

# Foot and Mouth and Other Problems



## Pastor Al Detter

March 21, 2004

I want to tell you from time to time why we are spending significant time in Proverbs. Proverbs is a training manual on how to live your life wisely, how to live in such a way as to please God, how to live your life to experience blessing and avert painful consequences.

Today we are going to look at three detrimental behaviors that set the stage for ruin if engaged in and not corrected. These are behaviors that don't seem to be that dangerous. Yet they each have destructive consequences. The three behaviors are unwise promises, laziness, and purposely hurting people. Please follow along as I read Proverbs 6:1-15.

By the way, what we are doing today is a 2400-year-old tradition among God's people. The spiritual leader would get up in front of the people, read a portion of God's Word, explain it, and ask the people to obey it.

Solomon identifies three behaviors to avoid and gives us a warning about each one of them. Here's the first one.

### **Warning #1—Don't make unwise promises (Proverbs 6:1-5)**

The major matter of concern here is becoming surety or giving a pledge to someone (verse 1). "Surety" in the Old

Testament was when you contracted to assume the debt of another in the event of default. Sometimes a person would actually agree to take the place of another person to satisfy that person's obligation (Genesis 43:9; 44:32). In today's terminology, we would call it cosigning for a loan. It puts a potential financial burden on you or your family that should not be there. This is not talking about lending but assuming liability. Becoming surety is financially irresponsible.

A pledge was giving a person something in security to guarantee the fulfillment of an obligation or promise you made. These were frequently good faith agreements sealed by a handshake (verse 3).

We are discouraged from becoming surety or making pledges like this with anyone—either someone we know well, the neighbor, or someone we barely know at all, the stranger (verse 1).

There are inherent problems with become surety and giving pledges. In the matter of becoming surety, you are promising personal assets to cover another party's default. In effect, you are losing control of the situation. If they make bad decisions or if they have a financial reversal, you will become responsible for their debt. Furthermore, you can enable a person to over-extend their limits by becoming surety. The Bible takes a dim view about doing this

(Proverbs 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26-27; 27:13).

In giving a pledge, you obligate yourself to someone to follow a certain course of action, financially or otherwise, assuming that the future will be favorable for you to make good on your promise. The pledge here seems to be a promise made in questionable or dangerous situations, often by giving some kind of collateral. James 4:13-16 tells us not to boast about what we are convinced will happen in the future because we do not know what a day will bring forth. We are not to make promises we might not be able to fulfill.

So, this is the warning—never obligate yourself to someone when the outcome is totally dependant upon them or a speculated future.

Verse 2 says that to take over the responsibility for the debt of another or to make a promise about future performance is to put your foot in your mouth. Your words have gotten you into trouble. You've agreed to do an unwise and dangerous thing. You have put not only yourself, but your relationship with the other party in jeopardy. If a person defaults and you must pay or if you can't keep your promise, you know what that can do to relationships.

So verse 3 tells us what to do. This is the only place in the Bible I know where it tells us to get out of an agreement or a promise. If you have obligated yourself in this fashion, this is what we are told to do. Escape the possibility of ruin quickly. Deliver yourself. Your neighbor has a grip on your life he should not have. You're in a bind and you need to get out of the arrangement.

How do you do it? This is not pretty, but you go to your neighbor and make a fool out of yourself. The Hebrew words are forceful here. Humble—it means “to

stomp or tread yourself or to be tramped upon.” In other words, somehow you become smaller. You beg on your hands and knees for release if you have to. You don't go with an attitude to justify or with excuses. You tell them you made a foolish mistake.

If that doesn't work, the next word is importune. It means “to be boisterous or aggressive.” You become animated and demonstrative with your request but without being threatening. You won't be quiet or at rest with them until you are released. It's better not to become surety or make a pledge if this is what you must do to get out of it.

Verse 4 adds a time dimension. Do it quickly—that very day. Don't go to bed with these kinds of agreements hanging over your head. It's just like anger in Ephesians 5:26-27. The longer you wait, the worse it will get. This could get sticky. You've agreed upon something with someone. You have “come into their hand” (verse 3). Verse 5 tells us to seek release and hope to move back into freedom like the gazelle or bird which is released from the hand of their captors.

Doing this could cause damage to a relationship. They may think less of you and see you as going back on your word. And there is no guarantee here that someone will release you. They may not. The option then is not abandonment of the agreement. You must be released. If they don't release you, you are bound to the agreement and promise and may suffer loss (Psalm 15:4). Regardless, you need to make a quick attempt to get out of the bondage you have entered into and hope to be released.

