**The Book of Proverbs – Gaslighting: What It Means And How To Respond**

This is week four in our study from Proverbs. We are going to discuss a major issue in our culture today as we continue in our series. We have discussed wisdom, emotions, character and continue today with something you have probably heard of. If not, you will hear about it today. Next week we will discuss parenting from the Proverbs.

Today we are going to talk about gaslighting and we are not discussing how to light the pilot light on your stove or hot water heater. We are talking about a verbal situation that affects us. To understand what **Proverbs** says about how to handle these types of attacks, we need to define what gaslighting is. It would be easy to tune me out at this time but in conversations I have had with people even at our church, you have experienced what we are going to talk about.

It’s not a new term. The word and how it is used is fairly recent, the concept is not. The following is where the idea is traced to and this is from the website, **theworld.org**,

**The term "gaslighting" can be traced back to a 1938 play. British playwright Patrick Hamilton created "Gas Light," a mystery/thriller that premiered in London and played there for six months. But most folks familiar with the history of the term think back to the 1944 film adaptation of the play, "Gaslight."**

**The movie stars are Charles Boyer and Ingrid Bergman. They play a married couple, Paula and Gregory. Throughout the film, abusive husband Gregory manipulates Paula to make her feel as if she has gone mad. He leads her to believe she's stealing things without realizing it and hearing noises that aren’t really there. Paula begins to question her reality.**

Let me define how this concept is used today in our world as we dive into Proverbs. Someone who gaslights another does so intentionally. Their goal is to get us to question what we have said and/or the intent behind our words. **Dr. Alison Cook** has put it this way,

**“Gaslighting is a form of manipulation in which your reality or experience is systematically and intentionally invalidated. It’s when someone uses lies and deception in order to manipulate you. Someone who gaslights constantly questions your word or your perception of reality.”**

People who gaslight call into question our integrity. They manipulate what we may have said to gain power over us. As noted in the definition, they will lie and question what we think or say. So, let’s dive into **Proverbs** and see what it says about this type of person and how we are to respond to them. I have been very interested in doing something on this cultural phenomenon so I have researched the topic to try to figure out what passages to focus on and what we should know about this type of individual.

Let me begin by stating the obvious: Gaslighters mislead us. They want to make sure that what they say and think is what we accept and believe, even when reality and the facts say they are wrong.

**Merriam-Webster Dictionary named “gaslighting” the 2022 word of the year.** There was a 1,740% increase in lookups online for the word “gaslighting”, so it is a topic of interest in our culture and a main problem as well.

The Bible itself does not use the word, but it does talk about people who do the things that we have just mentioned, and Proverbs does address this type of situation, I believe.

Sadly, even in churches, people do this. They cause division and problems and those times when it happens cannot be ignored or allowed to continue.

So, regarding gaslighters, Let’s see what we can find out from Proverbs:

**1) Gaslighters are liars and deceivers.** Note **Pro. 6:16-19**. These are things that God hates. It says that there are six things God hates but seven are an abomination to Him. There are seven sins mentioned in this section.

Let me try to explain **vs. 16** because it may not seem to make a lot of sense. Solomon is not off on his math here. **It is thought that the purpose of this kind of numerical pattern (x plus 1) is not to give a complete list but to stress the final item, as the culmination or product of what was previously noted (BKC)**.

**J. Vernon McGee** says that the word seven here does not indicate perfection but completeness, meaning that God has a complete hatred of the things noted in these verses, and that they all are works of the flesh.

There is a progression of things written here, that there is more is to be said about this topic. Note even the change from **“hate” to “abomination”**.

In **vs. 17** note the word **“lying.” It describes someone who deceives, who will betray someone, who will tell a lie. They are frauds.** The truth does not matter to them. They are out to get you. And they do not care if your character is ruined, or that you suffer hurt from it.

**Pro. 26:28** tells us that a liar literally hates those they are talking about or to. Note the word **“victims”** in **vs. 28**. **It describes someone who is** **“distressed, crushed, oppressed.”** Gaslighters try to make you feel that you are wrong and confused, etc. There is no love or care. And here is a facet: liars know they are lying. They consciously do these things.

As **Jim Newheiser** writes in **“Opening Up Proverbs, “Liars selfishly manipulate words to help themselves and harm others.”**

Sadly, some of us have experienced this. Family, friends, even church people, gaslight at times. And they don’t care about the human carnage left in their wake of destructive words. Destroying others does not matter to them.

**2) Gaslighters do not think objectively.** They have possibly even deceived themselves into thinking that what they are doing is somehow okay. They are so determined to manipulate and make us wonder about the reality and truth of things, that they may come to believe that they are right. But do not think for a moment that they do not know what they are doing. They most certainly do.

