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Proverbs: Ancient Wisdom for Contemporary Organizations

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ARTICLES

PROVERBS

ANCIENT WISDOM FOR CONTEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses how the Biblical Book of Proverbs applies to contemporary organizations. An inductive study of the Proverbs related to organizational life elicited a set of thematic categories. All proverbs related to these categories are reported, and a subset of these categories is explored further. Select examples of proverbs are provided to illustrate each topic with connections made to current management scholarship. Finally, these topical themes are integrated in the context of organizational trust, demonstrating the importance of comprehensive adherence by organizations and their members to all the principles that Proverbs advocates. The degree to which all of the themes within Proverbs are present in organizational trust highlights the significance of God's wisdom for organizational relationships and effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION: ANCIENT WISDOM LITERATURE

This article proposes that Biblical wisdom literature, specifically the Book of Proverbs, has relevance for the effective functioning of contemporary organizations. The Book of Proverbs is an immensely practical book intended as a teaching resource with application to daily life. These applications include business practices, and although we might typically consider Proverbs to be advice for individuals, principles from Proverbs are relevant at the organizational level as well. Many of the foundational principles for effective organizations that management scholars and practitioners advocate are not new; rather, they can be found in these writings from thousands of years ago. In fact, the recently popularized concept of organizational wisdom, though not acknowledging the Creator as the source of all wisdom, does imply that meaning and understanding, practical instruction, and collected advice contribute to effective

organizational functioning and achievement. The purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive examination of the content of Proverbs as it relates to business using an inductive approach to Scripture, followed by a content analysis of the themes that occur. A subset of these thematic categories will be explored further in the context of their relationship to management theory broadly, as well as in a deeper examination of organizational trust. A hope is to offer an article suitable for classroom discussion that gives students an awareness of the intentionality with which the Bible was written and confidence that their faith and their discipline advocate the same best practices.

The organization of the article is as follows. First, wisdom literature as a genre of Scripture is introduced, with a particular focus on Proverbs. This background information will include the definition of wisdom and purpose of wisdom literature, briefly exploring how stylistic elements were used to emphasize content. The goal

of this section is to enhance the reader's appreciation of how characteristics of the genre itself contribute to one's understanding of and commitment to applying the content. Next, the present article will be placed within the context of current scholarship regarding the intersection of business and Proverbs. Following this introduction, the main portion of the article is dedicated to a content examination of Proverbs and its application to organizational practice and human conduct within organizations. Proverbs related to several categories of organizational effectiveness are introduced and integrated with organizational theory and research. Finally, as a further demonstration of the relevance of the set of principles that Proverbs advocates, the Proverbs categories are applied to a model of organizational trust. The degree to which all of the themes within Proverbs are present in organizational trust highlights the significance of God's wisdom for organizational relationships and effectiveness.

Meaning of Wisdom

During the time Proverbs was composed, wisdom was seen to have various but related meanings: meaning in life, meaning of life, the way to success, and the discovery of the order of creation and conformity to it (Bergant, 1984). Broadly, wisdom had to do with one's understanding of or approach to reality (Murphy, 1981). For ancient cultures (including Hebrew as well as other Near Eastern cultures such as Egypt and the Sumerian culture of Mesopotamia), wisdom did not mean just intelligence or knowing facts, but also having insight and the ability to navigate life well, including the ability to avoid problems, the skill to deal with them when they arrive, and even the ability to interpret what other people are saying in order to react appropriately (Longman, 2002). Wisdom included having discretion and pursuing action that is right, just, and equitable (Longman, 2002). The dictates of wisdom shaped and upheld the order that was seen to permeate all things. "The natural world, the realm of human conduct, and the organizational structures of human society, were all believed to lie within this one sustaining order of wisdom that had been laid down at the creation of the universe" (Clements, 1992, p. 45-46). Wisdom literature is an invitation to study this ordered world "in a spirit of humility, so that we may take our due place within it willingly and intelligently" (Kidner, 1985, p. 12).

Purpose of Wisdom Literature

Wisdom is obtained by observing people and things (Clements, 1992). Thus, wisdom literature was based on

observation and could be in the form of instruction, a life experience example (e.g., Job), a debate (e.g., Ecclesiastes), or, most commonly, short proverbial sayings. The Book of Proverbs expresses its purpose as follows:

For learning about wisdom and instruction,
for understanding words of insight,
for gaining instruction in wise dealing,
righteousness, justice, and equity;
to teach shrewdness to the simple,
knowledge and prudence to the young—
Let the wise also hear and gain in learning,
and the discerning acquire skill,
to understand a proverb and a figure,
the words of the wise and their riddles.
(1:2-6, *NRSV*)

Wisdom literature could be experiential (telling things the way they are and leaving the reader to draw practical conclusions) or didactic (characterizing a certain act or attitude so as to influence the reader's conduct; Murphy, 1981), but overall was concerned with seeing life from God's perspective (Lynn & Wallace, 2001).

Wisdom literature in general, but particularly the proverb form, is intended to be pragmatic, but does not "separate Divine wisdom from its practical implications for human conduct" (Chewning, 2001, p. 128). The content of Proverbs, as with wisdom literature in general, deals with human experience set in the context of everyday life: home, family, marketplace, political and other organizations (Atkinson, 1996; Clements, 1992; Murphy, 1981). Proverbs depict the art of living skillfully in whatever actual conditions we find ourselves" (Peterson, 1996, p. 282) — they describe a life that is well-managed (Kidner, 1985). Because they deal with human nature, Proverbs exhibit a timeless quality and impart wisdom as much today as they did as when they were first written (Kidner, 1964).

Though pragmatic in content, care was taken to communicate the advice well, including facilitating oral transmission. Using the technique of parallelism, couplets state and repeat the same message using different phrasing (Hybels, 1998). Proverbs make use of figurative and poetic language (Clements, 1992; Longman, 2002), and typically employ literary techniques such as metaphor, simile, hyperbole, sound and word repetition, personification, humor and irony to emphasize their point (Hybels, 1998; Ibekwe, 1998; Rovira, 1984). The parallelism and imagery, as well as the personification of Lady Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs, are good exam-

ples of this artistic language (Clements, 1990; Longman, 2002). For example:

Wisdom has built her house,
she has hewn her seven pillars.
She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed
her wine,
she has also set her table.
She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls
from the highest places in town,
“You that are simple, turn in here!”
To those without sense she says,
“Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
Lay aside immaturity, and live,
and walk in the way of insight.” (9:1-6,
NRSV)

These literary devices were used to get deeply into the mind of hearers, drawing them into answering and asking questions, perhaps helping them to work out painful issues (Kidner, 1985).

Proverbs generally express an insight widely held to be truth—though not necessarily followed. Proverbs and other wisdom literature also recognize the idea of contingency, being sensitive to the situation (Longman, 2002). For example:

Do not answer fools according to their folly,
or you will be a fool yourself.
Answer fools according to their folly,
or they will be wise in their own eyes.
(26:4-5, *NRSV*)

The correct action depends on the right time and circumstance. Ecclesiastes has made the most encompassing statement of this idea: “For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven” (*Eccl.* 3:1, *NRSV*).