I have been very careful about avoiding these situations. I don't want to suffer personal losses and I don't want to make a fool out of myself before others.

I did something like these verses tell us not to do when I was a teenager. In my home, we had a no dating rule until you were 16. I had a crush on a neighbor girl. She lived out the back alley from our house and across the street on the second floor. The day I turned 15, I asked her out on a date for that Friday night.

This was going to be my first date and it was going to mean a lot to me. Somehow I thought my mother would be very agreeable. She wasn't. I had given the girl a pledge that we would go out. But my mother laid down the law of the Medes and Persians. I had to tell Janet that the date was off. That walk through the alley, across the street, and up those stairs was one of the longest walks of my life. Janet opened the door and I felt this big (small gesture) in her eyes. She released me from the pledge. I learned a couple valuable lessons that day.

Friends, don't agree to cover someone else's financial risks with your own assets. And do not make promises that you may not be able to fulfill. Rather keep your mouth shut and give a gift if you want to. Or surprise them with something they didn't expect rather than to disappoint by failing to make good.

## **Warning #2—Don't be lazy (Proverbs 6:6-11)**

---

There's a character in the Proverbs that is rather prominent (17 times). He's called the " sluggard." He's an incredibly lazy person. He is without purpose and discipline. He wants everything handed to him without any work. I have a hard time with lazy people. Apparently so did a new CEO.

He was determined to rid the company of all slackers. On a tour of the facility,

he notices a guy leaning on a wall. The room is full of workers and he wants to let them know he means business. So the CEO walks up to the guy and asks, "And how much money do you make a week?" A little surprised, the young man looks at him and replies, "I make \$300 a week. Why?" The CEO then hands the guy \$1200 in cash and screams, "Here's four week's pay. Now GET OUT and don't come back!" Feeling pretty good about his first firing, he looks around the room and asks, "Does anyone want to tell me what that goof-off did here?" With a sheepish grin one of the workers mutters, "Pizza delivery guy from Pa Pa John's."

Statistically I know there are some sluggards in a crowd this size. I'm going to be gentler than this CEO. I'm going to point us to nature for some lessons. In verse 6, Solomon tells the lazy person to observe the ways of the ant. The harvester ant in Israel has a lot to teach us about industry, organization preparation, discipline, and productivity.

In verse 7 we learn that the ant is a self-starter. There is no hierarchy or bosses prodding them to do their work. The sluggard needs a lot of prodding to do anything. He is adverse to work. He only does work when he is forced to do so and then only the minimum to get by. The lesson is this. If you are lazy, get going. Don't wait for others tell you what to do. Show some initiative. Do more than the minimum.

In verse 8, we also learn that the ant prepares for tomorrow. They do what needs to be done at the right time so that tomorrow will not be lacking. They work during the summer to store up provisions for the winter (cf. Proverbs 30:25). If they don't store up for the winter, there will be nothing to eat. They work hard now for future needs. The lesson is this. Don't play today and ignore tomorrow. Stop

procrastinating and making excuses. Don't live as though the present is all there is. Tomorrow will come and if you don't get ready for it, you will have a crisis on your hands. And don't expect people to provide what you were not willing to provide for yourself.

It's the teaching of Proverbs and I have seen it by experience. There is little you can do to motivate and change a sluggard. There are three things they love and aren't about to give up—fun, food, and sleep. In this passage, the issue is sleep (verses 8-9). The sluggard loves his bed. The alarm goes off and he stays in bed. He comes home during the day and gets in bed. The ant is taking care of responsibilities but the sluggard goes to bed and shirks them. Verse 8 asks, "When are you going to get out of bed and do your work?"

Here's the problem. He is sleeping when he should be working and sleeping when others are working. He lets others do his work if they are stupid enough to do it and he expects other people to feed and provide for him. He is an able-bodied person who is unwilling to do necessary work and pull his share. He is a parasite. He is a pain to live with.

It doesn't take a whole lot of laziness to do a sluggard in. Verses 10 and 11 say just a little sleeping and just a little idle time when you should be working can cause you to end up with nothing when you need it. Verse 11 says that your poverty will come upon you as if an armed robber stole from you. In reality, you robbed yourself! Something's going to happen to you and you will find yourself in a crisis without resources and it will be your own fault. Sadly, rarely does the crisis change the sluggard.

There is a time to sleep and rest but not

when it's time to work. God will bless the work of our hands but not the lazy person. If you're industrious, you'd make a good ant. If you are lazy, learn from the ant. And if people who are close to you tell you you're lazy, believe them and admit your problem. Otherwise, winter will come to you and you will have nothing.

