

# Proverbs 5:15-20

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/prov/prov-5/proverbs-515-20/>

*Focusing on two metaphors, water and marriage, Solomon encourages the reader to tap into the true source of meaning and joy in one's life.*

Solomon continues his warning against a life based on falsity. In the culture to which Solomon writes, *water* is a source of life. It is representative of one's existence. In the last chapter, Solomon refers to the heart as "the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23). So, in this passage, the references to *water*—*cistern*, *fresh water*, *well*, *fountain*, *springs*—are all used as an allegory to represent that which sustains one's life on this earth.

He begins by warning: *drink water from your own cistern*. A *cistern* holds rainwater for future use. Drinking *water from your own cistern* alludes to having intimate relations with your own wife, rather than with the *adulteress*. The principle can be extended to enjoying what you have instead of chasing that which you don't have. The *water* of someone else's *cistern*, the intimacy with the wife of another might seem that it would be superior. But it is still water. So enjoy what you have. The grass is not greener on the other side of the fence. It is just grass.

Seeking to drink the *water* from the *cistern* of another (intimacy with the wife of another) leads to handing over your life to strangers. Solomon warned against this in previous verses (Proverbs 5:7-14). The command here is to enjoy what you have. Following envy, and seeking that which belongs to another actually forfeits your life to the powers of darkness.

The principle can be expanded further. *Drink water* (in other words, live life) *from your own cistern*. Steward that which you have. Avoid envy. Seek to create and build rather than to extract and steal from others. Make your choices based on the values of wisdom. Do not hand over the joy and opportunity of living in wisdom to that of wickedness. Wickedness will void the very essence of life.

To this admonition to drink *water from your own cistern*, Solomon adds *and fresh water from your own well*. A *cistern* is a way to store rainwater. A *well* is the source of water from an underground aquifer. Both refer to sources of water within your possession. That which you already steward. Take your daily *drink* of life from within the sphere of what God has granted you to steward. It does not matter whether the *drink* comes from a *cistern* or a *well*. What matters is that the water from the *cistern* or *well* is yours.

God has granted certain things for each of us to steward, and only we can play the part we are meant to play. But our human tendency is to be discontent with the stewardship God has granted and seek our own way. The consequence of casting aside God's gifts in order to take from others is very negative. To highlight this, Solomon asks the rhetorical question, *should your springs be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets?*

Solomon continues using *water* as a metaphor for the source of life. He has changed from *cistern* and *well* to *springs*. To have the *water* of our *springs* dispersed abroad means to lose use of the water. To have the spring diverted to someone else's property. When we seek to extract from another to benefit ourselves, what we inevitably do is transfer what we own to the stranger. We have a virtuous wife (our *cistern*, *well* or *spring*) but choose to chase the adulteress. The result is our *spring* diverts to another place. Unsatisfied, we chase a better life and end up thirsty and without a source of water. We lose the life-giving fellowship with the virtuous wife and all the benefit that stems from her, and get nothing in return.

Such is the way of sin and wickedness. Its promises always come up dry. To pursue the strange way instead of the way of wisdom leads to *streams of water in the streets*. This bears an image of water not flowing to the proper places where it can be of benefit to us. Instead it collects garbage and grime as it aimlessly flows through the mud or stone *streets*. We had life-giving *springs* that are now squandered; they are *streams* running in the *streets*. The ironic and tragic consequence of seeking to extract benefit from others is the loss of what you already possess. The water you owned becomes a runoff flowing down the gutter of *the streets*.

Instead of wasting the life available to us by forfeiting it to *strangers*, Solomon moves to a positive command: *let them be yours alone and not for strangers with you; let your fountain be blessed*. The water that flows from your *fountain* can be *blessed* if you drink from it instead of seeking water that belongs to someone else. Live according to truth and reality, and choose to be content and enjoy what you have. The Apostle Paul instructs that God “richly supplies us with all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17). So enjoy what God has supplied. Enjoy your own wife or husband. Doing so heaps *blessing* instead of waste, rejoicing and life instead of separation and death.

Solomon next reinforces the allegory—*and rejoice in the wife of your youth*. Throughout Proverbs, Solomon speaks to the young men in these binary dichotomies—wife/adulteress, Lady Wisdom/temptress. This has a direct and practical application—Solomon wants these young men to marry well. But it is also an allegory for our relationship with God. *The wife of your youth* represents the truth for which we were created.

Human marriage itself is representative of God's relationship with His people. The Old Testament consistently refers to Israel as God's wife, as in Ezekiel 16 and the book of Hosea. The New Testament refers to the church (all believers) as Jesus' bride (Ephesians 5:31-32). This makes it clear that this principle applies to men as well as women.