Look with me at **Pro. 18:2**. Here we read that a fool, which a gaslighter acts like, takes no pleasure in understanding. They are close-minded to any other thought or opinion and refuse to consider any other facts but the ones they have in their mind. They have no interest in understanding or getting to the truth. **The word here for “no” is an absolute negation meaning they have absolutely no interest beyond what they think**.

No matter what you say they are not willing to listen. The idea of the word **“pleasure”** in **vs. 2** means **“to be mindful of, attentive to, delight in.”** So, the word “pleasure” says it well. They don’t care what we think, and they are not interested in hearing the other person out.

Don’t confuse them with the facts is a mantra of gaslighters. They do not want to, as **vs. 2** says, have any **“understanding,” any knowledge of reality or insight into truth and intelligence**. They have created their own reality in their minds, and that is sad. You cannot reason with them.

All they want to do is share their own views, or as **vs. 2** puts it, **“expressing his opinion.”** Nothing else matters to these types of people. He reveals what he is really about. **What comes out of a gaslighter’s mouth is what is in his heart, in his inner being, his mind, affection, will, conscience, thoughts. That is the idea behind the word “opinion.”** The will and purpose of a gaslighter is seen in their expressing themselves and only wanting to be heard.

They want to **“declare” and “display” or “reveal”** their opinions. The word **“expressing”** shows us that. Nothing matters but what a gaslighter thinks and unless they are open to seeing facts and truth, they do not look at things objectively. Their thinking is skewed, and they will not believe anything that counters that.

**3) Gaslighters slander others.** This is a by-product of lying, of trying to manipulate you. They will drag you through the mud because they want things their way and they want you to look bad and look ignorant. Look with me at **Pro. 10:18**.

A fool, who is noted here, as the **Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia** puts it, is

**“...not one who does not think or reason, but who reasons selfishly and wrongly. In the OT the fool is the person who rejects the fear of the Lord, and thinks and acts independently as if he could ignore God’s rule and blaspheme His name and mock at sin, all with impunity (**[**Ps 14:1**](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ps14.1)**;** [**74:18**](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ps74.18)**,** [**22**](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ps74.22)**;** [**Prov 14:8–9**](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Pr14.8-9)**; etc.). In other passages the term has the more ordinary meaning, denoting one who is rash, loud-mouthed, or unreasonable.”**

It is not about being stupid. That is not what we mean. A fool is one who is self-centered and does not consider what God says about anything. They are unkind and uninterested in spiritual things. They also, as **William Mounce states, “display a defective moral character...”** Gaslighters are that way. They, as **Pro. 10:18** notes, “slander” others.

The word **“slander”** is a nasty word. The Hebrew word used here has the idea of **“whispering”,** where we talk to others about someone and attack their character. It means **“to defame, give an evil report.”**

We may think that since something is true, we have the okay to spread the word about a person. Not if the goal is to destroy someone. Slandering is an attempt to ruin another person. Gaslighters are on the prowl to ruin lives. By the definition alone we see that. They will slander you to others and because they are questioning your motives, your morals, your beliefs, they have no problem doing this. Slander is malicious, and the goal: ruin others. This is a mark of a gaslighter.

So now, how do we respond to these types of people. Let me share some thoughts on what we should do, specifically speaking from **Proverbs**, about these people.

**1) Stay away from them.** We may be thinking “I can’t, they are family.” We do not have to be abused or stay in an abusive relationship. And that is what gaslighting is. It is abusive. But I would say also that if we hang around people, even friends, who are prone to do this, maybe not to us, but speak this way of others, we need to stay away from them.

Look with me if you will at **Pro. 14:7**. Solomon tells us to **“Leave the presence of a fool.”** And the reason is seen in this verse, **“for there (in the presence of a fool), we do not meet or get words of knowledge.”**

The word **“leave”** is a command, an exhortation, for us to do something. We are to get away and limit our interaction with this type of person. If you work with them, talk to someone in charge or start praying for them to change or for a new job because no one needs to be dealing with this every day.

**Point:** Stay away from this person. Set boundaries. Do not allow them the time to do their dirty work. As **Pro. 14:7** says, being around these types of people does not increase knowledge about life and truth. We need to spiritually protect ourselves. When they start into gaslighting, walk away.

**2) Surround ourselves with people of wisdom and grace. Pro. 13:20** tells us that whoever **walks with the wise (people with Godly wisdom) become wise**, but to be around fools we pay a price. Choose our friends and influencers wisely. These are the people we want to interact with, which is the idea behind the word **“walks” in vs. 20**.

We need interaction with people who are not negative or gaslighters. People who are wise live life by the Book, by God’s Word. Those are the people we want in our lives.