### **Warning #3—Don't knowingly hurt other people (Proverbs 6:12-15)**

---

There are some people who aren't happy unless they are causing trouble to people around them. In verse 12, these mischief-makers are called worthless and wicked people. That's pretty strong language. We tend to think of wicked and worthless people as those who commit really bad sins like theft, murder, and rape. That's not so.

The words in Hebrew frame the disposition of this person. The first word translated "worthless" is literally "of Belial." It means "to be without worth or profit." These people add absolutely no social capital to relationships. The term "Belial" came to be used as another name for Satan whose worthlessness is destructive.

The second word translated "wicked" means "twisted, devious, perverse." There is an intentional turning away from what is right, good, and lawful. In verses 12-14 we see two kinds of trouble they cause.

**They use deception for personal gain (verses 12-13).** These are con artists and scam specialists. They are users and takers. They see you coming. They tell you what's in it for you. They make you think you are getting a deal. All the while they, without conscience and in collusion with others, are taking

advantage of you. They are smooth talkers who tell lies and half-truths. They misrepresent. During their dealings, their partners are being tipped off by signals you do not discern until it is too late.

Marie and I used to play a card game called *Rook* with some members of the church. If you look the meaning of the verb “rook” up in the dictionary, you will discover that it means “to cheat or swindle.” Anyway, it used to be the men against the women. The guys did a lot of winning.

Do you know what our wives did? They accused us of the behavior of verse 13—winking with our eyes, signaling with our feet, and pointing with our fingers.

Maybe some of you know how it feels to be unjustly accused.

Maybe we aren't the sort of sorry people that deceive others for their own ends. But whenever we are not totally honest with someone in order to make personal gains, we are worthless and wicked.

Here's the second thing that worthless and wicked people do.

#### **They disrupt relationships (verse 14).**

Twenty-seven times in the Proverbs it talks about people who spread strife. They love to create trouble between people. They are always plotting some kind of disruption. The trouble they cause is not accidental. It is intentional. They gossip. They send anonymous letters.

They triangle. *Triangling* is involving someone other than the person with whom you have an issue without his knowledge or consent. They spread rumors. They have private hallway meetings. They leave you with false impressions about others. They even

create spiritual issues about others and try to win you to their side. That's just the beginning of their ways.

God calls upon us to strengthen our relationships. We are never to willfully plan or do anything that pits person against person or causes division between people. Causing ill-will among people is a worthless and wicked thing to do, whether in your marriage, your church, in your neighborhood, or at work.

In verse 15, God says that people who deceive others and disrupt relationships will suddenly get hurt someday. It is unavoidable. Up to that point they thought they were in total control. Then there's nothing they can do. The word “broken” here means “a sudden opening, splitting, or breaking apart without remedy.” It's a word we could properly use for Humpty Dumpty. Something will happen to ruin them and there will be no fixing or healing. I think we are seeing this kind of thing happen nationally in the business world. Look at the number of corporate heads who lied and took advantage of people and are facing jail time. Their careers are ruined.

Friends, we need to be people helpers and people healers, not people hurters or people dividers. The Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 2:3-4 to “do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind, let each of you regard one another as more important than himself. Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” God holds us accountable for how we treat others.

## Conclusion

---

The negative behaviors we talked about today God hates. We are warned not to practice them. Don't make unwise agreements about securing someone else's financial matters. Don't make any promises that are questionable in the first place.

Don't be lazy. Pull your share of the load. Prepare for tomorrow. Remember the wise saying that we hear in our church from time to time—poor planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part.

And don't use or injure people. Always be honest and do not cause division. Build people up. Bless them. Wish for them success and deep relationships.

Most of all, don't do these things towards God. Don't promise Him things you can't fulfill. Ecclesiastes 4:5 says that it's better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Don't be a slacker in spiritual things. Involve yourself in spiritual disciplines like Bible reading and prayer. And don't try to pull the wool over God's eyes. There is nothing hidden from Him.

Several months ago I spoke about the man who complained to his coworker about his lunch: "Every day it's a baloney sandwich. I'm tired of baloney sandwiches!" The coworker told him to have his wife make him something else. He said, "I'm not married, I make the sandwiches myself." You know the moral of the story. Much of the baloney in our lives we put there ourselves. The sermon today was about putting less baloney in our lives.

## Scripture References

- **Genesis 43:9, 44:32**
- **Psalms 15:4**
- **Ecclesiastes 4:5**
- **Proverbs 6:1-15, 11:15, 17:18, 20:16, 22:26-27, 27:13, 30:25**
- **Ephesians 5:26-27**
- **Philippians 2:3-4**
- **James 4:13-16**

## Notes: