

**The Consequences of Our Character (Prov. 11)**  
Proverbs: The Wisdom of God as a Way of Life  
Zionsville Fellowship | October 5, 2025 | Drew Hunter

Every one of us in this room wants two things:

You want your life to go well for you, and you want to make a positive impact in the world.

Who doesn't want that? Listen to any graduation speech, and this is the focus: Your future is bright, and you're going to change the world. And what do you need in order to do that? You need that diploma in your hand and a dream in your heart.

But we all know it doesn't actually work like that. Because so many people set out on this path, and then it doesn't work. Or at some point they look back on their success, and they see that it was all superficial. Or they have important public success, but their family doesn't respect them. They know they failed where it mattered most.

The two ambitions aren't wrong—wanting your life to go well for you, and to make a positive impact. The problem is that we skip over the way to get there—which is character.

Proverbs 11 shows us the consequences of our character.

Our character shapes our future and impacts the world around us.

Here's a negative way to think of it: If you don't cultivate your character, you will make a mess that others will have to deal with. Put positively: If you want your life to go well and to make an impact on the world, you cannot bypass character.

Why? Because of what we're seeing in the book of Proverbs more broadly.

Proverbs teaches us to see how the world was designed by God to work a certain way. And wisdom is about seeing reality as he made it, and adjusting our lives to live in line with it. Wisdom is learning to live well in God's world. It is living with reverence for God and respect for reality as he designed it.

Wisdom is a way of life. Every thought, every micro-decision, every word we speak—all of this flows from our character. This is why if want your life to work well and to make a positive impact—it starts there.

**Proverbs 11 shows the consequences of character for ourselves and the world around us.**

Now, before we walk through this chapter, I want us to keep two things in view.

1. First, Proverbs 11 is part of a section that gives elementary wisdom.

Proverbs is a curriculum in character formation. The book is not randomly organized like a playlist on shuffle. There is a progressive development of wisdom from one section to the next. The first nine chapters gave beginning wisdom, and now chapters 10–15 give elementary wisdom. Future sections will move on to intermediate and advanced wisdom.

This section gives us a portrait of the truly righteous and wise person. It is filled with basic contrasts—especially between the righteous and the wicked.

2. Second, this portrait of the righteous person is ultimately a picture of Jesus.

Jesus is the only one who is truly wise and righteous, through and through. He created reality, and he perfectly lives in line with it.

As we read this, let's not think we're able to master it. The way for us to become wise from Proverbs 11 is to look to Jesus. To receive his forgiveness and his help to become like him.

Let's walk through the chapter now.

**Proverbs 11 shows the consequences of character for ourselves and the world around us.**

We'll see the consequences of our character for your life and for everyone else. And then we'll see a test case example. And finally, the consequences of Jesus's character for ours.

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## **1. The Consequences of Character for Your Life (vv. 1–8)**

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First, the consequences of character for your life.

This is all through the chapter, but it is especially prominent in the first 8 verses.

In Proverbs 4 we saw that there are only two paths in life. The way of wisdom leads in a straight line, and it gets brighter and brighter. The way of foolishness is crooked, dark, and filled with obstacles that trip you up. This is because the way of wisdom is in line with how God created the world. When we fear God and cultivate character—our path will be straighter and brighter. If we neglect character, it will get darker and darker.

Proverbs 11 now gives example after example of how this works. Here is what we'll see over and over in this chapter: character leads to a way of life, which leads to outcomes. So here are the outcomes we should expect from a way of life, which comes from character.

In verse 2 we see the outcomes of pride or humility: “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.”

This at first seems like a simple contrast. But Proverbs always demands that we slow down and think it through. There are usually layers here. These are often several lines of wisdom compressed into two. You can only unlock it by comparing the lines and filling in the gaps.

Remember what we’re seeing in this section: the progression from character to action to outcome. That’s what this verse is showing us—but each line is incomplete. Each line leaves something out, so we have to fill in the gaps by comparing them.

So, with the first line, the *character* is pride, and the *outcome* is disgrace. If you are proud, you will eventually be disgraced. But why is it that pride leads to disgrace? We’re missing the actions in the middle—the actions that lead from pride to disgrace.

Now, look at the next line: “but with the humble is wisdom.” Now, this gives the character and the actions. The character is humility, and the way of life is wisdom. But we don’t see an outcome here. What is the result of being humble and living with wisdom? We don’t know from this line.

Now, let’s put the two lines together and fill in the gaps.