**Point:** Having said that, it does not mean we never are around people without Christ. Gaslighters need Christ, but that does not mean we have to be in their line of fire. God can use others to reach out to them and since they are spiritually blind, we pray for them and if the chance does occur to share the Gospel, we do so. But we cannot allow them to be the ones who pour into our lives. They will wear us out, get us doubting ourselves and truth.

**Point:** Choose wisely my friends. And do not feel guilty that we have decided to be around people who are not tearing you down. This verse reminds us of the importance of who we choose to influence us. Nothing good comes out of being around gaslighters (fools), because in fact, we **“suffer harm”** this verse says. We can be hurt spiritually and emotionally.

**3) Confront them.** This is not easy to do, and I am not saying that you should do this alone. We realize that they may not change their attitudes, but they are faced with the fact that someone is not going to allow themselves to be on the end of their gaslighting.

They don’t expect this because they think they can manipulate, control and gain power over us only to find out such is not the case. Does **Proverbs** tell us anything about confronting foolish people or those who are unkind?

It does and it might be one of those passages that seems hard to understand at first because it looks like a contradiction, but it is not. Please turn to **Pro. 26:4-5**. Let’s start with **vs. 4**. I think a good explanation of this verse if sound in Jesus’ confrontation with the religious leaders in the temple in **Mt. 22:23-33**.

The Sadducees, who did not believe in a resurrection of the dead, still tried to get Jesus to respond to a hypothetical discussion regarding the resurrection. The Sadducees asked the Lord if a woman who ends up being a widow seven times, which one will she married be to in the afterlife. If Jesus would have answered their question, he would have been answering a fool’s folly. Would it have been her favorite, the first husband, the last one. Jesus shows us how not to get caught up in this stuff.

Instead, Jesus confronted them in **Mt. 22:29-33**. He corrected their ridiculous thinking and even though He knew they would not listen it did not stop Him from stating the truth.

Now, back to **Pro. 26:4-5**. **Vs. 4** reminds us not to be pulled down to the level of the gaslighter, the fool. Do not get into meaningless conversations and arguments, because that just puts us on their level. The gaslighter, when they speak, is usually unprofitable.

**Vs. 4** shows us that a fool’s questions and thoughts are based on wrong reasoning. We have shown that to be part of a gaslighter’s mentality. When we get caught up in conversations dictated by these types of people, we get frustrated and pulled down to their level. A point to note is that if we do respond at their level, they are more emboldened to think they are right about things.

That leads to **vs. 5** which seems to state the exact opposite of **vs. 4** but when we see the context, we understand what the writer is telling us. **Vs. 5** tells us that we should confront the fool, answer them, respond to them, but not at their level. The end of the verse tells us why we need to say something to, for instance, a gaslighter.

**Point:** We need to confront them because in their own eyes, if left unchallenged, they will see themselves as wise. **Vs. 5** is telling us that we are to speak the truth, show the wrong thinking of the fool, and leave it at that. But there is a point of confrontation.

The **BKC** gives a thought worth noting. According to the **Jewish Talmud**,

**“verse** [**4**](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Pr26.4) **pertains to foolish comments that can be ignored and verse** [**5**](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Pr26.5) **refers to erroneous ideas that must be corrected.”**

**Point:** Keep in mind that we do not want to get in an argument. State the facts and walk away because the gaslighter wants to control and when we do not go down the road of worthless arguments, but confront with the truth, just leave it there. But at times they need to be confronted to show the foolishness of their own thinking.

**Point:** We must pray for wisdom from God on whether to confront or not. In some situations, just staying away is what is needed. Every circumstance when dealing with these types of people must be prayed about and wise counsel sought and again, never confront them alone.

**4) Stay true to your Biblical values.** Do not allow a gaslighter to get us off-track. Stay true to what we know God wants in our lives and what He wants from us.

Let’s finish up with **Pro. 11:3**. Gaslighters will at times try to get us to question our values, our Biblical worldview, the things that guide us. Make the decision that no matter what, our integrity matters.

There are three key words in this verse, and they all go together. **First is “integrity.”** We looked at this word last week. The word describes us, as the **Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia** puts it as,

**“The state or quality of being ethically sound, morally well-adjusted, from Heb. *tom, tumma*, “completeness, integrity.”**

Integrity, for example, is when someone says something about us, they gossip or slander us, what they say, when checked out, proves to not be true.

The **second word** in this verse worth noting is **“upright.”** This is the person who does what is right and thus has integrity. They go together. The person who is upright does what is pleasing to God. We follow what the Lord wants for us. This word was used to describe Job in **Job 1:1**.

The **third** **word** to see in this verse is **“guides.”** Our integrity, not what others say or think, is what directs and leads our life. This sounds simple but we get attacked from so many different directions sometimes. We must stay grounded and we will be able to handle the gaslighters.

Remember that this is a choice we make, to stand by our values even when under attack.