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A Friend is Always Loyal

17: 7-28

A proverb is a short and memorable saying designed to be our blueprint for living in the world that ADONAI has created. It is important to note that proverbs are not promises; they are generally true principles, all other things being equal.

Eloquent words are not fitting for a fool; much less are lies fitting for a ruler (17:7 Hebrew). A fool never looks more **foolish** than when **he** jabbers at length on matters beyond **his** understanding, trying to make **his** words sound so excellent. **The sages** had a sense of what is right and proper, and this **proverb** presents two situations where matters are out of kilter. In the first place, **a fool** has nothing worthwhile to say. For **a fool** to have an eloquent manner of speaking would only increase the possibility of harm. **Nabal** in the life of **David** may be taken as an illustration of the type of person implied (see the commentary on [the Life of David Bm - David's Affront from Nabal](#)).³⁴⁵

A bribe is like a luck charm; whoever gives one will prosper (17:8 NLT). This **verse** does not encourage **bribery**, which is condemned in **verse 23: The wicked take bribes in secret to pervert the course of justice** (also see **Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 16:19 and 27:25; Proverbs 6:35; Isaiah 1:23 and 5:23; Ezekiel 22:12; Psalm 15:5; Ecclesiastes 7:7**). **Verse 8** of **chapter 17** is simply speaking from the giver's perspective: **A bribe is like a luck charm.** To say **bribes** are effective (**18:16** and **21:14**) is not to approve of **them**; it simply states the reality of life in the world.³⁴⁶

He who conceals an offense promotes love, but he who dwells on it can separate even close friends (17:9 CJB). **Love** covers many transgressions. **Friendship** thinks the best of others and overlooks offenses. On the other hand, a person who harps on problems will drive another away, robbing both people of the opportunity to develop a relationship. **First Corinthians 13:5** which describes **love** as **not self-seeking . . . not easily angered . . . and keeps no record of wrongs.** This **proverb** probably is not intended to promote the idea that **friends**

will never divide over an offense. It is an observation that can serve as a warning. Don't keep bringing up the faults of others if you want to enjoy an intimate relationship with that person. The repeating of a transgression may also involve **gossip** if the story is told to third parties.

A single rebuke does more for a person of understanding than a hundred lashes on the back of a fool (17:10 NLT). The **wise** listen to criticism, even if it is harsh. This contrasts with the hardheadedness of **fools**, who mock rather than pay attention to negative comments. Indeed, fools are so hardheaded that even a **hundred lashes** could not break through and get **them** to listen and change **their** wrongminded behavior. This exaggerated language serves the purpose of making fun of **fools**.

An evil man seeks only rebellion, but a cruel messenger will be sent against him (17:11 ESV). On the basis of the context-sensitive nature of **the proverb**, it would be wrong to take this statement as condemning all rebellion against authority. The assumption would be that the authority in question is wise and godly. The second colon does make clear that **the rebellion** envisioned is directed toward an established institution; it assumes that someone can **send a messenger** to take care of the "problem." **Solomon** warns **his** hearers about the dangers of rebelling against **the king** (see [the Life of Solomon Ct - Frustration: No choice](#)).

It is safer to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than to confront a fool caught in his foolishness (17:12 NLT). The point of comparison is fairly obvious. **A bear** is dangerous enough, but one that has suffered loss of **cubs** would be furious and especially dangerous (also see **Hosea 13:8**, where the angered **bear** represents **Yeshua Himself**). But more dangerous is that this is **a fool** whose stupid decisions will create great harm. The sages often used humorous exaggeration to make a point. This verse would certainly serve as a warning not to associate with **foolish** people.

If you repay good with evil, evil will never leave your house (17:13 NLT). It is never right to say **evil** words or do **evil** things, and to respond to kind words or deeds with **evil** ones is especially appalling. But what goes around comes around. Those who treat other people with **wickedness** will find that they and their **households** will never be far from trouble. **Paul** takes this more than a step further when **he** counsels: **Never pay back evil for evil to anyone (Romans 12:17 NLT).**

Starting a quarrel is like opening a floodgate, so stop before a dispute breaks out (17:14 NLT). The first colon presents a metaphor that implicitly compares the start of a fight to allowing water to escape. Once it starts, it is hard to control and bring the flow to an end. The second colon provides advice based on this observation: Don't even begin a fight by making an accusation. At the very least the one who confronts another person ought to be willing to pay the price of the trouble that it will begin.

Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent are both are an abomination to ADONAI (17:15 Hebrew). It is so wrong to misjudge people at the fundamental level of **righteousness** and **wickedness**. **ADONAI** hates seeing **the righteous** considered or treated as if they are **wicked** and vice versa. Judging correctly would be especially important in a legal context, and perhaps that background is specifically in mind here. **Deuteronomy 25:1** directs judges to judge **the righteous** as **righteous** and **the wicked** as **wicked**.

Why would a fool wish to pay for wisdom when he has no desire to learn (17:16 CJB). We don't know where the phrase **"pay for wisdom"** is literal or figurative language, but the general principle is still clear: **fools** cannot **buy wisdom** with money when **they** have no real **desire to learn**. I lean toward the figurative interpretation that simply says that any pursuit of **wisdom** on the part of **a fool**, who by virtue of being **a fool**, is therefore unable to acquire **it**. After all, **fools** say in **their hearts that there is no God (Psalm 14:1 and 53:1)**; how in the world could **they** affirm that **the beginning of wisdom is the fear of ADONAI (9:10)?³⁴⁷**



A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need (17:17 NLT). **"Either friends or death," says the Babylonian Talmud**

(Ta’anit 23a, cited in Telushkin page 181). This was the attitude of the sages during the Babylonian Jewish community (see the commentary on [Jeremiah Gu - Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule](#)). Their opinion reflects a common viewpoint on **friendship** in ancient times. C. S. Lewis, an expert in literature and the history of ideas, says that, “To the Ancients, friendship seemed the happiest and most fully human of all **loves**; the crown of life and the school of virtue” (*The Four Loves*, page 87). But Lewis laments the fact that **friendship** is not so celebrated in the modern world. It is important to note that **proverbs** are not promises; **they** are generally true principles, all other things being equal.

Think about **David** and **Jonathan**, the two men made a covenant of **friendship** (see the commentary on [the Life of David An - David and Y’honatan’s Friendship](#)). The biblical writer says **that the soul of Y’honatan was knit to the soul of David, and Y’honatan loved him as he loved himself (1 Samuel 18:1)**. The name **Jonathan** means *gift from ADONAI*, and **the prince** would certainly prove **himself** to be that for **David**. The two would survive the clash of loyalty between **a father** and **a friend**. It would overshadow a sense of **jealousy** over **David’s** ascent to the throne, even though **Jonathan** was older than **David** and the apparent heir to **the king**.

We mustn’t think that **Solomon** used the term “**friend**” in the shallow sense of modern usage. He does not mean a mere acquaintance. **A friend** (Hebrew: *rey’a*) is one **who sticks** even more than **a brother** would: **Some “friends” pretend to be friends, but a true friend sticks closer than a brother (18:24)**. How many of those we call “**friends**” would be more faithful to us than family? This is **Solomon’s** definition of **a true friend**.

In the case of **Jonathan**, we see such **a friend**. **David** became the object of **Sha’ul’s jealousy** (see the commentary on [the Life of David Ao - Sha’ul’s Jealousy of David](#)). **Sha’ul** was **Jonathan’s father**, and **he** was **the king**. **Jonathan** was heir to Sha’ul’s throne. Yet, because of their covenant **friendship**, **Jonathan** opposed **his own father** in order to help **David**. Not only did he oppose **his father**, but he even assumed that **David**, not **he himself**, would be **the next king** of Isra’el. When **a new king** came to power in the ancient world, it was expected that the family and supporters of the previous regime would be **put to death**. However, **Jonathan** said to **David**, **you are to show me ADONAI’s kindness not only while I am alive, so that I do not die; but also, after ADONAI has eliminated every one of your enemies from the face of the earth, you are to continue showing kindness to my family forever (First**

Samuel 20:14-15 CJB). Y'honatan was fully aware that **he** had renounced **his** throne in favor of **David** and the possible implications of that action. The scenario feared by **Y'honatan** here is exactly what happened later in **Second Samuel Chapters 3** and **4**, but **David** would remember **his** oath to **Johnathan** by honoring **his son** (see the commentary on [the Life of David Cz - David and Mephiboseth](#)), and by sparing **him** from **death (Second Samuel 21:7)**. It was the least **David** could do to fulfill **his** covenant commitment to **his** friend **Y'honatan**.

It is important to realize that we cannot make someone else to **befriend** us in this way or to **love** (Greek: *agape*, meaning *unconditional, selfless, and sacrificial love that is given without expecting anything in return*) us in this way. **Love** cannot be demanded. However, we can be that kind of **friend** to a few select people, people with whom we have a unity of spirit. Certainly our spouse and our children should be such people. If we can be such a one to people outside of our own family, we then will experience a greater blessing.