Solomon exhorts his students to *rejoice in the wife of your youth*. This is not about stuffy obligation; it is the key to joy. True joy is found in focusing on enjoying what we have. Living within the bounds of wisdom. Following the path God has marked for us. The *wife of your youth* is where sexual pleasure should be sought and enjoyed. Enjoy what you have. Cherish intimacy and oneness with the one to whom you are joined. Seeking to satisfy appetites apart from God's ways leads to destruction.

In verse 19, Solomon highlights some of the perspectives around not just marriage but the relationship with God to which marriage eludes as a source of great joy.

*Hind* and *doe* are both ways to express a female animal. *Hind* refers to a female deer, while *doe* refers to the female of a number of animal species (deer, rabbit, etc.). So in this allegory of marriage, a *loving hind* likely means one's specific spouse, a caring and affectionate partner. And a *graceful doe* represents the unique value that femininity adds to all of creation and existence. One might say, my wife is a great partner (*hind*) and an incredible woman (*doe*).

The point here is for the young men to *rejoice* in their wives. Following the ways of truth and reality lead to joy. Following God's ways in marriage is to be *exhilarated*. Solomon communicates this in a way his young, male audience will certainly understand—*let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be exhilarated always with her love*. God invented sexual intercourse, and designed it to be enjoyable. When sexual fulfillment is contained within the proper bounds of marriage, it leads to a genuine *love* that lasts. When it is sought outside of those bounds, it leads to destruction.

To have her *breasts satisfy you at all times* makes it clear that Solomon is urging his young male students to seek sexual fulfillment exclusively from their wives. Not just some of the time, but *at all times*. Not as a part, but in totality. The *exhilaration of love* is not limited to sexual fulfillment. The same Hebrew word translated *love* is used to describe God's love for His people (Deuteronomy 7:8) as well as Jonathan's love for his good friend David (1 Samuel 18:3). Sexual intercourse is, at its root, a spiritual activity. It is one soul joining in oneness with another soul.

Paul adds to Solomon's warning against following the ways of the adulteress by noting when believers have sexual intercourse with a prostitute, they are joining the Holy Spirit with that prostitute, because believers are indwelt with the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:16). In that verse, the Apostle Paul even quotes Genesis 2:24, which clearly speaks of marriage, to support the idea that sexual intercourse creates spiritual oneness: "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH."

When we make spiritual oneness transactional, we diminish something intended to be life-giving and make it mere consumption. Solomon makes it clear that sexual exclusivity leads to something much greater than a temporary high. It leads to an *exhilaration of love*.

Solomon rounds off the allegory with another rhetorical question: *why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress and embrace the bosom of a foreigner?* Although it is easy to overlook, one of the most important phrases in this sentence is *my son*. Throughout the first five chapters of Proverbs, Solomon has used this familial term of endearment to connect himself with his audience. He is not just a teacher, but a caring father.

His teaching and instruction are from the heart of a dad, with the care and affection that relationship brings. And so, if you are a *son* to Solomon's teachings, why would you be *exhilarated* by lies and temptations that go entirely against the path of life and wisdom? If you are inheriting Solomon's wisdom, why would you be excited by what he recognizes as wickedness and death? The exhilaration of the temptress is a temporary high, followed by death and destruction.

Solomon introduces a new character that appears to be synonymous with *the adulteress*—a *foreigner*. The phrase *the bosom of a foreigner* paints a picture of a sexual embrace. It was

common in the history of Israel for their falling away from the path of wisdom to be intertwined with engagement with foreign gods and foreign women. For example, from the time when Israel was wandering in the wilderness, some 500 years prior to Solomon:

“While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.”

(Numbers 25:1-2)

Moab was a neighboring country (now a part of the country of Jordan) that worshipped Molech. As with other pagan religions, sexual promiscuity was an integral part of their “worship.” Ironically, Solomon ultimately did not follow his own advice (1 Kings 11:6-8). It led to his downfall, and the downfall of his kingdom.

There is also a bit of belittling the falsity of the *adulteress* here. Solomon is saying that if great joy is only available in *the wife of your youth* (also a picture of our relationship with God), why would you waste your time anywhere else? As with all wisdom, there is an immensely practical reason to follow its path—it is what actually works to gain fulfillment in life.

### **Biblical Text**

**Drink water from your own cistern**

**And fresh water from your own well.**

**16 Should your springs be dispersed abroad,  
Streams of water in the streets?**

**17 Let them be yours alone**

**And not for strangers with you.**

**18 Let your fountain be blessed,**

**And rejoice in the wife of your youth.**

**19 As a loving hind and a graceful doe,**

**Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;**

**Be exhilarated always with her love.**

**20 For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress**

**And embrace the bosom of a foreigner?**