- Pride leads to disgrace—why? Because with the proud is not wisdom, but foolishness. And their foolishness leads to living a life that eventually results in disgrace.
- And now the second line: with the humble is wisdom, but what is the outcome? It must be the opposite of disgrace—it is honor. The humble will live with wisdom, and that results not in disgrace, but honor.

Why is this the case? Because wisdom comes from respecting God and reality as he made it.

If you are prideful, you have an exaggerated view of yourself—and it is not aligned to reality. If you are proud, you will not be open to good advice. You will live for the praise of others, rather than doing what’s right. You will look down on others, and treat them disrespectfully. You will repeat your failures. And this will lead to shame and disgrace.

But if you are humble, you have an accurate view of God, yourself, and others. You are open to God’s wisdom and the wisdom of others. You admit your weaknesses and failings. You will honor others, put them first, and encourage them. You will learn to live along the grain of creation. And it will lead to honor.

We don’t have time to go through all the proverbs in this detail—but this is how they work. Now, let’s go more quickly through the rest of these first 8 verses.

Verse 3 shows us integrity and its outcome: “The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.”

What is the progression between character and life and outcome? The upright live with integrity, and it guides them in life. In contrast, the treacherous live with crookedness and it destroys them.

Integrity is when your inner character matches your outward behavior. There is a straight line between your private life and your public life. A straight line between who you are when no one is looking, and when you’re at work.

The opposite of integrity is crookedness. There is a twistedness and disconnect between who you are in private and who you are in public. Your family knows you as one person, and your coworkers and neighbors and church knows you as someone else.

And here’s the point of this verse: Integrity guides the upright to walk straight. But the crookedness eventually will destroy you. The gap between who you are in private and public will eventually become too wide. Your life will eventually blow up.

Verse 4 focuses on outcomes of destruction or deliverance: “Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.”

This compares riches to righteousness. It’s leading us to order our values. We should value righteousness over riches. Character over wealth. Why? Because riches are worthless in the end; only character matters in the end.

Verse 6 shows us the outcomes of deliverance or captivity: “The righteousness of the upright delivers them, but the treacherous are taken captive by their lust.”

The upright live with righteousness, and it leads to deliverance.  
The treacherous live with lust, and it takes them captive. This is probably how our own lustful desires begin to rule us and take us captive. Proverbs often views sin as an addiction that enslaves us.

Finally, verse 8 shows us how our character either helps or harms us in the end: “The righteous is delivered from trouble, and the wicked walks into it instead.”

This isn’t karma. It’s not even just that God intervenes to make sure these outcomes happens. These are the direct consequences of our character because it’s how God designed the world to work.

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## 2. The Consequences of Character for Everyone Else (vv. 9–14)

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This is all the consequence of your character for yourself. Now verses 9–14 focus on the consequences of your character for everyone else.

Your character spills out into your relationships and the broader culture and society. And our *words* are especially in view here. Here's the progression in this section: Our character produces words, which then produce outcomes for others.

We influence both the close relationships around us, and also what Proverbs calls "the city." This is the broader culture we're a part of.

First, here's how our character influences our personal relationships.

Verse 9, "With his mouth the godless man would destroy his neighbor, but by knowledge the righteous are delivered."

The godless man speaks, and the outcome is that his neighbor is destroyed.  
The righteous speak with wisdom, and they are delivered.

Putting these together and filling in the gaps—the godless not only destroys his neighbor, but he is destroyed; and the righteous not only delivers himself, but also his neighbor.

The speech of the godless harms those closest to them. How? Because their speech tears people down, belittles them, slanders, gives foolish advice.

We see this in verse 12: "Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent."

The man who lacks sense and the man of understanding are both standing there. And in front of them is a neighbor who maybe does something stupid.

What is their response? The man who lacks sense belittles his neighbor. The man of understanding stays quiet.

This is the difference character makes. How you speak about other people reveals your character. And how you use self-control to *not* speak about a neighbor also reveals your character.

Verse 13 is similar: "Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered."

Here two people both know something about someone that should be kept secret. The man who lacks character goes around revealing that secret to others.

The trustworthy man keeps it covered.

Gossip reveals character. If you are the kind of person who shares secrets about others—people cannot trust you. But the wise know how to keep confidences.

And thinking more broadly, let's be careful not to hold public gossips in esteem. There are a number of journals and internet watch-bloggers who are gossips. They are sharing things publicly that may or may not be true—or that at least should not be uncovered to everyone.

Yes, public sin and scandal must be exposed and dealt with. But that does not mean one person's local scandal needs to become global news. And we need to be careful, then, what we share and repost online—because that is a way of spreading secrets that damage others.

Now verses 10-11 broaden the scope to the consequences of character for a whole city.