Current Christian Management Scholarship on Proverbs

Christian management scholarship commonly makes reference to Proverbs, but Proverbs rarely has been a primary focus. Exceptions are two books written for non-academic audiences that propose solid management practices and then provide Scriptural support for these practices from Proverbs (Hybels, 1998; Zigarelli, 2008). Not surprisingly, Proverbs has been cited frequently within the *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business*. Authors often mention at least one Proverb among other

Bible verses when discussing Christianity and business generally (e.g., Hoover, 1998; Porter, 1998) or writing about topics related to specific Christian business practices such as charging interest (e.g., Proverbs 28:8; Elder, 1999), conflict (e.g., 15:18, 16:28, 26:20, 27:17, 28:25; Mackey, 1999), leaders seeking counsel (e.g., 15:22; Mackey, 1999), planning (e.g., 23:3; Beadles, 1998), or servant leadership (e.g., 29:18, Tucker, Stone, Russell, & Franz, 2000). Less typically, articles have focused entirely on a single Proverb, for example, Proverbs 29:18 as it relates to strategic planning (Black, 1998). At times, more conceptual topics such as firstfruits (e.g., Proverbs 3:9; Stewart, 2003) and wisdom generally (Chewning, 2003) also benefit from application of Proverbs. Topics surrounding Christian business education, such as conflict of ideas (Mackey, 1999), students’ attitudes toward materialism (Proverbs 13:21; Jung & Kellaris, 2001), teaching Biblical principles (Chewning & Haak, 2002; Surdyk, 2002), and faith integration strategies (e.g., Chewning, 2001; Johnson, 1998, 1999; Lynn & Wallace, 2001), also cite Proverbs. Rarely are Proverbs cited in articles which focus on management theory (see Black and Smith [2003] work on complexity theory for an exception). Thus, one contribution of the present article is to integrate teachings from Proverbs with organizational scholarship.

Secular Scholarship and Organizational Wisdom

Perhaps surprisingly, the secular management academy has also begun to discuss the concept of wisdom in the context of organizations. The source of wisdom is attributed more to individuals than to God; nevertheless, scholarly work in this area has recognized that individuals receive wisdom through foundational sources such as the Book of Proverbs (Bartunek, 2004; Dose, 2004; Manz, Manz, Marx, & Neck, 2001). This emerging focus by organizational scholars is encouraging and has been applied to topics such as servant leadership and organizational legitimacy (Hamilton, 2006; Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006), as well as being an Eastern Academy of Management conference theme in 2004. Kessler (2006, pp. 297) has defined organizational wisdom as “the collection, transference and integration of individuals’ wisdom and the use of institutional and social processes (e.g., structure, culture, leadership) for strategic action.” The focus is on ways in which organizations might go beyond simply developing knowledge and instead seek to effectively synthesize it with higher order visioning in order to apply it in appropriate ways in a given situ-

ation (Bierly, Kessler, & Christensen, 2000; Hamilton, 2006). Organizational wisdom has been called the ideal of perfect and practical (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). The desired outcome of organizational wisdom is an effective organization, one that has a clear mission, carefully-planned strategic goals leading to anticipated results, cohesive and productive teams, good leadership, and ethical, skilled, and hard-working employees. Organizational wisdom cannot exist without individual wisdom, and even individual wisdom is dependent upon organizational members being willing and able to acquire, share, and act on each other's knowledge and experience. Taken together, Proverbs depicts many attributes of an effective organization as seen in the sections that follow.

PROVERBS FOR CONTEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS

Methodology for Selection and Categorization

Although the genre of wisdom literature exists in other books of the Bible as well, this article focuses on Proverbs as a specific type of wisdom literature because it is the most applied in format and context, and because of its wealth of examples relating to organizational life. In contrast to the other writing on the application of Proverbs to business (e.g., Zigarelli, 2008), this article takes an explicitly inductive approach (Osborne, 1991; Prahlad, 1996). An inductive approach to studying Scripture focuses on the text itself, then deriving meaning, principles, and application from what the passage actually says rather than reading into it one's own ideas or preconceptions (Grahmann, 2003). Consistent with similar practices of other authors who use Scripture in the context of their disciplines and who have noted that no single version captures the entirety of the Proverbs' meaning (e.g., Zigarelli, 2008), multiple versions were examined in order to collect relevant Proverbs. One translation is the *New Revised Standard Version (NRSV; 1989)*, a word-for-word translation using traditional language and current scholarship. Quotations are also taken from *The Message* (Peterson, 1996), a version specifically crafted to present vivid images and ideas in everyday language, and which resonates well with applications to contemporary organizational life. Using the combination of the two versions helps to underscore the Proverb's message.

In the case of the present study, the text was examined for all proverbs having to do with organizational life specifically or with specific application to organizational life. Proverbs related to topics such as family relation-

ships, the poor, or one's general relationship with God were not included. The comprehensive set of Proverbs was then sorted into common themes (e.g., leadership, planning). The categories were not developed a priori, but rather emerged from the existence of Proverbs concerning similar topics. Categories are not intended to be definitive, but rather indicate the key themes related to organizational effectiveness that Proverbs addresses. The categories that emerged are as follows:

- Integrity in business dealings
- Discipline
- Competence
- Planning
- Learning—information gathering, seeking instruction, feedback
- Effective communication—truthfulness, civility, discretion
- Work group interaction
- Leadership

A comprehensive list of the Proverbs corresponding to each category is provided in Appendix 1. The categories fall into two main types. One encompasses the first three categories: integrity in business dealings, discipline, and competence. These have more to do with conduct related to the marketplace and the pursuit of business itself. The other type has more to do with organizational life and encompasses planning, information gathering, instruction, communication, work group interaction, and leadership. There are instances in which a Proverb may address more than one category simultaneously (e.g., leadership and communication in 29:12), demonstrating the application that categories have for one another, as well as emphasizing the point that certain general principles are repeatedly emphasized in multiple Proverbs, and thus encouraging readers to learn from these wise sayings. Since Proverbs having to do with the first three categories have been more widely discussed elsewhere (e.g., Black, 1998; Chewning, 2003; Elder, 1999), the present discussion will focus on Proverbs in the latter categories—those having in common how organizational members act together in a work situation. The following brief discussion uses select Proverbs from these categories to make connections between Proverbs topics and the management literature, and to demonstrate how current management scholarship parallels thought that has existed for centuries. The reader is encouraged to explore Appendix 1 for further examples from Scripture.

Planning

Achieving organizational goals requires planning (Miller & Cardinal, 1994). Proverbs also advocates this important management function, suggesting that careful planning leads to success:

The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance,
but everyone who is hasty comes only to want. (21:5, *NRSV*)

Prepare your work outside,
get everything ready for you in the field;
and after that build your house. (24:27,
NRSV)

Note that the quotations imply both efficiency and effectiveness. Although a dynamic business environment requires decisions to be made quickly, neglecting to take the time necessary to plan can be a major management pitfall. Successful planning allows an organization to be proactive rather than reactive (Miles & Snow, 1978). Planning also requires careful analysis of the situation in a holistic, systemic manner of thinking that theorists have associated with wisdom (Weick, 1998).

Sound thinking makes for gracious living,
but liars walk a rough road.
A commonsense person *lives* good sense;
fools litter the country with silliness. (13:15-
16, *Message*)

As mentioned earlier, Proverbs recognize the idea of contingency; prudence means selecting the best course of action in the face of contingent events (Hariman, 2003). “A prudent person sees trouble coming and ducks; a simpleton walks in blindly and is clobbered” (22:3 *Message*). Management scholars likewise advocate contingency planning in the face of uncertain future events (Schoemaker, 1995).

Learning

Proverbs addresses the full spectrum of learning, which encompasses gathering information, applying oneself to instruction, and heeding advice even if it is in the form of reproof. Proverbs addresses the full spectrum of learning.

Information Gathering

Information gathering is important for organizational effectiveness in a number of ways. Planning, discussed in the previous section, makes use of the information

gathering in order to develop strategic and operational plans based on the capabilities of the organization and the trends in the external environment. “An intelligent mind acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge” (18:15, *NRSV*). Weick (1998) described wisdom as a balance between doubt and confidence—expressing good judgment, but also admitting what one does not know. Thus, a careful, prudent analysis requires gathering information.

