

Part 36: How To Pass a Personality Test

Tyler Velin | Proverbs 26:1-28

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If there's one thing the internet has done for us is that it has fueled the phenomenon of personality tests. Facebook wants you to know which Disney Princess, Marvel Superhero or Famous Actor your personality represents. In the church we often find people eager to take tests which describe their spiritual gifts or love languages. In the business world we want to know what your enneagram is, or your Meyer's Briggs test.

So I did a couple this week. When it comes to the enneagram, I'm a 6, 3, 1. A loyalist with achiever and reformer traits. On the Meyer's Brigg I am an architect INTJ-T. I knew very little of what any of this meant, or if any of it were true. But then in the blurb on one it said: "Uncertainty is often difficult for sixes to understand and describe, and they might give up any attempt to verbalize them and instead succumb to worry. Some might call sixes, neurotic." The Meyer's Briggs assessment added that my type is the most likely personality type to often expect the worst.

Though I had no idea what any of it meant, I felt seen. As I saw all of my self-destructive tendencies thrown in my own face I also discovered that if I wanted help to understand or change, I would have to pay.

If I wanted to find a list of jobs that suited me, or to interpret what the maze of numbers on my report meant, I needed to pay \$20 for my personalized report. This whole economy preys on our desires to know who we are and to know how we ought to change our weaknesses and maximize our strengths.

Today in the book of Proverbs we encounter a similar personality text. It wants to show us who we are by holding up traits for us to assess in our own heart. Broadly speaking there are three types of persons in this text. One commentator labeled the parts of this passage as "the mirror of fools," and another as "the mirror of sluggards" we will also see today, "the mirror of meddlers."

We might not want to be categorized as such, but this is why the Bible is good news for those who humbly read it. Not only does it know our heart from God's perspective, but it also knows how we change by God's mercy, and best of all it has no monetary cost. God wants you to examine your heart and to see these descriptions and think, "That might be me." But instead of withholding what we need, the implicit application of scripture is that if we don't like what we see in the mirror, then we can look to the gospel, see the world through the eyes of Jesus and experience the change we hopefully not only want, but also desperately need.

What we are going to see today is this: **Seeing our hearts through God's eyes gives us wisdom to avoid the pits of destruction.** There is a constant reprieve we see in this text which is going to be key in both our understanding and application. That is "to be wise in our own eyes."

That is to say God is calling us to see ourselves with our own eyes, but to understand the severity and the salvation we see through his eyes. It's in this perspective that we find both the conviction and the hope that we need. The three personality types we are going to see today are **The Unfit Fool, The Self-Justifying Sluggard, and The Malicious Meddler.**

But before we get into the personality test of our hearts, it's important to note that Proverbs 26 begins and ends with a reminder of God's created order. It reminds us of truths which God himself upholds that give us hope as we assess our hearts.

I'm going to read for us **Proverbs 26:1-5, 27**. So I'm not going to linger here but I want to point out the four affirmations Solomon makes here before he dives into our hearts.

First he says that fools will not receive honor. It is unfitting for them. If you want honor, if you want a position which matters, you will not find it by turning to the foolishness of the world.

Second, those who pursue righteousness, though cursed by foolish people, will be ultimately delivered. That's what is meant by the illustration of a curse flitting around like a sparrow. Foolish people in a broken world might condemn the righteous with a slew of hurtful, harmful and destructive words. But these causeless curses won't land. To be wise in Jesus Christ is to no longer fear the words of man.

Thirdly we see that the fool, and those who pursue evil will themselves be judged. Why do we need to see our hearts as God sees them? Because to leave our hearts unaddressed is to face the consequences. A just as a horse is whipped into submission and a donkey bridled for control, so the fool will be struck with discipline. The man who digs a pit to trap another will find himself trapped, the fool who seek to destroy others by rolling a stone down onto his enemy will be crushed by the backfiring of his own plan.

And fourthly, those who are wise will, with God's help, know how to live in the midst of fools. There will be times where we need wisdom to know how to respond, whether to correct or whether to ignore, but the key is that unlike the fool, the wise man does not boast in the wisdom of his own eyes but relies on God's wisdom.