Verse 10 says, "When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, and when the wicked perish there are shouts of gladness."

Why would the city rejoice when it goes well with the righteous? I doubt that it is simply because it's going well for their personal, private, moral lives. No—the city rejoices because the righteous are a blessing to the city. They probably have positions of authority and government roles—and their presence leads to justice and good policies.<sup>i</sup>

And remember who the righteous are: These are those who know God and walk in his wisdom. Today, these are Christians who are leading and influencing the culture. A wise citizenship appreciates this.

In our culture today—we rejoice when Christians influence culture, and business, and government. We want to have cities and states and a nation that honors virtue. We rejoice when those who lead us value human life, freedom, and justice. A city and state and nation rejoices when it's led by those who respect reality.

The wise in Proverbs do not live with a private morality; they let their character influence society. And the society benefits from it. We should want Christian values and wisdom to shape our nation—for the good of everyone.

Verse 11 continues this theme. It says, "By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is overthrown."

When you have a citizenship that knows Christ and lives with his wisdom—that city, that state, that nation is exalted. It is honored. It is built up.

But what about when the foolish and wicked are in charge? This pictures the wicked gaining control of a city, and then ruining it with its wickedness. When you have a nation ruled by people who reject God and live out of line with reality—then that nation becomes unstable. This says the speech of the wicked overthrow it. This could refer to slander that demoralizes a city.<sup>ii</sup> Or perhaps their prideful taunts invite invasion from enemies. Or maybe their words are foolish, so they give foolish counsel.

When they are in power, the people suffer, are oppressed, and do not flourish. This happens under tyrannical situations. It happens when foolish policies lead to persecution or economic failure.

God's wisdom and righteousness are not just good for individuals and their personal lives. They are good for communities and cities and nations. We should want leaders who have character, and policies that reflect God's wisdom. And when this happens, it's a blessing to the people.

Proverbs 14:34 says something similar: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." When a nation conforms to God's standards of righteousness, it will be exalted.<sup>iii</sup> It will be esteemed. It will be wise. It will be just.

And finally, verse 14, continues this theme: "Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety."

So many times in our lives we make mistakes because we didn't seek wisdom. I see it in my own story, and I'm sure you do as well.

But this verse is probably mainly speaking about wisdom for governance. When a city or a state or a nation does not receive wise counsel from wise people—it will fall. A nation needs wisdom from people who fear the Lord, follow Christ, and reflect his wisdom.

This is why, by the way—when we elect government officials, we should be looking for people who listen to others. Who is counseling them? We want leaders who listen to people who know God, have wisdom, and understand justice.

Counsel can make a good lead bad and a bad leader worse. Or it can make a bad lead tolerable and a good leader better.

This is also why—as a church, we have a group of elders who lead together. We are all equal in authority, and we talk through every big decision.

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### 3. Test Case: Your Character and Your Relationship to Wealth

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We've seen how character influences your life and everyone else. Now here is a test case.

This is one aspect of life that reveals your character. It is your relationship to money. Your relationship to money reveals your character. This is the topic that shows up through this chapter more than any other.

Here's what we'll see, briefly: Your character is revealed in the way you relate to wealth in three ways: How you get it, how you view it, and how you use it.

First, how you get it.

Do you get it with straightforward honesty, or through deception? Verse 1, "A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight."

This is contrasting a false balance and a just weight. The balance was a scale used at a point of sale. You put your grain or whatever on one side, and then the seller puts a weight on the other. If the weight is a three pound weight, and the scale balances out, you have three pounds of grain. So you pay for three pounds of grain.

But sellers often deceived people. They rigged the balance, or they mislabeled the weights. So you put two and half pounds of barley on the scale. The seller puts a weight that says three pounds on the other side, and it balances out. That means you think you're buying three pounds of barley. And you paid for three pounds of barley. But you get two and a half.

You are not bothered, because you don't realize you've been ripped off. The seller is thrilled, because he just made extra money. But there's someone else there, too. God. He is looking into every business transaction—and he has an opinion. He delights in a just sale, and he hates a deceptive one.

As a seller, your character is revealed in how you get money. To deceive like this reveals your character, and God hates it. God is offended by injustice because he cares about the victim.

There are plenty of examples today. Hidden costs and fees without telling the buyer up front. Taking advantage of the finances of the elderly. Email fishing scams. Dishonesty about reporting your work hours. Working a partial day when they are paying you for a full day. A seller charging too much at the checkout line. A buyer being charged too little, and not saying anything to make it right.

Your character is revealed in how you get wealth. It's also revealed in how you view it.

- Wisdom recognizes money is not as important as character. Verse 4, "Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death." And verse 7, "When the wicked dies, his hope will perish, and the expectation of wealth perishes too." Wealth cannot deliver you from death and judgment. It's worthless in the end. When you die, all that you hoped for wealth to do for you dies as well.
- Wisdom also recognizes that character, not wealth, brings true honor. Verse 16, "A gracious woman gets honor, and violent men get riches." This woman has noble character and inner beauty, and she gains an honorable reputation. But violent men get riches; and that's it.

Character is also revealed in how you use wealth. This is verses 24–26.

- Verse 24 "One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want." The one who gives, gets more. The one who hoards never has enough. It doesn't always work like this—but it often does. We all see it. God often blesses those who give with more, because he knows they will give more.
- Verse 25, "Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered." This is the pattern: God blesses you, so you bless others, and then God returns that blessing to you again.
- Verse 26, "The people curse him who holds back grain, but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it." This probably pictures a situation where there is probably a famine. One person has a lot of grain, and the rest of the people don't. He controls the supply, the demand goes up, and so the price goes up.

What is the result? The people curse him for it. He may make money, but he's lost his reputation. He's a fool.

But if he sells at the usual price, people bless him. He didn't just do what was right, but what was kind and merciful.

Your character is revealed in how you relate to wealth—how you get it, how you view it, and how you use it. And this has consequences for you and others.

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#### 4. The Consequences of Christ's Character for Ours

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Now, here's the reality from everything we've seen: We all know that we fail at this.

- Some of you may hear all of this and feel completely undone. You see that you have been on the wrong path your whole life. You have neglected your character. You have not sought God's wisdom. And this is revealed in how you get, view, and use money. And you can see the consequences for everyone around you.
- Others of use hear this and recognize that God has brought us on his path of wisdom. He has transformed our character. But we're seeing now just how far we have to go. We have done significant damage to people around us. We've not cleaned up the mess in our heart, and so other people have to deal with it.

What hope do we have to move forward on this path of character?

The answer is our final point—the consequences of Christ's character for ours.

This chapter paints a portrait of wise and righteous character. They are consistent through and through. And this means their life works out for them, and they leave a good and lasting impact on others.

Jesus is the only one who is consistent through and through. He is the one who walked in the way of wisdom perfectly. And he is the one who gives us hope for ours.

And so, I want end by drawing attention to the end of the chapter

Look with me at verse 30: "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and whoever captures souls is wise."

Our character is to be like a tree—and it leads to producing a way of life that is righteous fruit. And this fruit is shared with others. As people come into our lives, they are nourished by us. We are a tree of life to them.

And we seek to give life to others. This is what it means to "capture souls." It is capturing, or saving souls from foolishness and its consequences. This chapter is not just about us having personal character for our personal well-being. It is about becoming the kinds of people who are a tree of life to others. We walk on the way of wisdom, and we bring others along with us.

But when we honestly look at this, we realize that there is only one man who has walked on that path. There is only one man with perfect character.

And his life is the true tree of life for us. He captures our souls to make us wise.

But here's the striking thing. Over and over in this chapter, we saw that if you cultivate your character, it goes well with you. Your path gets brighter and brighter. You are not destroyed.

But what happened to Jesus? Where did his path lead? It led straight into darkness and destruction on the cross.

Why? Because he was capturing us. He walked on the path of righteousness, but he took the consequence of walking down the path of wickedness. He did that so that darkness and destruction don't have to be our end.

The cross itself has become a tree of life. This is where Jesus, who had pristine character, dies for those who don't... so that we can be forgiven.

And he doesn't just forgive us; he also makes us wise. He rose again, and he gives us the Spirit of Wisdom. He leads us to follow him.

If you want to get the character that counts—you can't get anywhere else. You get it from Jesus. He is the tree of life, and he is the one who captures souls to make us wise.

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<sup>i</sup> See Tremper Longman, *Psalms*, 254.

<sup>ii</sup> Bruce Waltke notes this is the slander that demoralizes the city, and so it "tears down" what the righteous "built up" (Waltke, 1:493)

<sup>iii</sup> The biblical scholar Bruce Waltke said this is an implicit admonishment for a nation to conform to God's standards. And when it does, it will be esteemed and provide wise leadership. A nation's exaltation depends on its ethics and virtue; not its political, military, or economic greatness (Waltke, 1:612). We want a nation whose rulers do not break treaties. Who do not let the judicial system break down. Who does not lie. Who does not bully weaker nations. Who does not overtax and intimidate its citizens.