

We pick up our study now. We're looking at the transition from chapter 1 to chapter 2 in Proverbs via Proverbs chapter 7 and the extended description of what is initially referenced at the close of chapter 1 and a little bit farther on in Proverbs chapter 2. This is given in much greater detail in chapter 7, this woman who accosts this simple individual. And interestingly, in verse 7, the description of this young man: "I saw among the simple, I perceived among the sons a na'ar, a youth, a young man." And when it says devoid of understanding, this literally says lacking heart. The word translated understanding is lev, l-e-b or l-e-v, lacking heart. And the implication to the translator is, well, he must lack understanding, but he lacks a heart that's going to do him any good.

And what we recognize is that choosing wisdom, turning at wisdom's rebuke, responding to wisdom's call, gives us a heart, a meaningful guide, a reliable compass, something where God can speak and work and, in our age, reside, be at home in our hearts—to use Paul's phrase, Christ at home in your heart. This man, this young man, lacks a heart. And so, passing along near the corner and taking the path to her house in the twilight, in the evening, in the black and the dark of night, you can't get more emphatic that this is dimly lit, dark, not welcoming, not partaking of the light in any way.

There a woman met him with the clothing of a harlot and a crafty heart, a crafty heart. Now, this word crafty is really something, because it is netzer. It is from the word netzer, and you think, well, now wait a minute, isn't netzer, doesn't that mean branch, the root shoot from the stump of Jesse, the branch that will spring forth? He will be called a Nazarene. He will be called a netzerine. And yet here, this woman, this seductress's heart is described with a similar word. So she's got the attire of a harlot, and her lev, very same word you had up above, is netzerat, netzerat. It comes from netzer, n-e-t-s-e-r, and normally this word is translated to watch or guard or keep. And your first instance of it is in Exodus.

Now, the reason we're spending time on this, we're looking at the characteristics of seduction, the characteristics of deception. What is it that sneaks up on us, surprises us, and leads us astray? This young man is the example. He doesn't have what he needs to have in his heart, and somebody with a heart of this nature is going to accost him and lead him astray. What kind of heart does she have? It is a netzerat heart. And netzer is first used in Exodus 34:7. Netzer actually is the verb, and this is God in Exodus 34:7 who keeps mercy for thousands, who keeps chesed. Loving kindness, grace, loyal love is one of the translations of chesed. And God keeps this; He guards it, He reserves it, He sets it aside in a special way.

In Deuteronomy 32:10, the personification of Israel is being spoken of, and God instructed him and kept him as the apple of His eye, the pupil of His eye. Guarded, set aside in a special way, treasured is the idea. There is an interesting use of this in Job 7:20, where Job says, "What have I done to you, O watcher of men?" The one who guards, who treasures and keeps: what have I done that I am no longer treasured and guarded?

Turn to Job 27:18, because I believe there is a second combination of these three consonants, netzer, that came to have a completely different meaning. And you see this in Job. You turn back a few pages to 27:18, and here it is speaking of the rich man.

Begin at verse 11: "I will teach you about the hand of God. What is with the Almighty I will not conceal. Surely all of you have seen it. Why then do you behave with complete nonsense?" This is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage of oppressors that is received from the Almighty. So we are talking about the evil man and what God is going to do to him. "If his children are multiplied, it is for the sword, and his offspring shall not be satisfied with bread. Those who survive him shall be buried in death, and their widows shall not weep. Though he heaps up silver like dust, and piles up clothing like clay, he may pile it up, but the just will wear it, and the innocent will divide the silver. He builds his house like a moth."

I told you we would be talking about moths, although the Septuagint and the Vulgate have spider here. It is some sort of insect that builds a dwelling place. Spider makes more sense. Where does a moth live? I don't know. Did you ever see a moth build a house? But you see a spider build little funnel-shaped places where they live or places where they dwell. But what is the nature of a spider's web? I actually prefer spider here. I think the Septuagint preserves the earlier and better reading from the Masoretic. "He builds his house like a spider, like a booth." This is the word sukkot. Remember the Feast of Booths? Sukkot.