Managers benefit from observing and talking to people throughout the organization, using the opportunity to gather data and build a cognitive map (Malan & Kriger, 1998). “Without counsel, plans go wrong, but with advisors they succeed” (15:22 *NRSV*). Conversations between organizational stakeholders provide each other with the opportunity for understanding and cooperating in the planning process (McNamee, 1998).

These Proverbs are consistent with information monitoring and dissemination as important managerial roles (Mintzberg, 1971). Of course, knowledge means more than simply collecting information; it also means insightful analysis of that situation. A relevant warning also is given that one can chase after transient schemes that are not really wisdom at all. A “fool” in ancient times had a more severe connotation than it does in our present culture, describing one as rebellious, arrogant, careless, and having little interest in achieving greater understanding (Willard, 1998). In direct contrast, wise individuals are portrayed as seeking knowledge carefully and humbly. Wisdom is a virtue that makes sense in community (Bartunek, 2004). Organizational wisdom exists when members view each other as sources of information (Srivastva, S. & Saatçioğlu, 1998).

Seeking Instruction

Effective organizations understand that training is not simply a cost, but rather an investment in human capital (Laabs, 2000). Individual employees contribute to the organization by being proactive about learning new skills related to their job or seeking to gain techniques such as those related to total quality management. Proverbs emphasizes the value of instruction: “Apply your mind to instruction, and your ears to words of knowledge” (23:12, *NRSV*). Wisdom implies a desire to learn as well as to reflect critically on one’s own behavior. It also implies double-loop learning—not just attempting to solve immediate problems, but engaging in learning that addresses the root causes of those problems (Argyris, 1991). Additionally, help-seeking behaviors encourage new knowledge creation (Lee, Caza, Edmon-

ton, & Thomke, 2003). Proverbs reflects these ideas as well: “Give instruction to the wise, and they will become wiser still” (9:9, *NRSV*). Wisdom implies integration of cognitive ability, affect, experience, and ideas (Birren & Fisher, 1990), elements necessary to understand organizational culture and systems (Malan & Kriger, 1998).

Feedback

In addition to seeking knowledge, feedback that is given by supervisors, peers, subordinate and/or customers must be accepted (Probst, 1998). Proverbs 13:18 states: “Poverty and disgrace are for the one who ignores instruction, but one who heeds reproof is honored” (13:18, *NRSV*). Receiving negative feedback is not always pleasant, but perceptive individuals know that it is wise to seek improvement for the betterment of both themselves and the organization.

At the same time, those who give advice or feedback need to consider the method in which they communicate information: “A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit” (15:4, *NRSV*). Learning from mistakes is also a characteristic of wisdom (Sternberg, 1990), and effective organizations realize that individuals are more likely to attempt novel and difficult tasks and to engage in experimentation when the organization tolerates failures (Lee et al., 2003). Therefore, organizations should foster organizational wisdom by allowing employees to learn from mistakes rather than punishing them (e.g., The Toro Company; Melrose, 1995).

Responding to feedback takes place on an organizational level as well. Rather than recognizing or admitting failure, organizational decision makers can become so committed to a course of action that they continue in it even though objective knowledge of the situation would suggest otherwise. They seek to preserve the status quo or even engage in escalation of commitment rather than to admit that the initial decision was wrong (Hammond, Keeney, & Raiffa, 1998). Proverbs 6:1-3 is a warning not to make a commitment one cannot keep, but rather to admit one’s mistakes.

Dear friend, if you’ve gone into hock with your
neighbor
or locked yourself into a deal with a stranger,
If you’ve impulsively promised the shirt off your
back
and now find yourself shivering out in the
cold,
Friend, don’t waste a minute, get yourself out of
that mess. (6:1-3, *Message*)

Effective Communication

Effective communication is integral to the topics discussed previously, but Proverbs also addresses it specifically and, judging from the number of Proverbs dealing with the topic, it is given a great deal of emphasis. Communication that is careful, deliberate, and responsible benefits the organization and the individuals in it, both in terms of goal achievement and morale. Wise speech is supportive of fellow employees and gives individuals credibility. Wise organizational members are circumspect and do not have reputation for idle gossip. Their words can be trusted. Proverbs includes some general suggestions for effective communication as well as advice related to specific topics such as being truthful, civil, and discrete. For example:

The mind of the wise makes their speech judicious,
and adds persuasiveness to their lips. (16:23,
NRSV)

According to Proverbs, fitly spoken words are rare and valuable. Upright, judicious speech is persuasive, and can give deliverance and hope. These principles could be applied to many aspects of organizational life. In addition to seeking and accepting instruction, as discussed above, effectively giving feedback is important as well. Individuals who give advice or feedback to others would be wise to take these suggestions and consider the method in which they communicate information (Mohrman, Cummings, & Lawler, 1983). Gentle, constructive feedback is more persuasive than abusive language in motivating people to change, even if the content of the feedback is unpleasant.

Truthfulness

More specifically, for organizational members to interact effectively with each other, communication must be truthful. Information exchanged must be accurate in order to lead to organizational wisdom. Although Proverbs does not reference organizations directly, several sayings provide valuable advice for the transference and integration of organizational wisdom and demonstrate that truthfulness is highly commended, for example: “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight” (12:22, *NRSV*). Truthfulness is essential for establishing and maintaining trust, whether it is among coworkers, team members, leaders and followers, or with other stakeholders (Droege & Anderson, 2003). In addition to individual efforts, or-

ganizational policies should also promote truthfulness. Realistic job previews (Wanous & Colella, 1989) accurately describe to job applicants what they will experience as employees. Open book management (Pascarella, 1998) allows employees to understand an organization's financial situation.

Civility

In addition to communication accuracy, several Proverbs advocate managing and controlling anger, allowing relationships, and the information exchange derived from these relationships, to flourish. Patience and gentleness in speech may make the listener more receptive to the content of the message: "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (15:1, *NRSV*). In contrast, angry words harm relationships, impair productivity, and impede information flow. For example, "Slowness to anger makes for deep understanding; a quick-tempered person stockpiles stupidity" (14:29, *Message*). Anger has been found to have negative consequences including impaired relationships, poor coping styles, and coronary problems; an increasing number of people are referred to anger management treatment (Lench, 2004; Smith & Pope, 1990). It is possible to reduce aggression by reducing unexpected or unfair frustration (Berkowitz, 1989) in the organizational setting. Employee selection practices (Sommers, Schell, & Vodanovich, 2002) and cognitive and behavior skill training may also be beneficial (Defenbacher, Oetting, & DiGiuseppe, 2002) to reduce the number of employees who are prone to anger.

Discretion

Circumstances may also dictate that the wise response be to practice discretion or even not to speak at all: "Whoever belittles another lacks sense, but an intelligent person remains silent" (11:12, *NRSV*). Effective communication is also circumspect—not necessarily silent, but certainly prudent, carefully considered, and concise: "Rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing" (12:18, *NRSV*). Confidentiality is important in the context of survey results, personality instruments, employee assistance plans (EAPs), and employee records in general. Executive coaching programs (Blackman-Sheppard, 2004) and open-door policies (Shenhar, 1993) are more successful when there is a confidentiality policy. Wise organizational members do not have reputation for idle gossip. Scholars point to gossip and rumor as dysfunctional and destructive for organizations (Baker & Jones, 1996). A strategy of greater timeliness and transparency in official

communications (Christensen, 2002) can reduce reliance on the grapevine, instead strengthening horizontal and vertical communication (Baker & Jones, 1996).

