaders obey God's instructions.

Now in Prov 31:1-9 we see three instructions given to a ruler. A queen mother instructs her king son **in two dangers that are destructive** to him personally as well as to his rule, then she encourages him to **maintain the legal rights** of the poor and helpless. How do wise leaders conduct themselves? The first characteristic of wise leaders is this:

### **Wise leaders maintain moral purity (Prov 31:1-3).**

Wise leaders avoid immorality. Leaders are subject to the same temptations as other people. They can be destroyed by immorality as well as the next person. Note the warning the wise mother gives in **Prov 31:1-3** (NKJV): "The words of King Lemuel, the utterance which his mother taught him: **2** What, my son? And what, son of my womb? And what, son of my vows? **3 Do not give your strength to women, Nor your ways to that which destroys kings**" (Prov 31:1-3 NKJV).

Now what does the wise mother mean when she warns her son not to give his strength to women? The word translated "**strength**" refers to **physical powers**, i.e., "vigor" or "stamina." It is therefore a figure of speech in which "**give your strength**" stands for **sexual involvement with women**. Wise leaders don't get involved sexually with one who is not their spouse. It would be easy for a king to spend his energy enjoying women, but that would be unwise. Giving your strength to one who is not your spouse brings ruin upon you, as the last phrase of v. 3 makes clear: [Do not give] your ways to that which destroys (or ruins) kings." Don't set up conflict situations by deliberately exposing yourself to temptation.

**Samson** is an example of one **ruined** by his involvement with an immoral woman (cf. Judges 16). **Another example is "King David** who paid fourfold for his sin of immorality with Bathsheba. Instead of being out with his armies in the spring of the year, he took a break from his responsibilities—and it cost him terribly (2 Samuel 11). [cf. D. Jeremiah, *Powerful Principles*, 21.]

In the closing days of King David's reign, he should have been enjoying the fruits of prosperity and God's blessing. Instead David was in the midst of a domestic battle in his own house. Why? Because of his illicit relationship with Bathsheba. **Solomon**, David's own son, who succeeded him on the throne, also yielded to the temptation to immorality. This resulted in the weakening of Solomon's rule. **Solomon's** many concubines and wives turned his heart away from the Lord and to the worship of other gods (1 Kings 11:1, 3–4). [Ibid.]

Now "the argument is often put forward that a leader's personal life is separate from his life as a ruler; that his right to rule should not be affected by his personal activities. **But this is not biblical thinking**. If a ruler willingly sins in his personal life, he threatens the well-being of those he leads by the (likely) eventual sin he will commit in his public life." [Ibid.]

**REIT/TRANS:** Wise leaders heed God’s instructions in how they can conduct themselves. Wise leaders maintain moral purity. A second warning the wise mother gives to her ruling son concerns the use of alcohol. She warns her son against excessive and unwarranted use of alcohol, or a troubling need for it. How do wise leaders conduct themselves?

## **Wise leaders avoid over-indulgence (Prov 31:4-7).**

A leader must keep sober so that his judgment is not impaired. **Note this warning in vv. 4-7 (NKJV):** “*It is not for kings, O Lemuel, It is not for kings to drink wine, Nor for princes intoxicating drink; 5 Lest they drink and forget the law, And pervert the justice of all the afflicted. 6 Give strong drink to him who is perishing, And wine to those who are bitter of heart. 7 Let him drink and forget his poverty, And remember his misery no more* (Prov 31:4-7 NKJV).

Leaders need to be aware of what is happening, they need to keep their wits. **Excessive alcohol can easily cloud ones thinking and lead one to make unwise choices.** For all of us overdrinking and overindulgence is in conflict with God’s will.

Alcohol was regularly used in any ancient royal court. What appears to be meant here from the context in v. 5 is **an excessive and unwarranted use of alcohol, or a troubling need for it.** God warns us alcohol can cloud the mind and deprive a leader of true administrative ability and justice.

The book of Proverbs warns all of us of the destructiveness alcohol can bring: [SLIDE] “Wine is a mocker and strong drink is a brawler; whoever goes astray by them is not wise” (Prov 20:1, NET). [Blank Slide] In other words, the person who is drunk mocks and brawls. The idea is that alcohol mocks the one who becomes drunk and the drunk person tends to become aggressive. Intoxicating drinks tend to lead people **astray**, causing them to do foolish things.

**Wise leaders exercise self-restraint when it comes to alcohol.** One of the qualifications for elders is that they are “not given to wine,” (1 Tim 3:3; Titus 1:7 NKJV), i.e., not addicted to wine, not drunkards. If these warnings were appropriate then, how much more today when the wine and alcohol is so much stronger than that of Bible times. The natural fermentation practiced in Bible times produced a wine of approx. 9% or so that was then cut with at least 3 to 4 parts water; versus the 16% + alcohol content of most wines today. When I see the devastation that alcohol has caused in so many families, I’m thankful I grew up with parents that practiced total abstinence when it came to alcohol. **Many of you know too well the devastating effects alcohol can have upon families.** Be careful not to be a stumbling block to others in this area.

The compassionate mother here in Proverbs says “Give strong drink to the one who is distressed & dying in order to ease their suffering and help them forget.” But for the leader God says **remain sober so that your judgment is not impaired.** God also warns us through the book of Proverbs that those who become trapped by the bottle find themselves on the road to poverty, misery, immorality, & instability (cf. also Prov 23:29-35). **The Japanese have a proverb** that says, “First a man takes a drink. Then the drink takes a drink. Then the drink takes the man!” [cf. D. Jeremiah, 20.]

ILL: There are nearly 50% more heavy drinkers “inside the Beltway,” that is among those who live and work in Washington, D.C., in some capacity relative to the federal government, than the national average [7% vs. 4.9% national avg. cf.