So the evil man who builds his house—this is like building your house on the sand—he builds his house like a spider. Spider's house isn't permanent. You don't find fossilized spider web houses. You don't find them

persisting from year to year. They're quickly destroyed. Like a booth, and it says, "which a watchman makes." But the word watchman here, they're trying to figure out what to do with netzer. But what is the other use of netzer? N-e-t-s-e-r. It doesn't mean to guard, keep, treasure, set aside as special. What is it? It's branch, right? And you have the word sukkot, and you have the word branch. So this is like a house made of branches. It's like a sukkot feast house. It's very ephemeral. It's very temporary. It's very impermanent, right? So this is something that only lasts a short while. Do you see where we're going with this? This house of branches is like a spider's house. It doesn't last long.

You go back to the use in several other places I could point to. It is to—very often it is translated preserve or observe or keep statutes, commandments, and so on. But there is a use in Isaiah that matches our pattern here in Proverbs, and it also uses the word sukkot. Turn to Isaiah 1:8. This is the last one we'll look at because it gives us the idea. Isaiah 1:8. My only goal here is to demonstrate that netzer can mean something other than guard.

What they've decided in translating it the way they did in 7, that she's got a crafty heart, is that her heart is guarded and you don't know what's really going on in her heart, so she's deceitful and crafty. But it isn't used that way anywhere else in the Old Testament. The way it is used is here in verse 8 of chapter 1 of Isaiah.

So we're talking about the daughter of Zion. You can begin in verse 4: "Sinful nation, people laden with iniquity, brood of evildoers, children who are corruptors. They have forsaken the Lord. They have provoked Him to anger and turned away backward." They have turned away. Look at verse 7: "Your country therefore is desolate. Your cities are burned with fire. Strangers devour your land in your presence. It is desolate as overthrown by strangers."

So the daughter of Zion is left as a sukkot in a vineyard. This is a booth that falls down. It doesn't last long. It was a temporary dwelling. Maybe the keeper of the vineyard built it to keep off rain, but the branches quickly wither away. So the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard. Then it says, "as a hut in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city." The word besieged is netzer. This is a city made of branches. It's not made of stone, brick, and mortar. It doesn't have walls and towers. It's a city. It's a netzer city. It's a city of branches. It's like the sukkot. You have the same two words within a verse as we just saw over in Job. This booth puts you in mind of branches that are just only there for a short time.

When I was a kid, we used to come up here in the woods and make forts. You stack up branches and such. You'd come back weeks or a few months later and it was all scattered and gone. Deer ran through it, squirrels and raccoons and rabbits and things very quickly. It just couldn't last. It had no structural integrity. That's the idea: something without lasting integrity, something that doesn't maintain its structure.

That's what I think is going on back in Proverbs chapter 7, the description of the heart of this woman. A colloquial modern translation would be fickle. She's making all these representations to this young man at the moment, but it's a house of branches. It's not permanent. It doesn't have any solidity or permanence. He doesn't have a heart. She's got a heart that's here today and gone tomorrow. You see the parallel here?

Continuing in chapter 7, a woman meets him in verse 10 with the attire of a harlot and an impermanent heart. She targets him, but tomorrow she'll be targeting somebody else. There's no permanence whatsoever. She is loud and rebellious. Her feet would not stay at home. This is violating the norm. This simpleton among the sons of Israel doesn't have a heart like a son of Israel should. This woman doesn't stay at home like she should. She doesn't work quietly with her hands in the home as she should. She is loud. This is the word for roaring. Almost every other place you find this word that says loud, it is compared to lions and to the ocean, to the sea roaring. This is a noise that is deafening. It cannot be ignored. It is a noisiness that cannot be ignored.

It is used in the Psalms. The psalmist will say, "My bowels, my innermost parts were roaring in pain, in agony of soul." It's something that can't be ignored. It's just too persistent and too much volume. So she roars and is rebellious. And the rebelliousness is, this is the same word that is used when the Lord says, "All day long, I have held out my hands to a rebellious people." There is another word that is translated rebellious. This one is rebellious with the idea of stubbornness. There's no talking to this woman. She is stubborn and set in her ways. And if you try to say, "Shouldn't you really be at home? Why are you making all this racket? Why are you out here seducing young men?" she is stubborn. She will not listen. It's water off a duck's back.