Why is this important before we get into the three hearts presented in this text? Because it shows us that if we want to see things rightly we need to be willing to trust God to do all these things. If we don't believe that God will care for the righteous, if we don't believe that there is no honor in sin, if we don't believe God will punish the wicked and if we don't believe that God gives us what we need to be wise in a foolish world then we will slowly start the process of trying to see things from another perspective.

If we don't believe God to be God, then we will have a hard time seeing our hearts rightly and we will have a hard time responding to our need and our world rightly. We will come back to this in closing, but with that set up, let's begin our personality test first by looking at **The Unfit Fool**. Read with me **Proverbs 26:6-12**.

So Solomon does something really genius here. He describes the inability of the fool in three ways. In verses six and ten he shows how business relationships with a fool harms everyone, then in verses seven and nine he says that the proverbs, the wisdom of fools are useless and dangerous, and then in the middle he shows that fools cannot be trusted with honor.

Like a dog who returns to his vomit, so the fool will always be these thing. He doesn't learn from his mistakes.

But then we see this verse: **Proverbs 26:12**.

So here we see that in this instance there is actually someone worse than the fool. Who is worse? The man who is wise in his own eyes.

Who is the man who is wise in his own eyes? He's the one who refuses to see the danger of fools and thinks that he can go on partnering with fools, learning from fools, and honoring fools and be fine because of it.

Solomon knows that we have a tendency to say: "I'm not like other people." He knows that we think we have found a way to have deep relationships and unprotected council with foolish people and be safe. But to think that is to be worse than the fool who slurps up his own vomit.

Biblically speaking the fool is not the one who is dumb or lacks intellect. The fool is the person who refuses to see things from God's perspective and who is willing to do what God calls sin to gain what they think is satisfaction. The fool refuses to see life from true reality.

Behind each of these warnings is actually a posture of trust. Don't trust a fool to be able to help you succeed in advancing your message, don't trust a fool to bring you council which really heals, and don't trust a fool to take your honor and give you back the comfort you desire.

When you think of who has positions of council, honor and influence in your life, who are those people?

Behind the Hebrew word for honor is an element of weightiness. Who carries weight in your life? Who are the influencers on social media, the scholars on your shelves and the commentators on your news outlets, and how much weight do they have? How easy is it, if we are unaware to slowly begin to trust them with the hopes and cares of our hearts?

What we see behind this text is the inevitability of discipleship. We will follow and be influenced by people. God made us that way.

This reality shapes the kind of community the church should be. If we aren't willing to let fools bear our message, then we need to bear the message of wisdom. If we don't want our world to wait for the next Proverb tweeted out by the superstars of the day, then we need to show the beauty of God's created order. If we don't want the world to give honor to the same people who will ultimately let us down, then let our conversations point not to ourselves, but to the King who truly is glorious and who will not lead his people astray.

What we see in this text is that it's often those who play by the world's wisdom who appear to be the most useful, the most wise and the most honorable. But for the wise disciple of Jesus we learn to trust God's view of us as more defining than the world's view of us.

That's not to say that we never find the voices of the world to be helpful, wise and honorable. But it means that we weigh everything through the lens of God's reality in the gospel. That's what it means to not be a fool.

But secondly, our next personality type is more directly aimed at our own actions. This is **The Self-Justifying Sluggard**.

Read with me: **Proverbs 26:13-16**.

I love the word picture Solomon uses here. It's a picture we can hear. As the door turns on its hinges so does a sluggard on his bed.

There's an even less flattering description of the sluggard who dips his hand into his chip bag but is too lazy to even bring it to his mouth!

But what we see most clearly here is the work of the sluggard. He does a lot of work to justify himself. He does this first of all by justifying why he is staying inside. He invents a narrative that there is a lion in the street. Therefore, if it is dangerous to go outside, then it's not lazy to stay inside, it's wise.

I'm often this way when it comes to running. If there is a cloud in the sky, I look out and say, "It could rain, I could slip, I shouldn't go for a run."

