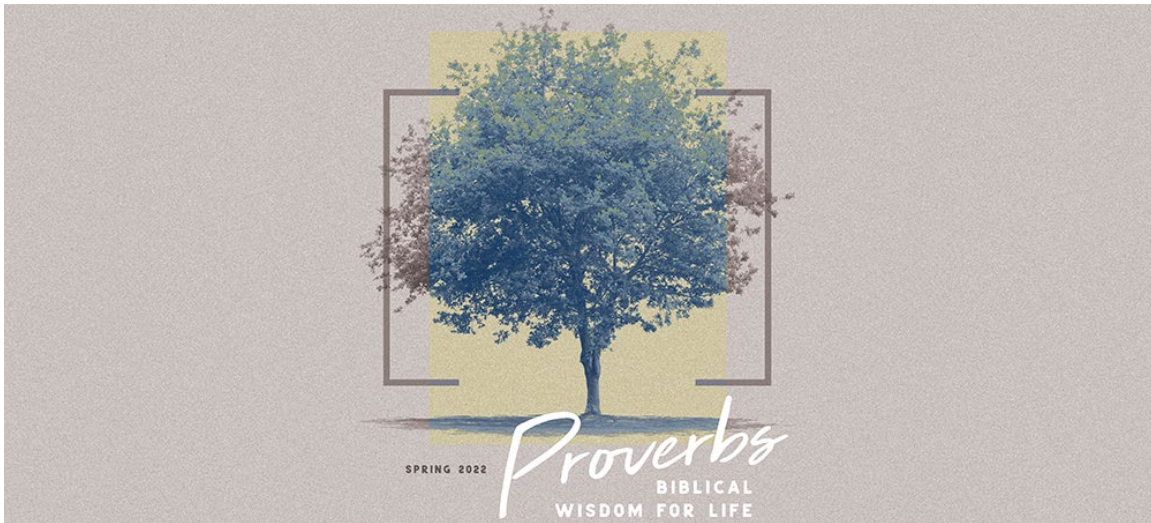


## Week 18: Proverbs: Deception and Temptation

### Hook



**Main Point: Tempters will try to entice us with smooth words and deceive us with lies.**

Shopping is an inevitable part of life. Many people enter a store with a plan of purchasing one item or only a few that are absolute necessities. However, they leave with ten additional purchases they do not need. According to a 2018 survey, the average American consumer spends \$5,400 on impulse buys every year.<sup>1</sup> Here are some common ways retailers entice you to spend more than you planned.

1. *Color-coordinated displays.* Retailers group items of complementary colors together, enticing you to make multiple purchases.
2. *Capitalizing on current trends.* Shops present the looks that are at the height of their popularity.
3. *Product demonstrations.*
4. *Upselling.* Electronics stores are great at this; accessories and warranties are two common upsells.<sup>2</sup>

**Q: What sales tactics do you find most persuasive?**

**Q: What stores are most effective at encouraging you to make impulse purchases?**

**Q: Name an instance in which you were persuaded to make a purchase and quickly regretted it.**

**Transition:** Today's lesson will explore the ways in which we can be deceived.

## **Week 18: Proverbs: Deception and Temptation**

### **Book**

**Main Point:** Tempters will try to entice us with smooth words and deceive us with lies.

**Proverbs 1:10–16; 12:5–6; and 14:6–16 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** Those who want you to join them in sin will try to entice and deceive you.

**Q: What tricks do the wicked use to try to entice us to sin with them?**

**Q: How can we tell when someone is deceiving us?**

In the very first chapter of Proverbs, Solomon gave us a vivid image of what it's like when the wicked try to entice us to follow them rather than follow God's wisdom. "Lie in wait for blood" and "ambush the innocent without reason" (1:11) sound obviously wicked, so why would any decent person be tempted to go along with that? Beeson Divinity School Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew Allen P. Ross said this is Solomon's description of what they would *actually* be doing, not how the tempters would describe their actions: "The unruly gang would never use expressions that condemn their acts; rather, they would try to cover them up or give them a different spin."<sup>3</sup>

The reason someone would be tempted to join the wicked is because of what they promise: "all precious goods" and "plunder" (1:13). Solomon warned his son not to listen to those who promise a life of easy money; it will always be gotten by evil means. He told us not to be tempted; participating in this evil will only lead to destruction. It's also very possible that though they promise to share "one purse" (1:14), they may entice you into doing the evil and still not give you your fair share of the plunder.