Work Group Interaction

In addition to suggestions for organizational interaction in general, Proverbs is replete with helpful advice for work group interaction. The previous sets of Proverbs could be considered building blocks for both work group interaction and leadership (to be considered in the next section). Effective groups need to share organizational knowledge, increase cooperation, and reduce interpersonal conflict in order to make decisions and to be productive (Eisenhardt, Kahwajy, & Bourgeois, 1997; Sinclair, 2003); however, effective information exchange can be difficult within groups (Dose, 2003). Proverbs addresses all of these issues, recognizing that many tasks cannot be done alone: "Do not rely on your own insight" (3:5, *NRSV*). Rather, work may require the expertise of several people (Mohrman et al., 1995): "Arrogant know-it-alls stir up discord, but wise men and women listen to each other's counsel" (13:10, *Message*). Techniques such as brainstorming (Osborn, 1957) are consistent with the advantages Proverbs gives to working with others: "Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another" (27:17, *NRSV*). Proverbs also recognizes the problems with interpersonal conflict, "Do not quarrel with anyone without cause, when no harm has been done to you" (3:30, *NRSV*). A Proverb in *Ecclesiastes* shows how individuals working together can be more productive: "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help" (4:9-10, *NRSV*). Managing task interdependencies requires frequent communication to provide information and build relationships (Gittell, 2003): "The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so the minds of fools" (15:7, *NRSV*). Finally, Proverbs demonstrates implications for selection: "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise; but the companion of fools suffers harm" (13:20, *NRSV*). Team composition in terms of both values and skills is important for organizational success, particularly for knowledge workers (Dose & Klimoski, 1999; Mohrman et al., 1995).

Leadership

The final category from Proverbs is leadership, appropriate since the preceding categories also apply to good leaders. Many Proverbs show the relationship of leadership to other aspects of organizational wisdom de-

picted in the Proverb categories discussed previously. To illustrate this relationship, a greater selection of Proverbs has been provided within the text, and the commentary following the quotations discusses their application to organizational practice.

Love and truth form a good leader;
sound leadership is founded on loving integrity. (20:28, *Message*)

Leaders who know their business and care
keep a sharp eye out for the shoddy and cheap. (20:8, *Message*)

The mark of a good leader is loyal followers;
leadership is nothing without a following. (14:28, *Message*)

Good-tempered leaders invigorate lives;
They're like spring rain and sunshine. (16:15, *Message*)

Leaders gain authority and respect
when the voiceless poor are treated fairly. (29:14, *Message*)

A good leader motivates,
Doesn't mislead, doesn't exploit. (16:10, *Message*)

Good leaders abhor wrongdoing of all kinds;
sound leadership has a moral foundation.
Good leaders cultivate honest speech;
they love advisors who tell them the truth. (16:12-13, *Message*)

Good leaders have integrity and encourage integrity in others (Treviño & Nelson, 1995). Leaders who effectively define business strategy are important for organizational performance (Miller & Cardinal, 1994). Honest, competent leaders create loyal followers (Kouzes & Posner, 1990). They provide renewal and energy to their followers, and merit respect and loyalty. Consistently great organizations have leaders who are strong-willed, yet humble (Collins, 2001). Proverbs concurs with the virtue of humility: "Do you see persons wise in their own eyes? There is more hope for fools than for them" (26:12, *NRSV*). Effective leaders not only exhibit these characteristics themselves, but they help their followers to grow, become accountable, correct unacceptable behavior, and learn to emulate the leader's wise example (Godshalk & Sosik, 2000; Sims & Brinkman, 2002). They have a significant influence in creating the culture

in which wisdom is readily transferred to others (Bierly, Kessler, & Christensen, 2000) and through which the organization can prosper. In fact, trusted leaders "may play the single most important role in determining success or failure" in developing a learning organization (Prewitt, 2003, p. 58).

Poor leadership can take many forms, including lack of restraint, sincerity, or good judgment, all of which have negative consequences:

An intemperate leader wreaks havoc in lives;
You're smart to stay clear of someone like that. (16:14, *Message*)

Mean-tempered leaders are like mad dogs;
the good-natured are like fresh morning dew. (19:12, *Message*)

It takes more than talk to keep workers in line;
mere words go in one ear and out the other. (29:19, *Message*)

When a leader listens to malicious gossip,
all the workers get infected by evil. (29:12, *Message*)

Among leaders who lack insight, abuse abounds,
but for one who hates corruption, the future is bright. (28:16, *Message*)

Although Proverbs apply to organizational members at any level, leaders have greater responsibility for financial, human, and other resources, and must apply wisdom to their decisions. Even though organizational leaders set an example for the rest of the organization to follow, they must still be willing to seek and take counsel: ". . . Fools despise wisdom and instruction" (1:7, *NRSV*) and "Fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to advice (12:15, *NRSV*)." Recent events (e.g., Enron, AIG, Countrywide Financial) have shown the consequences of unethical leadership that expresses little concern for the followers or for the organization as a whole: "The folly of fools misleads" (14:8, *NRSV*). Hopefully, other organizations and their leaders are wise enough to learn from these mistakes.

Interrelationships and Implications

This section has explored the content of individual Proverbs, classifying them into categories that address similar topics, generating a clear set of principles for organizational effectiveness that deal with multiple aspects of organizational life. Taken together, these Proverbs are useful in multiple ways. First, their origin, universality

and timelessness give weight to the advice they advocate. The same principles and advice given thousands of years ago are consistent with current organizational theory and empirical research. Second, Proverbs deals with behavior at the individual, group, and organizational levels. For example, individuals must plan their own work, but planning is important at an organizational level as well. Individuals must be proactive in seeking feedback, but institutional mechanisms can also be put into place to encourage feedback. Awareness of the weight and comprehensiveness of Proverbs and the principles advocated through its themes may encourage managers to apply them personally, but perhaps more importantly to apply them to organizational systems in order to enhance organizational wisdom.

Finally, not only can proverbs relating to organizational life be classified in a meaningful way, the thematic categories themselves can be connected in meaningful ways. For example, planning requires gathering information and asking for advice and counsel. Communication is a predominant theme in Proverbs, encompassing truthfulness, patience, and discretion; however, communication is also a significant element of other categories. Business dealings require communication between employees and customers. Depending on the job, skillful work may depend on effective communication; this is becoming more true as the service industry and knowledge workers become more important. Thus, the lesson here is that one cannot pick and choose which of God's principles to follow; God desires complete obedience. From an organizational perspective, organizational effectiveness is dependent upon commitment to a coherent strategy that encompasses the totality of the themes described above.

The interrelated and comprehensive nature of the Proverbs themes in the context of organizations also can shed light on topics that have been the focus of scholarly research. A deep understanding of both the internal and external contexts in which the organization operates is fundamental to organizational effectiveness. As noted above, the concept of "organizational wisdom" is relatively recent, but the idea that employees generally and leaders particularly need to have access to information and be able to analyze that information and learn from it has been recognized by scholars and practitioners for some time. The concept of a learning organization (Senge, 1990), research on problem solving (e.g., Hoffman, 1979; Zand, 1972), group decision making (e.g., Hirokawa, 1980; McGrath, 1984), and information ex-

change (e.g., Dose, 2003; Stasser & Stewart, 1992) all point to the essential nature of gathering, disseminating, and making use of accurate information in order to fulfill organizational goals effectively.

The following section provides one in-depth example of how organizational members, particularly leaders, who follow the set of principles that Proverbs advocates, will bring about beneficial organizational outcomes. Organizational leaders and members can achieve successful organizational knowledge sharing and problem solving by applying a model of trust that incorporates the principles from Proverbs with the trust outcomes of information, influence and control. First, trust is defined and placed in context. Next, a model of trust is described in which the Proverbs categories play a significant role in each element of the model.