I wonder how many of us are quick to justify our own sloth with such mental gymnastics. We aren't lazy, we are learning a new skill on Youtube. We are gluttons to Netflix, we want to be culturally informed. We aren't enslaved to our news cycle, we are just concerned citizens.

But the point is that behind this self-justification is an inability to participate in something truly worthwhile.

Now we often think of the sluggard as the person who does nothing. But what's interesting to see is that the sluggard is actually active in this text, he is constantly turning, but like a door, going nowhere. Constantly burying his hand, but at the end there's no gain. Many of us feel safe from sloth because we are active, but look at the warning of Paul in **2 Thessalonians 3:11-12**.

Paul warns not only of those who are inactive, but of those whose life is a flurry of activity, but activity towards things that don't actually matter or fulfill. Everyone is busy. But what are we busy with? Everyone is turning, everyone is burying, but are we getting what we want?

The Bible makes it clear that God wants, and actually made us to rest deeply and to enjoy his creation rightly. But he also made us to labor for things which matter. Many of us check our couch when we take the sluggard test, but maybe we also need to check our calendars.

Look at what Paul says in **Ephesians 5:15-17** and also **Colossians 4:5**. Are we using our time well? Solomon also knows that on our own we will say we pass this test! So look at what he says: **Proverbs 26:16**.

What's the point of application here? Talk to other believers in your life about your hobbies and habits. Be humble enough to soberly see if behind your frantic pace in life is actually the heart of a sluggard always turning but never truly getting what they want.

Instead realize that God has great things for us, hard things, satisfying things, difficult things, but deeply meaningful things. Things worth living for.

But now Solomon really hits the gas as we turn to our final profile this morning: **The Menacing Meddler**.

We meet the meddler in verse 17 but behind that word is the reality of an instigator or the provoker. If you've ever made a homemade volcano, the meddler is like the vinegar which when added to the baking soda causes an eruption.

There's two ways we can cause a reaction like that in this text. One is the more visibly offensive quarreler, and one is the more subtle and secret whisperer.

We meet the quarreler in **Proverbs 26:17-21**.

So who is this meddling quarreler? He is the one of us who delights in openly instigating fights and conflicts which he has no business being a part of.

Solomon uses this illustration of grabbing a dog passing by to illustrate this. The point is that this dog was minding his own business passing by this man, but the man, eager to cause some chaos, grabbed the dog by the ears just to frustrate the dog but ultimately we can assume that the man himself is the one who will be bitten.

The quarreler generally likes to watch the world burn and loves to be in the midst of the chaos. He's the person who when he walks into a room lights it on fire with controversy because he likes it.

The internet has given us new ways to provoke those around us but the heart we show in our comments and message boards is the same heart that sits at our dinner table and community groups.

I think this is something that is particularly common among men. In Colossians 3:21, Paul warns fathers to not provoke their children. Because I think there is something sinful in men that clamors for conflict. We like to provoke.

I see my own sins in the sins of my son. My son loves to irritate his sisters just for the fun of it. Like a man grabbing a dog that irritation often ends in him getting clawed to death, but it's worth it for him. But as frustrated as I get with him, I realize my heart does the same thing in more subtle ways.

I think we all are prone to this in different ways and one common cover is humor. This is what Solomon alludes to when he points to the man who set out to deceive his neighbor and then ended up saying, when harm was done, "I'm only joking, lighten up."

There are times where our sarcasm, our humor and our laughter is a cover up for what is really behind our hearts. Did you see what is behind this desire to cause quarrels? Look at **Proverbs 26:18-19**.

The quarreler seems to be the most light hearted of the group but what he brandishes are barbs of death.

I used to follow TSA on social media because they would show the items they catch at their security checkpoints. It was wild to see the length some people would go through to sneak dangerous things onto planes. They would often disguise knives and even guns as ordinary things like toys, shoes and gifts.

Many of us think that we can hide the wickedness of our heart under the label of humor, but God's examination shows that he is not fooled. We see the devastating nature of this heart all the more as we examine the subtly deceit of the whisperer: **Proverbs 26:22-28**.

