

Series in Proverbs: Proverbs 1:10-19.

Pakhom was a poor Russian farmer who worked hard to eek out a living. He and his wife were happy with their lives, though Pakhom had one grievance. He wished he owned the land he worked.

Winter came, and the poor farmer heard of land for sale. It seemed far out of reach, but Pakhom scraped enough together for a down payment and bought a few acres. He planted and saw a good harvest that year, but it didn't make him any happier. People trespassed or even let their animals feed on his land. He became bitter and wanted a fresh start with new neighbors... and more land.

Well, a traveler passed through town one day, and Pakhom gave him a place to stay. The man spoke of vast stretches on the other side of the Volga that were very fertile and cheap. Pakhom jumped at the opportunity—how could he resist? The next year he harvested more crops, and though becoming quite wealthy, he still wasn't happy.

More land. More cattle. More wealth. More problems. Some of the new land disappointed Pakhom, and some of his acres were miles apart. Determined to buy a thousand acres elsewhere, he came across a traveler who captured his imagination. The man spoke of land never farmed, ten thousand acres practically being given away. Curiosity took hold, and Pakhom traveled many days to inspect the claim. It was all true, and the owners were quite eager to sell.

The deal was a bit odd, however. For a fixed price, Pakhom could have as much land as he could walk around in a single day. *Walk around?* Nonetheless, he rose at sunrise the next day, started walking and marked all the land his heart desired. With each acre, the next seemed even better. He had to have more and more until he lost sight of his starting point and couldn't possibly return before sunset.

Walking turned to running, and running into an all-out sprint as Pakhom raced back. His heart pounded, his lungs burned, and his body was ready to collapse, but he made it before sunset. Endless acres of land were now his... but only for a moment.

Leo Tolstoy writes that the farmer's hunger for more land cost him his contentment, his friends, and finally his life. Having pushed his body so hard to have more, Pakhom's body collapsed. He gained land only to lose his life.

Scripture doesn't say it's wrong to be wealthy. It does, however, warn against the desire to pursue it (1 Tim 6:6-10). Jesus said that it's impossible to serve both God and money (Matt 6:24). It's impossible to strive after riches while enjoying what you already have, too (Heb 13:5).

At its outset, Proverbs has a warning about the discontent of always wanting more (Prov 1:10-19). Solomon makes it personal, telling of a crowd who wants to prevail upon his own son. Young Rehoboam wants more and has the wrong group of friends—how far will he go along with them?

AN ENTICING OPPORTUNITY (PROVERBS 1:11-14)

“For all the wars are sprung from one source, desire, and the desire for money or glory or pleasure. These it is that bring disaster to the human race.” Philo was right. Conflicts always start with a desire that grows into action. And if the wrong kind of desire is fostered long enough, it may lead a person down a path filled with regret.

In Proverbs 1, Solomon speaks to his son about the friends he's chosen. Rehoboam was a young man who had attracted the wrong kind of crowd. Solomon sternly warned him: “If sinners entice you, do not consent” (Prov 1:10). His son may be at a crossroads in life.

It's a detailed picture that Solomon paints which leads me to say it came from a real concern—a crowd who seemed likely to pressure his son with theft and murder. “If they say, ‘Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood...’” (Prov 1:11).

Proverbs 14:30—“A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.”

Solomon could tell that these friends were the kind who liked what others had. Perhaps they had a few run-ins with the law? Maybe. In any case, he knows that they're heading down the wrong path and that his son might be enticed to follow.

He uses the most intense form of the verb for “entice” (Prov 1:10). Solomon wants Rehoboam to understand that one day his current friends might allure him with evil, seduce his mind with their plans, or captivate his thinking. Extreme peer pressure.

How Much Does a Man Need?

What can we learn from this? That wrong desires in the heart warp the mind and can ruin a person's life. If we allow what's wrong to "entice" us, our mind will begin to work at having. Given enough time, longing and thinking may turn into doing.

Proverbs 4:23—"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."

Solomon pled with his son to listen, because if Rehoboam should become enticed by this crowd's plans today, there's no telling where this path might take him tomorrow. Solomon was being proactive, trying to address the root before weeds could ever surface in his son's life.

RUNNING TO RUIN (PROVERBS 1:15-19)

"My son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths" (Prov 1:15). *My son, stop walking with these guys!* He knows his son's foot is inclined towards his friends, not him. He pleads hoping that Rehoboam will listen.

Here's a crowd that believes law-breaking is advantageous (Prov 1:13). Even if they never go so far as to commit murder, they haven't any respect for authority. Likely this group has involved Rehoboam in lesser schemes, and his father knows that it's all self-destructive behavior (Prov 1:17-18). Law breaking may bring happiness and fortune for a time, but it comes with a cost.

Sin always comes with a cost. It kills daily joy and strangles any desire to worship God or walk in fellowship with Him. It enslaves people, overwhelms them with bad feelings, and blinds them from rightly seeing reality. Whether it's criminal activity or sin in general, actions that dishonor God devastate the lives of those who regularly engage in them.

Gain can be a blessing, but if we must sin to have it, we're guilty of what Solomon called, "unjust gain." It's taking for ourselves a gain that God didn't intend for us to have. Rather than enhancing life, unjust gain is a disease that rots the heart. "It takes away the life of its possessors" (Prov 1:19).

Ecclesiastes 5:18-19 says that when God gives riches, He often prevents a person from enjoying them. Solomon had riches, and he rarely experienced the peace of contentment. Reading Ecclesiastes, it seems he was perpetually restless, always wanting something more or something different than the riches God had given him.

"IT IS WRONG TO ASSUME THAT MEN OF IMMENSE WEALTH ARE ALWAYS HAPPY"

~ JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER.

There's a connection between the love of money and a discontent heart (not money itself, but the *love* of it). No matter how much you gain, it's never enough. More. More. More. It's an unhappy pursuit that never ends.

Later in Proverbs, there's a prayer that God wouldn't give too much or too little (Prov 30:8-9). Why? Because in great poverty or great riches, in the extremes of life, there are unique temptations.

Just give me enough, Lord—what I need; no more, no less.

Life is filled with opportunities to be content or to be discontent. If you know Christ, you have the choice either to thank Him for what He's given or to offend Him for not giving more. What's the secret to being content? According to a Puritan pastor of long ago, it's realizing that God has already provided everything you need to be happy right here, right now.¹

Had Solomon's son grasped onto this truth, he would've held back his foot from the path of his friends.

¹Jeremiah Burrows, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*.