And the passage in Deuteronomy 21 that prescribes stoning for a teenage son who is rebellious and stubborn—the word stubborn there in Deuteronomy is this word. He's unrepentant. He is unrelenting. He is unwilling to turn, stubborn. "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious," and you take him out among the people and he has

to be stoned. I doubt that ever happened. But these people turn a stubborn shoulder in Nehemiah 9:29. It's used several times for stubbornness. And you can look this word up with a Strong's or something, but it's enough for us to understand that she roars and she is stubborn in that pattern of life.

Her feet will not stay at home. At times she was outside, at times in the open square, lurking at every corner. When she's at the open square, she's on the edge of it. Wisdom is out in the public square calling. This woman is whispering and crooking a finger and saying, "Come here, I've got a better offer." And it is deceptive. It is alluring. It appeals to those who are unwilling to listen to wisdom.

So she caught him and kissed him. Wisdom makes her appeal with words. She calls out with a verbal appeal. This woman leads with a kiss. What does this do? This is designed to stir emotion and inflame passion, not the thinking part of the psyche. A kiss, an initial stimulation, an initial entertainment, something that is alluring, something that is unexpected and ostensibly pleasurable. So she leads with a pleasant stimulation. This is how we get sucked into watching things we shouldn't watch and enduring things we shouldn't endure, listening to things we shouldn't listen to. Well, there's this initial burst of flavor, if you will.

You heard me mention before that one of the difficulties in cocaine addiction is the first time someone tries it, the brain is completely without prior experience. And the buckets—they've been compared to buckets of endorphins that are normally full—all dump out at once. And you have this incredible once-in-a-lifetime high, the first time that substance gets into the bloodstream and hits the brain. All of the endorphin buckets empty at once, and people have this unimaginable, pleasurable experience. And they say, "Oh, wow." When they recover, they say, "I want to do that again."

Well, the brain has a built-in defense mechanism, and it says, "Whoa, we can't have that happening again." And so, "I'm going to put some wire on these bucket handles and try to keep these things from dumping." And so the second time someone does the very same chemical at the very same amount, the high is not as great because the brain has gone into defense mode. There are some endorphins that spill out, but it says, "Ha ha, you're not emptying me this time." And each successive exposure, you build up a resistance. So it takes more, and you have to work harder, and you have to get it in a different form and try to surprise the brain's defenses because it's now on guard.

And this girl at the corner surprises this guy with a kiss, hoping to catch him with his guard down and get him to make a decision that isn't based on any kind of thoughtfulness, any, any anticipation of the future, any recognition of how badly this could go wrong. So she leads with a kiss and with an impudent face she says to him, "Peace offerings are with me today. I have paid my vows. So I came out to meet you." What is this offerings and vows? What she's saying is, "I have no time of impurity that would prevent me from engaging in sexual relations. I have finished my time of impurity, and I'm ceremonially clean." What a crock. She may be ceremonially clean from the letter of the law, but her motives and her intentions are entirely evil. But she says, "I have checked off the boxes of the, uh, the Levitical law, and I'm, I'm ready for love," as the old song goes.

"I paid my vows today, so I came out to meet you. You were the first one I thought of, 'cause I'm ready to make hay while the sun is shining, and I diligently came to seek your face, and I have found you. I have spread my bed with tapestry, colored coverings of Egyptian linen. I perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until morning. Let us delight ourselves with love, for my husband is not at home. He has gone on a long journey and taken a bag of money with him and will come home on the appointed day. He won't be back anytime while we're having our, uh, tête-à-tête."

With her enticing speech, she caused him to yield. With her flattering lips, she seduced him. Immediately he went after her as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks. Actually, it says, "as a dog to his chain," if you look at the Septuagint, until an arrow struck his liver, as a bird hastens to the snare. He did not know it would be his life. It would cost his life. It's going to change his life. It's going to cost his life. Just as it said in chapter 1, the foolishness of the fool will slay him. It is more than his life is worth.