We should be quick to see the hatred of the quarreler because he's openly and actively acting out the desires of the heart. But with the whisperer, or with what other translations call the gossip, we often feel safer because we aren't saying the things openly. We aren't being inflammatory in public. But here we see the deceit which is behind the heart of the gossip.

Multiple times in the New Testament we read of the dangers of gossip in the church and it's listed as one of the sins which typifies a heart far from God.

But I can honestly say that while I heard of the danger of the gossip in the New Testament, it wasn't until this week that I felt the danger of the whispering gossip here in Proverbs 26.

Don't we see the dangerous, menacing duplicity of words spoken in secret? Where the quarreler meddles and says, "I was only joking." The whisperer meddles and says, "I never said that."

Even though we see the hatred, the hostility, the delight of an evil heart in the words of the whisperer, we also see how nuanced it is.

The words of the whisperer are delicious morsels. We love them when we hear them. It sounds like we are getting juicy details which we love to hear and we think we are getting them in a safe context. They are presented to us as fancy glaze which covers a priceless vessel, but inside the glaze is nothing more than dried mud.

They come to us with hate disguised. The whisperer is already in the midst of the assembly but he or she is hard to find because of their duplicitous ways. They seem to speak graciously, they seem to speak softly, they seem to speak as if to almost say, "I'm just sharing this because I'm concerned but have you heard about blank?"

But behind their gracious words and flattering lips is a heart filled with hate and full of abominations.

Just as the quarreler is able to identify himself based off of his impulsivity, so too the whisperer from their intentions.

I think the church itself has a very confused relationship with gossip and whispering. There are many things that we should share in confidence with people that are not shared, then there are many things that shouldn't be shared even in private which are shared.

What's the difference? Intention.

When we encounter something dangerous, scandalous or attention worthy in the lives of someone we should share it either with that person or with someone else with the desire to help, to care, and to serve. That's what we looked at a few weeks ago about snatching people who are stumbling to the slaughter.

But what we often do instead is share things which may or may not be as serious, but we share it with a desire to spread rumors which either make ourselves look better, or make others look worse. We share it because we want our friend to think less of the person who dislikes us, so that we might look better in the conflict that might arise in the future.

But how vile this heart is inside the church! Where the quarreler picks up arms and enjoys himself in the midst of the battle, the whisperer delights in sitting on the sidelines while she has convinced others to go to battle for her.

But instead of being a meddler who delights in the destruction of others, look at what the heart of the wise is to model: **Ephesians 4:29**.

Do we meet this standard? If not, we are in trouble. Because what we see clearly in the last few verses of Proverbs is that what you think you are getting away with in secret will one day be exposed. What you think will ruin others will one day ruin you. Why? Because God knows our hearts.

So what do we do if this is us? We need to see our hearts through God's eyes.

To trust that God will judge means that you should be willing to also trust God for something else. Look at **Proverbs 3:5-8**.

If we are not who we want to be, the solution is to turn our eyes back to God who makes our paths straight.

I love the story of Jesus and the woman at the well in John chapter 4. In the story Jesus encounters a woman who is already on the fringe of society. But more than that, Jesus knows her heart and her sins. He asks her where her husband is, knowing she doesn't have a husband. In fact he says to her: "You have had five husbands and the one you now have is not your husband."

Here Jesus exposes a history of sexual brokenness and brings all of it to bear in her heart. The woman immediately says to Jesus, I don't even know where to worship to make this right! Some people worship on the mountain, some people worship in Jerusalem. And behind her seemingly random subject change is the sobriety of knowing her brokenness but not knowing how to be healed from it. But Jesus knows this and he says to her: The hour is coming where you will worship God truly through me.

When we come to Jesus, we encounter the ways in which our hearts are not like Jesus'. When that happens we have a tendency to do two things. First, some of us try to clean ourselves up. We become busy with work that doesn't matter. We think we can work our way back into God's grace but to see through God's eyes we see that we can never do that. Instead Jesus has come to do that work for us.

Secondly, we run and hide. We know how unworthy our hearts are so like Adam and Eve we cover our nakedness in shame. But to see Jesus rightly we see not only his work to save us, but his willingness to do that. He wants to help us address our hearts because that's what he came for.