TRUST

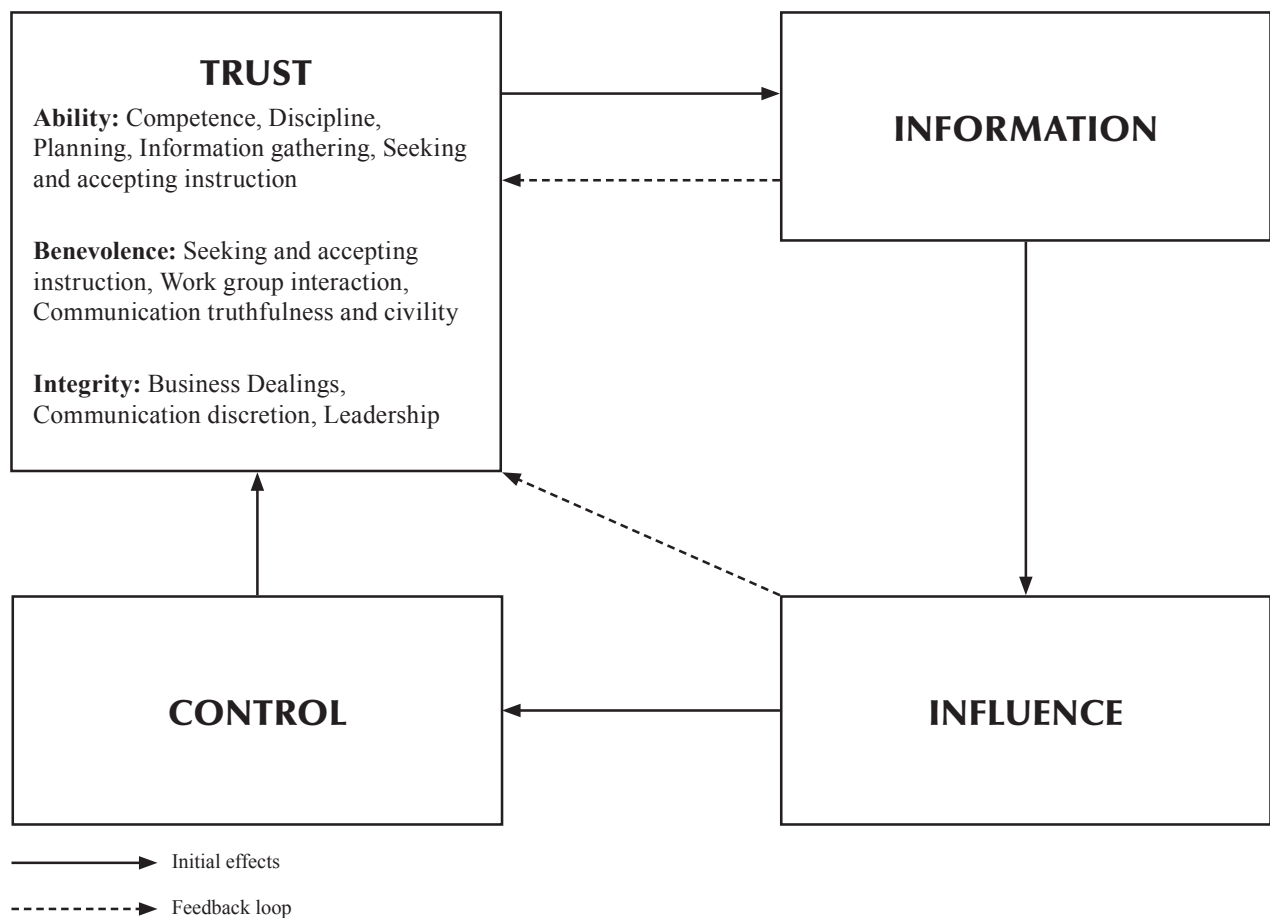
Trust has been described as an essentially Christian concept (Smith, 1999), and its presence is recognized as being especially valuable for organizational effectiveness (e.g., Dyck, 1999; Smith, 1999; Trufino, 1995). To trust is to be willing to accept vulnerability to another based on positive expectations about the other's intention or behavior (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; McEvily, Perrone, & Zaheer, 2003). Both Christian and secular scholars have noted the advantage of a culture of trust. The present business environment of rapid change requires fast and accurate problem solving and decision making (Burke, Sims, Lazzara, & Salas, 2007; Smith, 1999). Trust (in the team, leader, and/or organization) is associated with more effective problem solving (Zand, 1972), and enhanced communication, cooperation, and information sharing processes (Ferrin, Dirks, & Shah, 2003; Rempel Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). Trust has been described as essential to increasing the likelihood of engagement behavior in employees, even for intrinsically motivated behavior (Macey & Schneider, 2008), and engagement correlates with customer satisfaction and financial performance (Schneider & Paul, 2011). Additionally, trust has been associated with increased organizational citizenship and other discretionary behaviors (Connell, Ferrer, & Travaglione, 2003), increased upward communication (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001), improved team and organizational performance and stability (Dirks, 2000; Rich, 1997), and reduced need for bureaucratic control systems (e.g., Martinez, 2003; Bjijsma-Frankema & Costa, 2005; Smith, 1999).

Trust has particular importance in the context of leadership. Trust has a positive effect on satisfaction with and perceived effectiveness of a leader (Gillespie & Mann, 2004). Leaders who articulate a clear vision based on strong values, consistently model those values, communicate high performance expectations, and display confidence in followers' abilities have followers who are more committed, satisfied, better performers, and are more likely to trust the leader (Lowe, Kroeck, & Siv- asubramaniam, 1996; Waldman & Yammarino, 1999). The previously mentioned relationship between trust in the leader and effective problem solving (Zand, 1972) indicates that a functional view of leadership (Fleishman, Mumford, Zaccaro, Levin, Korotkin, & Hein, 1991) is particularly appropriate in the context of the complex, dynamic environments that organizations currently face

(Burke et al., 2007). The functional perspective defines leadership in terms of social problem solving directed toward organizational goal attainment, focusing on *what* leaders accomplish rather than the particular style they use to undertake those responsibilities (e.g., charismatic, transformation, transactional, etc.). Functional leadership of a team can be described as a series of problem solving steps: information search and structuring, information use in problem solving, and managing personal and material resources (including obtaining, allocating, developing, maintaining, motivating, and monitoring; Fleishman et al., 1991).

The following sections describe a model of trust, including antecedents, that integrates principles from Proverbs into that model's components, and which has implications for organizational wisdom. The model ap-

Figure 1. Model of Trust Outcomes



Adapted from Zand's (1972) *Model of the Relationship of Trust to Information, Influence and Control* and Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) *Proposed Model of Trust*.

plies to both organizational members and leaders; however, the elements of effective functional leadership will be evident within the model.

A Trust Model

Since problem solving is key for organizational effectiveness, and since trust is a key precondition for influence, it is appropriate to incorporate the content of Proverbs into an established model of trust and problem solving. Zand (1972) has proposed a model in which trust leads to greater information disclosure. Information, in turn, leads to willingness to be influenced by others. Effective influence leads to greater control in the form of interdependence, self-control, and commitment to success. This model is consistent with the goals of organizational wisdom, which requires gathering, communicating, and integrating information. The purpose of obtaining wisdom is to apply it in pursuit of organizational goals. Institutional and social processes facilitate the influence process. Leaders, especially, have a responsibility to interact directly with followers in order to build trust (Tucker et al., 2000). A model that combines elements of both the Mayer et al. (1995) characteristics of trust and the Zand (1972) trust outcomes is presented in Figure 1.

Components of Trust. For trust to be present, certain key characteristics of the individual upon which trust is to be based must exist. Scholars have widely acknowledged that these antecedents of trust fall into three categories: ability, integrity, and benevolence (Mayer et al., 1995). The examination of Proverbs shows that certain themes are related to these characteristics. In addition, Biblical leaders provide illustrations of these characteristics in action.

