African Proverbs

“A wise person who knows proverbs reconciles difficulties.” (Yoruba)

“Proverbs are the daughters of experience.” (Senegal)

People in many countries use wise sayings that have been handed down from the past to sum up their values. We call them proverbs. Can you think of some from your country? Examples: “A penny saved is a penny earned;” “If you want a friend, be one.” Can you think of others?

Read the African proverbs below. Put an (x) by the sayings that describe the way in which the Fellowship of the Least Coin works. Try putting it into your own words.

Ethiopia

1. When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.
2. If you offend, ask for pardon; if you are offended, forgive.

Ivory Coast

3. Mutual affection gives each his share.
4. It takes two to make a quarrel.
5. A little leaven smooths away the whole lump.
6. Talking with one another is loving one another.
7. Seeing is different from being told.

Nigeria

8. Seeing is better than hearing.
9. Fine words do not produce food.
10. Not to know is bad; not to wish to know is worse.
12. The opportunity that God sends does not wake the one who is asleep.

Sierra Leone

13. To try and to fail is not laziness.
14. Quarrels end, but words once spoken never die.
15. To be without a friend is to be poor indeed.

Tanzania

16. Do not mend your neighbor’s fence before looking to your own.

Zululand

17. A word uttered cannot be taken back.
18. A half loaf is better than no bread.
19. A fault confessed is half redressed.

Sudan

20. A little shrub may grow into a big tree.

Proverbs usually have more than one meaning. Below are suggested meanings of the 20 African proverbs above. How do they compare with your ideas?

1. Many “least coins” can overcome hunger and poverty.
2. Reconciliation begins by saying, “I’m sorry!”
3. Two friends want to share good things equally between them.
4. Even if someone is angry, there’s no fight if you don’t get angry yourself.
5. One peaceful person helps everyone calm down.
6. We show our love to someone by listening to what they need to tell us.
7. and 8. Find out for yourself what is wrong instead of just listening to what others say about it.
9. Actions speak louder than words - share food with hungry people.
10. Don’t let the good things you enjoy make you blind and deaf to the needs of others.
11. We pray for peace in our own hearts before we pray for peace with others.
12. Praying and giving a least coin awakens our hearts to the needs of others.
13. It’s better to try and fail than not to try at all - next time you may succeed.
14. Think carefully before you criticize someone else’s behavior.
15. True riches are found in the love of family and friends all around the world, not in wealth.
16. First ask God to forgive you - before you ask enemies to forgive each other. See Matt. 7:3.
17. Think before you speak; don’t add fuel to the fire.
18. Even if you don’t have much to share, be generous anyway.
19. If you wrong someone, admit it; they will forgive you quickly.
20. Shanti Solomon’s idea of offering a prayer and a least coin to bring peace among people has spread to over 30