Proverbs 12:6 uses the same language – "lie in wait for blood" – but explicitly tells us that the wicked are deceitful (12:5). They make a trap with their deceptions, both for their victims and for the one who goes along with them.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars suggest that the word used for "deceit" in both Proverbs 12 and 14 also means *self*-deception. Those who would tempt us to join in their wickedness not only try to deceive us, they also deceive themselves. Proverbs 14 describes this well – they "seek wisdom in vain" and their words are not "words of knowledge" (14:6–7). They think their way is "wise" but it's not – because it's not God's way. They are not only fooling others, they're fooling themselves. This lifestyle will only lead to ruin.<sup>5</sup>

These fools also “mock at the guilt offering” (14:9), one of the two offerings given for atonement of sin in ancient Israel. The “sin offering” was made to purify the tabernacle and the people from their sins. The “guilt offering” was made to make amends for the damage done by your sin. In addition to the offering, you had to pay back the value of whatever you stole or damaged, plus 20 percent (Leviticus 4–7). Other places in God’s law state that if someone stole an animal and it was found alive in his possession, he had to pay double its value (Exodus 22:1–4). People had to make amends if they sent their cattle to graze in another’s field or if a fire on their property got out of control and spread, damaging another’s crops (Exodus 22:5–6). If someone stole an ox or sheep and killed or sold it, he had to repay five oxen for one ox or four sheep for one sheep (Exodus 22:1).<sup>6</sup>

God requires people make amends when they wrong one another. Allen P. Ross wrote, “Folly offends, but wisdom makes amends.”<sup>7</sup> There may not be a tangible way to pay someone back for every hurt you have caused, but it’s important not just to say you’re sorry, but to recognize the damage you’ve caused and attempt to make amends. But fools don’t care about the damage they cause others.

In all these proverbs, Solomon contrasted the wicked with the upright, the fool with the wise. He encouraged his people to have prudence (14:15) and discernment (14:8) when listening to the promises of others. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. If they require you to do something against God’s law, it’s not worth it, even if it does lead to riches.

The answer to all these temptations is wisdom and discernment. Solomon urged his people, “Do not walk in the way with them,” referring to these sinners who try to entice you (1:15). Trust in the Lord and walk in *His* ways. He told them to “leave the presence of a fool” – simply get away from them. They’ll lead you astray from the way you should go. They’ll drag you down with them. They will bear “the fruit of their ways” (14:14), but those who walk by the Spirit will bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5). The key is to walk by the Spirit, to listen to God’s voice, to study His Word. That is how you will know when someone is trying to entice you to do evil.

**Q: How have you experienced people trying to “spin” their evil to entice you to do it?**

**Q: How can we witness to these people while being sure not to “walk in their ways”?**

## **Proverbs 16:19–25 and 23:1–3 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** Be careful with powerful people; they may have ulterior motives.

**Q: Why did Solomon tell us to be careful when we sit down to eat with a ruler?**

**Q: Why is it better to be poor than to divide the spoil with the proud?**

In Proverbs 23, Solomon offered some very specific practical instructions for being careful when you sit down to eat with a ruler. This is a different word than the typical one used for “king”; it can refer to any “ruler” or person in a position of power.<sup>8</sup> These sayings are set in an ancient culture where it would have been unusual for the average person to ever be in the presence of rulers, so it may seem like strange advice to give. Yet Solomon was the king, and the sons to whom he was writing would have been in the presence of powerful people all the time. Also, they lived in an honor/shame culture, which meant that everyone sought opportunities to make strategic moves to try to gain honor and minimize shame.

One of the biggest ways to gain honor was to be invited to a dinner party with someone more powerful than yourself. And even at the dinner party, there were seats of higher and lower honor and other ways of gaining or losing honor. A lot of scheming and maneuvering happened around the table.<sup>9</sup>

One way for a person to gain honor was by doing something nice for a less-honored person so that the person owed them a favor. Being invited to a ruler’s table could just be a social move rather than an authentic act of hospitality. Their goal was to trap the less-honored person into doing their bidding. A modern comparison might be when someone takes you to an expensive dinner to “butter you up.” This is how their food can be “deceptive.”<sup>10</sup> Imagine how tempting it would be for a regular person to eat these “delicacies” and how hard it would be to say no. That’s why Solomon used this dramatic saying, to “put a knife to your throat” (23:2). This expression means to control yourself, like our modern advice to “bite your tongue,” but it’s a quite drastic way to say it.<sup>11</sup>

The Mishnah is a collection of sayings from ancient Jewish rabbis written in the first couple of centuries AD, around the same time as the New Testament. One of those rabbis was Gamaliel, who is considered one of the greatest rabbis in Jewish history. He appears in the New Testament in Acts 5:34 defending the disciples against the religious leaders of the Sanhedrin who wanted to kill them. He said that if the disciples’ mission was really from God, they wouldn’t be able to stop it. In the Mishnah, Gamaliel is quoted as saying something very similar to this proverb: “Be careful in your dealings with the ruling authorities for they do not befriend a person except for their own needs.

They seem like friends when it is to their own interest, but they do not stand by a man in his hour of distress.”<sup>12</sup> Gamaliel was familiar with the “ruling authorities” and how wicked and manipulative they could be. He was a Pharisee and part of the Sanhedrin. He knew the religious leaders who plotted to kill Jesus and were trying to kill the disciples. He likely had often seen them do things like this before.