The circle of influence in everyone's life has degrees. There are real friends, in the fullest sense of the word. Other than our spouse, few of us had those kinds of **friends** – the kind who deserve every sacrifice of **love** we can give them. Then there are brothers and sisters in the congregations of **God** and a few other friends who have a connection to us that is deeper than mere acquaintance. To these we should be loyal and loving, as **Yeshua** says: **As I have loved you, so you must love one another (John 13:34b)**. We should not fail to be there for them if they need us. Finally, there are others who are really just acquaintances. To these, and even to strangers, we should show **kindness**, loving them as we love ourselves (see the commentary on [Leviticus Di - Love Your Neighbor as Yourself](#)).³⁴⁸

It's poor judgment to guarantee another person's debt or put up security for a friend (17:18 NLT). On a personal note, in 1928 my grandfather owned a thousand-acre farm in the heartland of Indiana. But he foolishly cosigned a loan to help a relative buy a farm. In 1929 the stock market crashed and the Great Depression began, he couldn't pay on the loan and lost the farm that had been in his family for over a hundred years. This essentially sent my grandparents, and my mother (who was a child at the time) into poverty.

Whoever loves a quarrel loves sin; whoever trusts in high gateways invites disaster (17:19 Hebrew). In the second colon, certain area houses were subject to invasion by marauding bands on horses at any time, and **a high gate**, or

gateway, allowed them to ride into the court area. To prevent this, **gateways** were built low enough to make it difficult, if not impossible, for a horse and rider to enter. Some went to extremes and built **the gateways** so low that it was difficult for a person on foot to enter without bending over or even crawling. In contrast, in Persia, a lofty gateway was a sign of royalty, which some of the lesser citizens, out of vanity, imitated as far as they dared. The meaning of the text is that he who has a **high gate** to his house invites the robber by a show of prosperity and by allowing easy access. Thus, inviting **disaster**.³⁴⁹

The crooked heart will not prosper; the lying tongue ends up in trouble (17:20 NLT). This proverb parallels heart with tongue, not especially atypical of the book, which recognizes that **people's** speech reflects **their** core personality. **Lady Wisdom** (see [Am - Lady Wisdom's Rebuke of the Foolish](#)), the personification of **ADONAI's wisdom**, has already said: **Store my commands in your heart (3:1)**. And Solomon has added: **The wise man's heart is prudent in his words, and to his lips it adds instruction (16:23)**. Therefore, **the proverb** simply observes that **the wicked** will experience dire consequences.

It's painful being the parent of a fool; there is no joy for the father of a rebel (17:21 NLT). A foolish son brings grief to his father and bitterness to the mother who bore him (17:25 NIV). The parent-child relationship is a major theme in **Proverbs**, a theme unto itself as well as a theme that touches on many other ideas. Here we see some of the relationship between the issue of **wisdom** and **folly** and the topic of family relationships. The actual truths are simple and seemingly self-evident, but the language used to express these truths is rich with meaning. **Proverbs 10:1** says that **a wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son brings grief to his mother (10:1b)**. Often, the word is used in the Hebrew Bible for gladness due to victory, reunion with a loved one, and many other causes for elation and celebration. **Joy** is not just to pleasure someone; it is to create delight, an emotional joy. Such is the feeling that a **wise** child brings to a parent.

There is craftiness in the contrasting statement that **a foolish son grieves a mother**. Mothers are known to love even the unlovable, while **fathers** often are known to be more emotionally unattached. But the **wise son** brings emotional **joy** even to a **father** who is not easily moved. Yet a **foolish son grieves a mother** who is not easily **grieved**. To understand the craftiness of this contrast, notice how much less effective the following proverb would have been, "A wise child brings joy to a mother, but a **foolish** son grieves a father." **Proverbs 17:21** expresses the

discontent that **a foolish son** brings to a parent. In fact, **a foolish son** creates the exact opposite reaction in **a father**: no **joy**. **Proverbs 17:25** says that a **foolish son** brings **grief**. The verse might literally be translated, “An irritation to his father is a foolish son.” The word for **anger** or irritation is used in **Deuteronomy** of **Isra’el’s** provoking **ADONAI** to **anger** (**Deuteronomy 4:25, 9:18, 31:29, 32:16**). This **foolish son** is also bitterness to **his mother**.