[http://www.statemaster.com/graph/hea\\_alc\\_con\\_hea\\_dri-health-alcohol-consumption-heavy-](http://www.statemaster.com/graph/hea_alc_con_hea_dri-health-alcohol-consumption-heavy-)

[drinkers](#) accessed 6/29/09] The opportunities to indulge are ever-present for our government leaders, and those who do often find themselves trapped by **the addictive power of alcohol**. The Bible simply says leaders should not be given to strong drink. Rulers have such great responsibility that they should guard themselves when it comes to strong drink. **God warns all of us of the dangers of alcohol and the need to not be under its control.** Leaders are to be sober and stable individuals.

**REIT/TRANS:** How do wise leaders conduct themselves? Wise leaders **remain morally pure**. Wise leaders **avoid over-indulgence**. They remain in control of their senses, they don't get drunk. A third characteristic of wise leaders is this:

## **Wise leaders promote justice for all (Prov 31:8-9).**

Wise leaders work to maintain the legal rights of the poor and helpless. One sure test for a ruler is how they deal with the poorest and most helpless, those who cannot help them politically.

Wise leaders promote justice for all. **Note Prov 31:8-9 (NKJV):** “Open your mouth for the speechless, In the cause of all *who are* appointed to die. **9** Open your mouth, judge righteously, And plead the cause of the poor and needy” (Prov 31:8-9 NKJV). “Leaders,” God says, “Uphold the rights of the oppressed!”

APPL: As a leader, **your measure of compassion and generosity toward the less fortunate is a measure of your worth as a leader.** How important is this? The leader who lacks compassion and generosity toward the less fortunate is described as **a wicked ruler** by Solomon in the book of Proverbs.

Those who are of no use to **a wicked ruler** often end up being destroyed by the leader. Note this characteristic of a wicked leader: [SLIDE] “Like a roaring lion or a roving bear, so is a wicked ruler over a poor people” (Prov 28:15 NET). [BLANK SLIDE] A wicked ruler who doesn't care for those who cannot meet his demands and are of no use to him are compared to animals that are **powerful, terrifying, insensitive, and in search of prey.**

Solomon gives us the mark of a good king and ruler along with both a promise from the Davidic Covenant, as well as a general principle when he observes: [SLIDE] “If a king judges the poor in truth, his throne will be established forever” (Prov 29:14 NET). [BLANK SLIDE] In other words if a ruler is careful to provide justice for all, including the poor, in accordance with the standards revealed by God in His Word, then he and his descendants will tend to enjoy a long and fruitful reign. **What quality is needed for an enduring administration? A righteous rule.** The qualification for an enduring administration is its moral character. **God is concerned that there be no miscarriage of justice for people simply because they are poor.**

What can you do as a leader to have a just administration? **If as a leader you are trying to have a righteous administration you will detest any criminal acts.** [SLIDE] “Doing wickedness is an abomination to kings, because a throne is established in righteousness” (Prov 16:12 NET). [BLANK SLIDE] **An administration is established by proper behavior and honesty in dealings.** Upholding good conduct is the basis upon which a stable kingdom is built. Dishonesty and injustice ultimately lead to a ruler's downfall.

**Part of pursuing justice as a leader includes purging wickedness from one's administration.** Solomon observes that when the king purges the wicked from his court he will be left with righteous counselors and his government therefore will be “established in righteousness” – it will

endure through righteousness. [SLIDE] “Remove the dross from the silver, and material for the silversmith will emerge; <sup>25:5</sup> remove the wicked from before the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness” (Prov 25:4-5 NET). [BLANK SLIDE]

If as a leader you desire to have God’s blessing and protection **pursue faithful love in your dealings.** [SLIDE] “Loyal love and truth preserve a king, and his throne is upheld by loyal love” (Prov 20:28 NET). [BLANK SLIDE] As a leader seek to have the best interests of those whom you serve in mind. Demonstrate faithful loyal love.

In contrast, Rehoboam, Solomon’s son who succeeded Solomon on the throne of Israel, rejected faithful loyal love to the people he ruled. The result was that ten of the twelve tribes of Israel were taken from him.

**Reit/Trans:** How do wise leaders conduct themselves? Wise leaders **remain morally pure.** Wise leaders **avoid over-indulgence.** Wise leaders **promote justice for all.**

**CONCLUSION:** This morning we’ve considered three characteristics of wise leaders. These are qualities for which each of us should strive. By God’s grace **let’s maintain moral purity.** Let’s **avoid overindulgence.** Let’s **promote justice.**

None of us are perfect. No leader is perfect, but God is looking for a heart that is responsive to Him, and who, when we sin, confess and forsake it. **God looks for one who desires to be used of God to further His kingdom.**

**Has God put within your heart a desire to shepherd and help lead His people?** If you have any inkling that the Holy Spirit might be calling you to serve this congregation as an elder would you pray and seek God’s guidance? Then talk to myself or one of the other pastors or elders.

Currently we are conducting leadership training and perhaps God would have you take part in this training. Let us know, if you sense the Lord nudging your heart toward church leadership. **If you feel any calling at all to eldership please let one of the current elders know now.** We want to begin to prepare and develop now those whom God may be calling to this responsibility. Some of the “potential elder” training includes reviewing the major (essential) doctrines of the faith as found in our constitution. The reason for this is because **what we believe effects what we do.**

**God has special honor and reward for those who shepherd and lead His flock.** Would you be willing to be used in that way if God so leads? **Pray about it; then please let me or one of the other elders or pastoral staff know.**

For all of us, let’s purpose to take heed to God’s wise advice to leaders. Seek to exhibit these five characteristics we’ve looked at this morning in your life, and let’s pray that our leaders might be characterized by these qualities themselves.

Communion/Greece Team Dedication