Both Gamaliel and Solomon knew what they were talking about when it came to the deception and manipulation of rulers. They had seen it happen many times over. We need to be careful of those in power who are suddenly nice to us or want to befriend us. As the proverb says, it’s better to continue to be poor or lowly in honor than to rise to power through manipulation and deception (16:19). As we saw in the first talking point, *discernment* is the key to protecting ourselves from these deceptions (16:21). When we trust in the Lord and know His Word, we can tell the difference between an authentic gesture of kindness and someone trying to butter us up.

**Q: Why is it so tempting to want to be with powerful people and be part of their world?**

**Q: How can we gain the discernment to see through manipulative people?**

**Proverbs 5:3–6; 7:21–23; 22:14; 23:26–28; and 26:23–26 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** Smooth talk can entice us, deceive us, and lead us astray.

**Q: What does it mean that the words of a seductress are like “a deep pit”?**

We read some of these proverbs before when we talked about the way we use our words. Many of these proverbs use “seductress” or “forbidden woman” to describe those who try to tempt us with smooth words, which was a real temptation for the young men to whom Proverbs was addressed. But it is also a metaphor for any person who tries to entice us with smooth words.<sup>13</sup> These words are like a “deep pit” (22:14; 23:27) because they entrap us like a stag or bird caught in a snare (7:22–23). We’re just walking along and then – BAM – we’ve fallen into a pit. We might not even realize how we got there. That’s how smooth talk can be. It’s like when a really good salesman has talked you into buying something you don’t need. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but when you get home, the fog lifts and you think, “Why did I buy that?” With the smooth talk and flattery, you don’t even realize you’re being played.

Solomon compared these smooth talkers to the shiny glaze covering an earthen vessel (26:23). It’s a disguise. Their smooth words cover a deceitful heart (26:24). They drip

honey and are smoother than oil, but they end in death (5:3–6). Again, Solomon warned us to beware of people who try to lead us astray. Again, Solomon said we need discernment. We need God’s wisdom and His Spirit to recognize the difference between smooth talk and truth.

**Q: In what ways have you been tempted by smooth talk and deception in the past?**

**Q: How can we grow in discernment? What steps can we take to become wiser?**

**Q: How can we help each other not to be deceived by evil tempters?**

## **Week 18: Proverbs 3: Deception and Temptation**

### **Took**

**Main Point: Tempters will try to entice us with smooth words and deceive us with lies.**

Have you ever been to a “house of mirrors” at a carnival or fair? The shape of the mirror distorts the image, making you appear taller, shorter, thinner or larger than you actually are. It’s fun because you know it’s not reality. But imagine that if you had never looked into a traditional mirror or had never seen a photo of yourself, each distorted mirror would present you with a different version of reality – you would have no idea which image to trust.

Having your identity fully informed by Christ is the only way to have a healthy and genuine perception of reality. As deceivers come to tempt you with visions of grandeur, attempt to sway you to ungodly purposes, or present you with false doctrine, being rooted in Christ keeps you planted firm in the truth.

**Q: How does someone become less susceptible to deception?**

**Q: What does it mean to have your identity informed by Christ? How might this impact your ability to avoid temptation and deception?**

### **CHALLENGES**

**THINK:** In what ways am I being enticed to sin by those around me? How are they trying to deceive me? How does what they’re doing look good? How can I know whether it really is good? How can I use my God-given wisdom to defend myself against these deceptions and enticements? Why might it be easy for you (in particular) to be deceived, sweet-talked, or manipulated into something?

**PRAY** for God to reveal to you any people in your life who are deceptive or smooth talkers. Ask Him to show you the ways they try to manipulate or deceive you or talk you into something. Ask Him to give you discernment, to lift the fog so you can see people for who they really are and their words and actions for what they really are.

**ACT:** Confront a smooth talker. First, pray for God’s direction and His heart in this. After having thought about the ways you’re being enticed or deceived and praying for Him to reveal these people in your life, look at that list of people (from the PRAY step above) and pray about how God may be calling you to talk to them. If you’re really being

tempted right now and don't have the strength to stand up to them, you may just need to walk away. For now. But if you do have the strength and God is leading you to do it, consider confronting these people with love and grace. Share your concerns about their actions and consider sharing the Gospel with them. Whether they respond well or not, pray that God would change their hearts.



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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/02/23/consumers-cough-up-5400-a-year-on-impulse-purchases.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/7-way-stores-trick-you-into-making-impulse-purchases-2012-5#stop-doing-stupid-things-with-your-money--8>

<sup>3</sup> Allen P. Ross, "Proverbs," Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Proverbs–Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

<sup>5</sup> William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach, Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1970).

<sup>6</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Allen P. Ross, "Proverbs," Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Proverbs–Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew–English Lexicon* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon, 2 Volumes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970).

<sup>12</sup> *Mishnah: Pirkei Avot 2:3*

<sup>13</sup> William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach, Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1970).