The power of a **son’s** life to affect **his** parents is overwhelming. Thus, a great deal of emphasis in **Torah** and in **Proverbs** is on the process of raising children. Traditionally, the Jewish community has embraced this concept, pushing children to success and to greatness in this world. And this is commendable. Jewish scientists, doctors, lawyers, and intellectuals have filled the pages of history. Yet, this commendable encouragement to greatness falls short of the biblical concept of **wisdom**, which includes godliness.

A powerful biblical example is **Timothy**, whose grandmother, **Lois**, and mother, **Eunice**, along with **Timothy**, had received the Gospel of **Yeshua** from **Paul**. **Paul** in **Second Timothy 3:15** regarding **Timothy**, “**From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which can give you the wisdom that leads to deliverance through trusting in Yeshua the Messiah.**” Imagine **Timothy**, at **his mother’s** feet, being trained of **the Scriptures**, which **they** probably heard read aloud in the synagogue. (**Timothy’s father** was a non-believing Gentile.) This training in **righteousness** truly made **Timothy** a **joy** to **his mother** and **grandmother**, and it also prepared **him** for the message of **the Gospel** when **Paul** brought it to **his** town.

Parents and children can learn from this teaching in **Proverbs**. If nothing else, will motivate a man or a woman to **righteousness** and **wisdom**, perhaps reflection on pain caused to parents will do so. And parents, reflecting on the outcome of their child raising will certainly be motivated to start now in building a legacy of **wisdom** and not **foolishness**.³⁵⁰

A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones (17:22 Hebrew). One’s psychological condition affects one’s physical condition. In other words, a healthy attitude fosters good health, but a depressed spirit ruins health. The contrasting ideas, describing the two effects, stresses the importance of **a joyful heart**. The first colon represents the ideal. On the other hand, **a broken spirit**, one that is depressed or dejected, has an adverse effect on the health of the body. “**Bones**” figuratively represents the body (encased in a **bony** frame); fat

bones mean a healthy body (**3:8, 15:30; and 16:24**), but **dry bones** signify unhealthiness and lifelessness (see the commentary on **Ezeki'el Ea - The Valley of the Dry Bones**).³⁵¹

The discerning person focuses on the wisdom that is there before him, but a fool's eyes wander to the ends of the earth (17:24 CJB). The wise persist in following the path of **wisdom**. However, **fools** are distracted, and are unable to fix **their** attention on anything, so **they** drift in a sea of uncertainty. **Qoheleth, the Teacher of Ecclesiastes**, may be responding to the idea behind this **proverb** when **he** states: **"I was determined to be wise" - but this was beyond me. Whatever exists is far off and most profound - who can discover it** (see the commentary on **the Life of Solomon Cs - The Search Goes On: Inaccessible Wisdom**)?

It's wrong to fine the righteous for being upright, nor to flog nobles for their righteousness (17:26 Hebrew). If **it's wrong to fine the righteous**, then how much more so **to flog them!** Corporal punishment is more dishonorable and painful than a monetary fine (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Er - Limits for Corporal Punishment**). Though **nobles** could be **fools** and not deserving of **their** title (**Isaiah 32:5**), the parallel **"righteousness"** shows that **the nobles** in view here would not compromise **their** honor and be corrupted by the system. In **17:7 nobles** are the opposite of **fools**. Therefore, **the proverb** warns **the wise** not to be a tyrant (**First Kings 21:11-13; Matthew 26:3-4; and Acts 4:1-3**).³⁵²

A knowledgeable person controls his tongue; a discerning person controls his temper (17:27 CJB). The idea of **wisdom** suggests a **person** who uses words sparingly and appropriately. This **proverb** reinforces that axiom. In other words, **the wise** are in control of **themselves**. In this way, **they** regulate how other people will perceive **them**. By speaking and acting with restraint, **the wise** are able to reflect on what **they** are going to say and do. But **even fools seem wise when they keep silent; with their mouths shut, they seem pretty intelligent (17:28 NLT)**. Connecting the theme of the previous **proverb**, this **verse** reiterates the value of speaking only when it counts. Using humor in the first colon, **Solomon** suggests that the best chance a **fool** has for being thought of as being **intelligent** is to avoid speaking altogether.³⁵³

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **Your** awesome **wisdom**, steadfast love and almighty power! Thank **You** for **the friends** I have, and thank **You** for people **You** have brought into my life that I can **befriend**. In times of heartache and in times of joy,*

we need each other so much. Yes, sometimes I am let down by people that I thought were my **friends**. **One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a Friend who sticks closer than a brother (18:24)**. And that **Friend** is **You**. I am so lucky to have **You** as my **Friend**. Thank **You** for **Your friendship**. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection.
Amen