- **Ability** describes the characteristics and skills that enable an individual to be perceived as competent in a particular domain. In terms of the themes found in Proverbs, *competence, discipline, planning, information gathering, seeking instruction, and feedback* are primarily examples of ability. Daniel is an exemplar of these attributes in Scripture and merited trust because of them (Liang, 2010) due to his obedience to God's instruction, influence over others, and endurance through adverse circumstances.
- **Benevolence** is the perception that the trustee wishes to do good to the trustor (individual or organization) without an extrinsic reward. Benevolence can be seen most clearly in the Proverbs categories of *seeking instruction, feedback work group interac-*

tion, and communication, particularly truthfulness and civility. Martinez (2003) provides Nehemiah as one such example, due to his communication with, organization, and protection of the workers.

- **Integrity** involves the perception that the trustee adheres to a set of principles that are acceptable to the trustor. *Business dealings, discretion, and leadership* correspond to integrity. Klay, Lunn, & TenHaken (2004) point to the trustworthy officials to be appointed by Moses in Exodus 18:21 as examples of this attribute.

The three factors are separable but related to each other (Mayer et al., 1995); thus, Proverbs are relevant to all three of Mayer et al.'s trust factors. For example, work group interaction can also be related to ability. Benevolence, and ability-based trust, have been found to be positively related to useful knowledge acquisition (Levin & Cross, 2004; Politis, 2003) and to admitting lack of knowledge and seeking information without fearing loss of self-esteem (Abrams, Cross, Lesser, & Levin, 2003).

Information. As shown in the model, trust, as demonstrated by ability, benevolence and integrity, leads to increased information flow. The Proverbs categories of *information gathering, seeking instruction, feedback, effective communication, work group interaction, and leadership* play a significant role with regard to information. An organization's ability to disseminate information to different groups is critical to organizational efficiency (Droege & Anderson, 2003). Effective knowledge management requires sharing and integrating highly distributed knowledge (Zack, 1999). Trust has been found to have a direct effect on communication (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001) by increasing the accuracy and quantity of information exchange (Abrams et al, 2003; Droege & Anderson, 2003), thus supporting collaboration and knowledge sharing (Politis, 2003). Trust leads to more effective problem solving because organizational members are more willing to share information and more accepting of others ideas (Zand, 1972). The information sender's trust in the individual receiving information reduces concern about knowledge appropriation and misuse (McEvily et al., 2003), thus influencing the sender's degree of openness about sharing knowledge with the receiver (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). If experts believe there is risk in sharing information, they may share only part of their conceptual systems (Politis, 2003). As organizations face the need for innovation, and the risk that entails, trust is a necessary foundation (Schneider & Paul, 2011). Openness is essential for organizational learning because it

increases the potential for knowledge to be more widely disseminated as well as creating conditions favorable for exploring how knowledge can be recombined in new and creative ways (McEvily et al., 2003). Employee engagement increases in an atmosphere of trust because individuals feel safe (Macey & Schneider, 2008). In terms of seeking performance feedback, employees may be more willing to disclose limits in skills and abilities to their boss or coworkers (McEvily et al., 2003). Division of labor and interdependence among team members imply that employees must exchange information and rely on others in order to accomplish organizational goals (Ouchi, 1980).

Influence. Proverbs also addresses perceptions of behavior particularly in the context of the categories of *business dealings, competence, feedback, information gathering, truthfulness in communication, work group interaction, and leadership*. Trust enables individuals to have positive interpretations of others' competence, discipline, and ethical behavior (Dirks & Ferrin, 2003); thus, they will be more likely to allow themselves to be influenced (Zand, 1972). Organizational members who believe they can trust the veracity of others' knowledge and that the trusted counterpart will not exploit one's vulnerability are more inclined to accept information without taking the time and effort to verify it for accuracy, thus reducing complexity and economizing on information processing (Luhmann, 1979; McEvily et al., 2003). Taking this a step further, trust can act as a heuristic in knowledge sharing for the information receiver. The receiver expects the source to have considered the receiver's (or the organization's) best interest; thus, the receiver assumes that the knowledge conveyed is important and relevant. Simplifying the acquisition and interpretation of information makes decision making more efficient, which in turn can speed organizational learning, alertness and responsiveness (Abrams et al., 2003). Trust also affects the success with which individuals combine their efforts toward common goals by aiding in conflict management and enhancing cooperation (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). It can be used as a lens to evaluate the social motives of group members, moderating motivational dynamics such as acceptance and interpretation of feedback (McEvily et al., 2003).

Control. The Proverb categories of *discipline, competence, planning, feedback, and leadership* demonstrate relationships to the control aspect of the model. The presence of trust reduces the need for organizational control systems based on bureaucratic hierarchical authority

(e.g., Martinez, 2003; Bjijsma-Frankema & Costa, 2005; Smith, 1999), instead relying more on a culture of stewardship (Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007). Organizations with a more horizontal structure often utilize a loose coupling of activities in order to be adaptable; thus, trust may prove to be a necessary feature for integration of activities (Droege & Anderson, 2003). Trust enhances the success of loosely coupled systems by increasing cooperation, collaboration, and information sharing among actors. Trust also shapes the relatively stable and enduring interaction patterns in and between organizations. For example, by influencing the status and reputation of certain actors, trust affects their positions within a social network and affects structure of network itself (McEvily et al., 2003). Additionally, mutual trust in a third party can serve as a proxy for trust in the unknown counterpart (Krackhardt, 1992).

The trust model depicted in Figure 1 is cyclical, containing feedback loops from information, influence, and control; therefore, effectiveness in all parts of the process enhances and sustains trust (Zand, 1972). For example, openness and congruity lead to trust (Hart, 1988). Employees need information about tasks, a predictable work environment, and performance feedback. For managers, information about employee performance leads to trust in employees and willingness to involve them in decision making (Spreitzer & Mishra, 1999). McEvily et al. (2003) found organizational trust so fundamental as to describe it as an organizing principle; the thematic categories represented in Proverbs support this idea. (An organizing principle is the rationale by which organizations coordinate work and gather, disseminate, and process information inside and outside the organizational system (Zander & Kogut, 1995); other examples include authority, norms, and markets [McEvily et al., 2003].) Organizations have a formal and an informal structure, both of which are important in determining whether organizational goals are met. Trust can facilitate these activities through interpersonal processes. The activities of information gathering, disseminating and processing are consistent with the definition of organizational wisdom. Effective information transference, in turn, facilitates effective strategy formulation and implementation.

CONCLUSION

The Book of Proverbs imparts wisdom to us in the present day just as it did centuries ago through its pragmatic insights and memorable communication style. Organizing the content of Proverbs into themes related to

organizational life provides a set of time-tested, practical guidelines for organizational effectiveness that are supported by both God's word and management scholarship. The principles taken together provide a coherent strategy for organizational members' interactions and lead to positive organizational outcomes. Trust is an especially valuable (though far from the only) application for the principles Proverbs advocates. Organizational members, particularly leaders, who exhibit ability, integrity and benevolence, can increase organizational wisdom by increasing information flow, enhancing influence, and reducing the need for bureaucratic control systems. Each element of the trust model draws strength from several of the Proverbs categories.