Therefore, verse 24, listen to me, my children. Pay attention to the words of my mouth. Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways. You're going to turn one way or the other, even either turn and follow the way of wisdom or turn and follow the way of seductive short-term pleasure leading to corruption and death. Do not stray into her paths, for she has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong. Her house is the way to Sheol, descending to the lower compartments of death, the tombs of death. There's actually a place where you can translate that netzer heart. The word netzer is used one place, and it appears that a valid translation of it is a tomb. Her heart is a tomb. You're going to get the products of death coming from it.

Now turn quickly to chapter 8. Once again, look at the better alternative. “Does not wisdom cry out, and understanding lift up her voice, taking her stand on the top of the high hill beside the way where the paths meet? She cries out by the gates at the entry of the city, at the entrance of the doors. To you, O man, I call, and my voice to the sons of men. O you simple ones, understand prudence, and you fools, be of an understanding heart.” And this isn't necessarily something you can just choose, but if you turn and start seeking wisdom, wisdom will give you a prudent heart.

As we're going to see in chapter 2, Proverbs chapter 2, “The Lord giveth wisdom; out of His mouth comes knowledge and understanding.” If you choose it, you can have it. There's no power in the choice, but there is power in what we choose. Just like the merit of faith, it isn't how strong my faith is. It is, what have I placed my faith in? The merit of faith is in its object. That's where the value is. And the merit of choosing is the power of what you have chosen. You can either choose something that has the power to build up, to enlighten, to give prudence, strength, character, or you can choose something that has the power to slay you and make your life a living hell, resulting in an eternal hell. The power is in what we choose.

“Fools, be of an understanding heart.” Verse 6 of chapter 8: “Listen, for I will speak excellent things. From the opening of my lips will come right things,” not this kiss of death, not this seductress taking you home to ply you with her persuasive ways and kill you. “My mouth will speak truth. Wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are with righteousness. Nothing crooked or perverse is in them.” Notice how wisdom is emphasizing her lips and her mouth. This is what the seductress uses to destroy. This is what wisdom uses to build up and to grant life.

Verse 9: “My words are plain to him who understands and right to those who find knowledge.” To him who has, more is given; to him who has not, even what he has gets taken away. “Receive my instruction instead of silver, receive my knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is better than rubies. And all things one may desire cannot be compared to her. I, wisdom, dwell with prudence and find out knowledge and discretion. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil, pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.” Good mouth, bad mouth; good lips, bad lips. “Counsel is mine,” verse 14, “and sound wisdom. I am understanding. I have strength. By me kings reign and rulers decree justice.”

Isn't this the promise of God, that if we are faithful, we will reign? “Be ruler over ten cities,” Jesus said in the parable. “By me princes rule, and nobles, all the judges of the earth. I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me.” Those who seek me diligently will find. “Riches and honor are with me, enduring riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, better than fine gold, and my revenue than choice silver.” And you can finish that chapter in a similar vein. God created the universe using this wisdom.

Look at chapter 9, and remember that house of branches, that impermanent spider web house that is just a sukkot, just a temporary booth. Look at chapter 9. “Wisdom has built her house. She has hewn out seven pillars. She has slaughtered her meat and mixed her wine. She has furnished her table, sent out her maidens. She cries out from the highest places of the city,” not at the corners, not seducing, not suborning, not taking by subterfuge. She cries out from the highest places of the city. “Whoever is simple, turn in here.” As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, “Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Forsake foolishness and live, and go in the way of understanding.”

“He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself.” These scoffers who delight in scoffing, fools who hate knowledge—if you try to correct them, all you end up with is shame on yourself. “He who rebukes the wicked only harms himself. Do not correct a scoffer lest he hate you.” This is active hate. He's going to turn and tear you to pieces. “If you rebuke the wise, he will love you. Give to a wise and he will be still wiser. Teach the just and he will increase in learning.” Remember the parallel in chapter 1 that we saw in the very first section: verse 5, “A wise man will hear and increase learning. A man of understanding will attain wise counsel.” To the wise, when additional wisdom is given, it builds him up. He appreciates it. He will love the one who gives it.

