Digging Deeper: The Greater Meaning of Proverbs 20:5

Thursday, October 29, 2026

> *“The thoughts of a man’s heart are like deep waters, but the discerning man draws them out.” (Proverbs 20:5)*

Solomon pictures a deep well. The water is there, but you can’t scoop it up with your hand; you have to let down a bucket and pull it up. The main point is that what a person truly thinks and wants usually lies below the surface, and it takes patience and skill to bring it up. As the day’s text explains, that is exactly what a couple needs during courtship: before getting too emotionally involved, they need to talk openly, ask good questions, and really listen to learn what the other person is like deep inside.

1 “Thoughts”: What a Person Plans and Intends (עֵצָה, ‘e·tsah′)

The Hebrew word translated “thoughts” is עֵצָה (‘e·tsah′). The NWT footnote says it can also be rendered “intentions,” and literally it means “counsel.” It is the word for a plan or purpose, the kind of thinking a person uses to decide what to do with their life.

So this verse is not talking about passing ideas or what someone had for lunch. It’s about a person’s goals, values, and the reasons behind their choices. That’s why the day’s text says to discuss “important matters, such as the other person’s goals.” Those are the deep waters worth reaching.

- The most important things about a person are often the things they don’t say right away.

2 “Deep Waters”: Worth the Effort to Reach (עָמֹק, ‘a·moq′)

The word for “deep” is עָמֹק (‘a·moq′), meaning deep or hard to get to. Proverbs uses the same picture elsewhere: “The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters.” (Proverbs 18:4) Some people are quiet by nature, and others may hold back what they feel until they trust you.

Deep water isn’t a bad thing. It often means a person has thought things through. But it also means you won’t learn who someone really is from a few fun dates. The day’s text suggests watching how the person acts “in different circumstances and with different people,” such as with family, with friends, and in the ministry, because that shows what’s underneath.

- Getting to know someone well takes time, and rushing it can leave the most important things unseen.

3 “Draws Them Out”: Patiently Pulling Up the Bucket (דָּלָה *da·lah′*)

The verb “draws out” is דָּלָה (*da·lah′*), the word for drawing water from a well. It’s used when Reuel’s daughters said of Moses: “A certain Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds, and he even drew water for us and watered the flock.” (Exodus 2:19) Drawing water was steady, hands-on work.

Solomon says it is “the discerning man” who does this, a person with understanding who knows how to ask the right questions and then wait for the answer. James gives the same advice: “Everyone must be quick to listen, slow to speak,

slow to anger." (James 1:19) Kind questions are the bucket, and real listening is the rope that brings the answer up.

- I can learn far more about someone by asking and listening than by doing most of the talking.

Key Spiritual Reflections

- **Reaching the Deep Waters:** When I talk with my wife, friends, or those in the congregation, do I ask about their goals and feelings, or do I mostly stay on the surface? (Proverbs 20:5)
- **Quick to Listen:** In my next conversation, can I ask one good question and then really listen without cutting in or planning my reply? (James 1:19)

- **Seeing the Whole Person:** Do I take time to see how others act in different settings before I form my opinion of them? (Proverbs 18:4)