Many of the themes presented in Proverbs would fall under the rubric of the following Proverb: "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due; when it is in your power to do it" (3:27, *NRSV*). This "good" might be advice, truth, leadership, or many other actions that foster organizational effectiveness through wise individual information exchange. In sum, these Proverbs illustrate that wisdom has value both for people as individuals and collectively in groups and organizations. Two final Proverbs sum up wisdom's worth:

Become wise for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.
(2:10, *NRSV*)

Know that wisdom is such to your soul;
if you find it, you will find a future,
and your hope will not be cut off. (24:14,
NRSV)

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APPENDIX 1. PROVERBS RELATED TO ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE LISTED BY CONTENT AREA

INTEGRITY IN BUSINESS DEALINGS

Treasures gained by wickedness will not profit,
but righteousness delivers from death. (10:2, *NRSV*)

Whoever walks with integrity walks securely,
but whoever follows perverse ways will be found out.
(10:9, *NRSV*)

God hates cheating in the marketplace
he loves it when business is aboveboard. (11:1, *Message*)

The integrity of the upright guides them
but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.
(11:3, *NRSV*)

Curses on those who drive a hard bargain!
Blessings on all who play fair and square! (11:26, *Message*)

Wealth hastily gotten will dwindle,
but those who gather little by little will increase it.
(13:11, *NRSV*)

A greedy and grasping person destroys community;
those who refuse to exploit live and let live. (15:27, *Message*)

Honest scales and balances are the LORD'S;
all the weights in the bag are his work. (16:11, *NRSV*)

Those who return evil for good
will meet their own evil returning. (17:13, *Message*)

The crooked of mind will not prosper,
and the perverse of tongue fall into calamity. (17:20, *NRSV*)

The wicked accept a concealed bribe
to pervert the ways of justice. (17:23, *NRSV*)

Switching price tags and padding the expense account
are two things that God hates. (20:10, *Message*)

God hates cheating in the market place;
rigged scales are an outrage (20:23, *Message*)

Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness
will find life and honor. (21:21, *NRSV*)

Better to be poor and walk in integrity
than to be crooked in one's ways, even though rich.
(28:6, *NRSV*)

The greedy person stirs up strife
but whoever trusts in the LORD will be enriched. (28:25, *NRSV*)

DISCIPLINE AND SELF CONTROL

Go to the ant, you lazybones; consider its ways and be wise.
Without having any chief or officer or ruler,
it prepares its food in summer
and gathers its sustenance in harvest. (6:6-8, *NRSV*)

A slack hand causes poverty,
but the hand of the diligent makes rich. (10:4, *NRSV*)

Make hay while the sun shines—that's smart;
go fishing during harvest—that's stupid. (10:5, *Message*)

Like vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes,
so are the lazy to their employers. (10:26, *NRSV*)

Whoever makes deals with strangers is sure to get burned;
if you keep a cool head, you'll avoid rash bargains.
(11:15, *Message*)

The one who stays on the job has food on the table;
the witless chase whims and fancies. (12:11, *Message*)

The hand of the diligent will rule,
while the lazy will be put to forced labor (12:24, *NRSV*)

A lazy life is an empty life,
but "early to rise" gets the job done. (12:27, *Message*)

The appetite of the lazy craves, and gets nothing,
while the appetite of the diligent is richly supplied.
(13:4, *NRSV*)

The way of the lazy is overgrown with thorns,
but the path of the upright is a level highway. (15:19, *NRSV*)

The appetite of workers works for them;
their hunger urges them on. (16:26, *NRSV*)

Laziness brings on deep sleep;
an idle person will suffer hunger. (19:15, *NRSV*)

The lazy person buries a hand in the dish,
and will not even bring it back to the mouth. (19:24, *NRSV*)

The lazy person does not plow in season;
harvest comes, and there is nothing to be found. (20:4, *NRSV*)

Do not love sleep, or else you will come to poverty;
open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread.
(20:13, *NRSV*)

Whoever loves pleasure will suffer want;
whoever loves wine and oil will not be rich. (21:17, *NRSV*)

Lazy people finally die of hunger
because they won't get up and go to work. (21:25, *Message*)

The lazy person says, "There is a lion outside!
I shall be killed in the streets!" (22:13, *NRSV*)

For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty
and drowsiness will clothe them with rags. (23:21, *NRSV*)

One day I walked by the field of an old lazybones,
and then passed the vineyard of a lout;
They were overgrown with weeds,
thick with thistles, all the fences broken down.
I took a long look and pondered what I saw;
the fields preached to me a sermon and I listened:
"A nap here, a nap there, a day off here, a day off there,
sit back, take it easy—do you know what comes next?"

Just this: You can look forward to a dirt-poor life,
with poverty as your permanent houseguest.” (24:30-
34, *Message*)

Like a city breached, without walls,
is one who lacks self-control. (25:28, *NRSV*)
As a door turns on its hinges,
so does a lazy person in bed. (26:14, *NRSV*)

If you care for your orchard, you’ll enjoy its fruit;
if you honor your boss, you’ll be honored. (27:18, *Mes-
sage*)

Anyone who tills the land will have plenty of bread,
but one who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty
of poverty. (28:19, *NRSV*)

She seeks wool and flax,
and works with willing hands. (31:13, *NRSV*)

COMPETENCE

Work gets paid with a bad check;
good work gets solid pay. (11:18, *Message*)

Well-spoken words bring satisfaction,
well-done work has its own reward. (12:13, *Message*)

One who is slack in work
is close kin to a vandal. (18:9, *NRSV*)

Do you see those who are skillful in their work?
they will serve kings;
they will not serve common people. (22:29, *NRSV*)

Know well the condition of your flocks,
and give attention to your herds. (27:23, *NRSV*)

She considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of her hand she plants a vineyard. (31:16,
NRSV)

She senses the worth of her work,
is in no hurry to call it quits for the day. (31:18, *Mes-
sage*)

PLANNING

My child, do not let these escape from your sight:
keep sound wisdom and prudence. (3:21, *NRSV*)

Sound thinking makes for gracious living,
but liars walk a rough road.

A commonsense person *lives* good sense;
fools litter the country with silliness. (13:15-16, *Mes-
sage*)

Without counsel, plans go wrong,
but with many advisors they succeed. (15:22, *NRSV*)

Commit your work to the LORD,
and your plans will be established. (16:3, *NRSV*)

We plan the way we want to live,
but only GOD makes us able to live it. (16:9, *Message*)

Desire without knowledge is not good,
and one who moves too hurriedly misses the way. (19:2,
NRSV)

The very steps we take come from GOD;
otherwise how would we know where we’re going?
(20:24, *Message*)

The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance,
but everyone who is hasty comes only to want. (21:5,
NRSV)

A prudent person sees trouble coming and ducks;
a simpleton walks in blindly and is clobbered (22:3,
Message)

Prepare your work outside,
get everything ready for you in the field;
and after that build your house. (24:27, *NRSV*)

Do not boast about tomorrow,
for you do not know what a day may bring. (27:1,
NRSV)

If people can’t see what GOD is doing,
they stumble all over themselves;
But when they attend to what he reveals,
they are most blessed. (29:18, *Message*)

LEARNING

• *Information Gathering*

Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, nor turn away
from the words of my mouth. (4:5, *NRSV*)

The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom,
and whatever else you get, get insight. (4:7, *NRSV*)

The wise lay up knowledge,
but the babbling of a fool brings ruin near. (10:14,
NRSV)

An intelligent person is always eager to take in more truth;
fools feed on fast-food fads and fancies. (15:14, *Mes-
sage*)

An intelligent mind acquires knowledge,
and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. (18:15, *NRSV*)

To get wisdom is to love oneself;
To keep understanding is to prosper. (19:8, *NRSV*)

By wisdom a house is built,
and by understanding it is established;
by knowledge the rooms are filled
with all precious and pleasant possessions (24:3-4,
NRSV)

• *Seeking Instruction*

Take my instruction instead of silver,
and knowledge rather than choice gold;
for wisdom is better than jewels,
and all that you desire cannot compare with her (8:10-
11, *NRSV*)