Verse 10, well-known verse: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. By me, your days will be multiplied, and years of life will be added to you. If you are wise, you are wise for yourself. If you scoff, you will bear it alone.” Be not deceived, Galatians 6:7 and 8: God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. He that sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he that sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

Notice verse 13: “A foolish woman is noisy, clamorous. She is simple and knows nothing.” The simple appeal to the simple. “She sits at the door of her house on a seat by the highest places of the city to call to those who pass by, who go straight on their way. Whoever is simple, let him turn in here.” As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, “Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.” And he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

So this ending section of 7, 8, and 9 is such a symmetrical reminder with the introductory sections in chapter 1, and we'll see it again in chapter 2. Look at chapter 2. We're about to close for the evening. You know the first several verses because we memorized them together. But look at what wisdom and discretion will do, beginning in verse 12: “To deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things, from those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perversity of the wicked, whose ways are crooked and who are devious in their paths; to deliver you from the immoral woman.”

Verse 16: “The seductress who flatters with her words, who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God.” Remember that in Malachi, when Judah forgets the wife of his youth and the covenant. “Her house leads down to death and her paths to the dead. None who go to her return, nor do they regain the paths of life.” This is a one-way ticket to destruction, to loss, to being outside with the dogs, fornicators, and those who love and practice a lie in Revelation, outside the gates of the city.

So look for wisdom. When you go back up to verse 10, “When wisdom enters your heart and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you, understanding will keep you.” And then skip down to verse 20: “So that you may walk in the way of goodness and keep to the paths of righteousness. For the upright will dwell in the land and the blameless will remain in it, but the wicked will be cut off from the land and the unfaithful will be uprooted from it.”

What a clear choice the word of God presents. And it is a choice that we continue to make and we continue to observe. And it is important to understand that you can't try to correct scoffers who love their scoffing. You cannot turn fools from their path. It only brings shame on your own head. We have to pursue what is within our control and within our power. If there is someone who is wise, if they are turning at wisdom's rebuke, if they are interested, if they are seeking and asking and knocking, we can be a means by which the truth can be spoken in love. But it requires self-control. The last and great fruit of the Spirit is self-control.

We want to turn people by our concern, with our love, with our heart that is breaking for someone. You can't. They have to turn. It is individual. We can't turn someone. We can be ready to speak the truth in love when someone is asking, when someone begins to seek, when the prodigal son says, “I'm tired of this swine slop. I will return to my father.” And when you see him on the horizon, you can run out to greet him, give him a robe and a ring and slaughter the fatted calf. But not until they turn.

The father of the prodigal knows what he's doing. He didn't travel to the far country seeking to save that which was lost. You can't turn the heart that has already turned away from wisdom's rebuke. That's why I like that translation of verse 23 of chapter 1 of Proverbs. It parallels verse 32 of that same chapter.

We have to be patient. We can pray. We can be watchful. But we have to be wise enough in our own experience, in our own path, that we can share wisdom with those who are interested and who ask, those who are seeking. God says over and over again, wisdom herself says, “You will seek and find me when you search for me with all your heart.” Not casual, not shallow, not momentary, not fleeting, not fickle. A determination to change, a determination to find God and find His way and His Word—that is what is required before God will reveal Himself. And many of us know this from personal experience.

Well, we'll pick up in Proverbs chapter 2 next time and see this wonderful set of 12 verses at the beginning of that chapter that are so heartening and such a wonderful promise to us.

Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You for the presence and power of Your Holy Spirit, the combination of which creates a dwelling place where You and our Savior, the Lord Jesus, can come and make Your home. We pray that as we reflect on these truths, we will not only see where we can improve our own walk and our own way, but that we can understand what is going on around us in the world, both collectively and with individuals in our periphery, and have the wisdom to know when to speak and when to leave things in Your almighty and all-capable hands. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.