

Proverbs 12:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour: but the way of the wicked seduceth them.

Analysis

This proverb addresses influence and moral guidance. The Hebrew is somewhat difficult, but the sense is: "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour"—the tsaddiq (צַדִּיק, righteous) provides better counsel and example than others. They guide (yater, בָּתֵּר, explore, search out, guide) neighbors toward good. Their influence elevates those around them.

"But the way of the wicked seduceth them" warns of evil's deceptive path. Derekh resha'im (דֶּרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים, the way of the wicked) tat'em (תַּאֲתֵם, causes them to wander, leads astray). The wicked's path doesn't merely lead them astray—it seduces others to follow. Evil is contagious, spreading through bad example and persuasive sin.

The proverb establishes moral influence as inevitable. We either guide others toward righteousness or seduce them toward wickedness. There's no neutral position. Jesus commanded being salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). Paul warned that "evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Hebrews 3:13 urges: "Exhort one another daily...lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Christians are called to edifying influence, building others up rather than leading them astray (Romans 14:19, 1 Thessalonians 5:11). Christ is the ultimate example—His way leads to life (John 14:6).

Historical Context

Ancient Israelite communities were tightly interconnected. Elders at the city gate provided moral and legal guidance. Righteous leaders like Moses, Joshua, and David shaped national character through their example. Conversely, wicked kings like Jeroboam, Ahab, and Manasseh led entire generations into idolatry. The proverb reflects this corporate reality—individual character impacts communal direction. Each person either guides neighbors toward God or seduces them toward sin.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. In what ways does your life guide others toward righteousness or seduce them toward sin?
2. Who are the 'neighbors' God has placed in your sphere of influence, and how can you more intentionally guide them well?
3. How does following Christ's example enable you to be a positive moral influence rather than a stumbling block?

Interlinear Text

רִבְבֵּת	מְרַבֵּת	צָדִיק	בְּדַבָּר	רָשָׁע
is more excellent	than his neighbour	The righteous	but the way	of the wicked
H8446	H7453	H6662	H1870	H7563

תַּעֲשֵׂה

seduceth

H8582

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 17:27 (Parallel theme): He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit.

1 John 2:26 (Parallel theme): These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

Proverbs 12:13 (Righteousness): The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips: but the just shall come out of trouble.

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