Give instruction to the wise,
and they will become wiser still. (9:9, *NRSV*)

A wise heart takes orders;
an empty head will come unglued. (10:8, *Message*)

Plans are established by taking advice;
wage war by following wise guidance. (20:18, *NRSV*)

Apply your mind to instruction,
and your ears to words of knowledge. (23:12, *NRSV*)

Buy truth and do not sell it;
buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding. (23:23,
NRSV)

Do you see persons wise in their own eyes?
There is more hope for fools than for them. (26:12,
NRSV)

• **Feedback**

Dear friend, if you've gone into hock with your neighbor
or locked yourself into a deal with a stranger,
If you've impulsively promised the shirt off your back
and now find yourself shivering out in the cold,
Friend, don't waste a minute, get yourself out of that mess.
(6:1-3, *Message*)

Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life,
but one who rejects a rebuke goes astray. (10:17, *NRSV*)

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge,
but those who hate to be rebuked are stupid. (12:1,
NRSV)

Fools think their own way is right,
but the wise listen to advice (12:15, *NRSV*)

Poverty and disgrace are for the one who ignores instruc-
tion,
but one who heeds reproof is honored. (13:18, *NRSV*)

A gentle tongue is a tree of life,
but perverseness in it breaks the spirit (15:4, *NRSV*)

A fool despises a parent's instruction,
but the one who heeds admonition is prudent. (15:5,
NRSV)

Without counsel, plans go wrong,
but with advisors they succeed. (15:22 *NRSV*)

Listen to advice and accept instruction,
that you may gain wisdom for the future. (19:20, *NRSV*)

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

The mouth of a good person is a deep, life-giving well,
but the mouth of the wicked is a dark cave of abuse.
(10:11, *Message*)

The speech of a good person clears the air;
the words of the wicked pollute it. (10:32, *Message*)

The words of the wicked are a deadly ambush,
but the speech of the upright delivers them. (12:6,
NRSV)

Knowledge flows like spring water from the wise;
fools are leaky faucets, dripping nonsense. (15:2, *Mes-
sage*)

The mind of the righteous ponders how to answer,
but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil. (15:28,
NRSV)

The mind of the wise makes their speech judicious,
and adds persuasiveness to their lips. (16:23, *NRSV*)

The crooked of mind do not prosper,
and the perverse of tongue fall into calamity. (17:20,
NRSV)

A fool takes no pleasure in understanding,
but only in expressing personal opinion. (18:2, *NRSV*)

There is gold and abundance of costly stones;
but the lips informed by knowledge are a jewel. (20:15,
NRSV)

A word fitly spoken
is like apples of gold in a setting of silver. (25:11,
NRSV)

• **Truthfulness**

Don't talk out of both sides of your mouth;
avoid careless banter, white lies, and gossip. (4:24, *Mes-
sage*)

A scoundrel and a villain
goes around with crooked speech. (6:12, *NRSV*)

Lying lips conceal hatred,
and whoever utters slander is a fool (10:18, *NRSV*)

The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom,
but the perverse tongue will be cut off. (10:31, *NRSV*)

Truthful witness by a good person clears the air,
but liars lay down a smoke screen of deceit. (12:17,
Message)

Truthful lips endure forever,
but a lying tongue lasts only a moment. (12:19, *NRSV*)

Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD,
but those who act faithfully are his delight. 12:22,
NRSV)

A truthful witness saves lives,
but one who utters lies is a betrayer. (14:25, *NRSV*)

Righteous lips are the delight of a king,
and he loves those who speak what is right. (16:13
NRSV)

• **Civility**

Fools show their anger at once,
But the prudent ignore an insult. (12:16, *NRSV*)

One who is quick-tempered acts foolishly,
and the schemer is hated. (14:17, *NRSV*)

Slowness to anger makes for deep understanding;
a quick-tempered person stockpiles stupidity. (14:29,
Message)

A soft answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger. (15:1, *NRSV*)

Those who are hot-tempered stir up strife,
but those who are slow to anger calm contention.
(15:18, *NRSV*)

One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,
and one whose temper is controlled than one who cap-
tures a city. (16:32, *NRSV*)

Those with good sense are slow to anger,
and it is their glory to overlook an offense. (19:11,
NRSV)

Let angry people endure the backlash of their own anger;
if you try to make it better, you'll only make it worse.
(19:19, *Message*)

Drive out a scoffer, and strife goes out;
quarreling and abuse will cease. (22:10, *NRSV*)

A fool gives full vent to anger,
but the wise quietly holds it back. (29:11, *NRSV*)

• *Discretion*

- Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you;
bind them around your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart. (3:3, *NRSV*)
- A gadabout gossip can't be trusted with a secret,
but someone of integrity won't violate a confidence.
(11:13, *Message*)
- The more talk, the less truth;
the wise measure their words. (10:19, *Message*)
- Whoever belittles another lacks sense,
but an intelligent person remains silent. (11:12, *NRSV*)
- Rash words are like sword thrusts,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing. (12:18,
NRSV)
- Irresponsible talk makes a real mess of things,
but a reliable reporter is a healing presence. (13:17,
Message)
- Frivolous talk provokes a derisive smile;
wise speech evokes nothing but respect. (14:3, *Message*)
- Scoundrels concoct evil,
their speech is like a scorching fire. (16:27, *NRSV*)
- Troublemakers start fights;
gossips break up friendships. (16:28, *Message*)
- To watch over mouth and tongue
is to keep out of trouble (21:23, *NRSV*)
- When you run out of wood, the fire goes out;
when the gossip ends, the quarrel dies down. (26:20,
Message)

WORK GROUP INTERACTION

- Do not quarrel with anyone without cause,
when no harm has been done to you. (3:30, *NRSV*)
- Arrogant know-it-alls stir up discord,
but wise men and women listen to each other's counsel.
(13:10, *Message*)
- Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise;
but the companion of fools suffers harm. (13:20, *NRSV*)
- The lips of the wise spread knowledge;
not so the minds of fools. (15:7, *NRSV*)
- Iron sharpens iron,
and one person sharpens the wits of another. (27:17,
NRSV)

LEADERSHIP

- It is the wisdom of the clever to understand where they go,
but the folly of fools misleads. (14:8, *NRSV*)
- The mark of a good leader is loyal followers;
leadership is nothing without a following. (14:28, *Message*)
- A good leader motivates,
doesn't mislead, doesn't exploit. (16:10, *Message*)
- Good leaders abhor wrongdoing of all kinds;
sound leadership has a moral foundation.
Good leaders cultivate honest speech;
they love advisors who tell them the truth. (16:12-13,
Message)
- Good-tempered leaders invigorate lives;
they're like spring rain and sunshine. (16:15, *Message*)
- Mean-tempered leaders are like mad dogs;
the good-natured are like fresh morning dew. (19:12,
Message)
- Leaders who know their business and care
keep a sharp eye out for the shoddy and cheap. (20:8,
Message)
- After careful scrutiny, a wise leader
makes a clean sweep of rebels and dolts. (20:26, *Message*)
- Love and truth form a good leader;
sound leadership is founded on loving integrity. (20:28,
Message)
- Good leadership is a channel of water controlled by God;
he directs it to whatever ends he chooses. (21:1, *Message*)
- Among leaders who lack insight, abuse abounds,
but for one who hates corruption, the future is bright.
(28:16, *Message*)
- A leader of good judgment gives stability;
an exploiting leader leaves a trail of waste. (29:5, *Message*)
- When a leader listens to malicious gossip,
all the workers get infected by evil. (29:12, *Message*)
- Leaders gain authority and respect
when the voiceless poor are treated fairly. (29:14, *Message*)
- It takes more than talk to keep workers in line;
mere words go in one ear and out the other. (29:19,
Message)