

Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet

Proverbs | Word to the Wise

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When I was younger (*jr. high & high school*), I would have said that Proverbs was my favorite book in the Bible. My email address was [Proverbs 18:22@hotmail](mailto:Proverbs18:22@hotmail.com).

“He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord” (Prov 18:22).

When I was a senior in high school, the most precious verse in the Bible to me was **Proverbs 3:5–6**, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart...”*

- I was learning just how trustworthy God is and just how confusing life could be.

So much of life doesn't make sense...¹

- It must have been very confusing to **Noah** when God told him to build an arc.²
- It must have been very confusing to **Abraham** when God told him to leave his family and his homeland and follow God to a new land that Abraham had never seen.³
- **Job** couldn't understand the prospering of the wicked & suffering of the righteous...
- The **disciples** didn't have a category what Jesus' talk about suffering and dying and rising three days later.

Proverbs 3:5–6 says: *don't lean on your own understanding*. Don't base all the decisions of your life only on what makes sense to you.

There are things that *seem* right to us that are foolishness in the eyes of God.⁴

In our media-saturated culture of socio-political agendas, we are surrounded by messages claiming to be the voice of wisdom regarding almost issue under the sun. They claim to be speaking the voice of wisdom regarding:

- *Gender identity & sexual preference*
- *LGBTQ+*
- *Feminism movement*
- *Abortion (a woman's right over her own body)*
- *Financial security & financial investments*
- *Health care. Welfare*
- *Gun control. National security*
- *Vaccinations*
- *Racial reconciliation. Police accountability*
- *Retirement*

¹ This is essentially the message of Ecclesiastes.

² Gen 6.

³ Gen 12.

⁴ 1 Cor 3:19.

I'm not making any statements regarding any of these things at the moment. I'm simply pointing out that we are surrounded by messages claiming to be the voice of wisdom regarding all sorts of things, yet...

Proverbs 14:12 says, “*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*”⁵

The point is: when it comes to deciphering all the messages and navigating all the decisions in life, we need God's help. Don't lean on your own understanding; instead seek **wisdom** that comes from above.⁶

That's the theme of the Book of Proverbs.⁷

Proverbs 2:6 says, “*For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.*”

While so many people plot a course for their lives based on what makes sense to them (what feels right to them), the book of Proverbs calls us to set our course using a very different compass: with a wisdom that comes from the Word of God.

Before we spend a few minutes looking at the big picture of this beautiful book, let's ask the Lord to give us His wisdom this morning.⁸

PRAY

Before looking into the book of Proverbs, it would probably be helpful for some if we started by defining what a “proverb” is. The Hebrew word for “proverb” (מִשְׁלֵל) has the idea of “comparison”. So people (like King Solomon) would make a comment about something that was really familiar to most people (e.g., agriculture, city life, animals, family, friendships, school, marriage) and then make a comparison between that thing and a deeper truth about life in general.

For example, **Proverbs 10:11** says,

- A. The mouth of the righteous
- B. is a well of life,
- B. but violence covers
- A. the mouth of the wicked.

This proverb is coming the mouth of the righteous & the mouth of the wicked (*what they say*)

⁵ See also: Isa 55:8–9.

⁶ James 3:17.

⁷ The words “wise” or “wisdom” show up well over 100 times in this book.

⁸ James 1:5.

There are two pictures in this proverb that everyone would have understood:

1. **A well:** a well was a place where people would go to get water for themselves, for their families, and for their animals. Every living thing needs water to live, and so a well was seen as a source of life.
2. **Violence:** violence is a concept that every culture understands. Instead of giving life, violence destroys life. It is any behavior that intends to hurt, damage, or kill.

So this proverb begins by comparing the words of a righteous person to a well that gives life. In other words, when you are around somebody who loves what is right, and you listen to them talk – their words fill you up: they encourage you; they motivate you; they challenge you; they comfort you.

On the other hand, when you are around somebody who doesn't care about what is right, their words often tear you down: they discourage you; they mock you/others; they stir up bitterness in your heart; they can make you resentful; they can destroy your spirit.⁹

So this proverb is like a **word picture** that was given to help you remember that the words you say are really important and really powerful; they either give life to other people, or they destroy life...

The book of Proverbs is full of this kind of short, easy-to-memorize sayings comparing common things with spiritual/moral truths.

Proverbs 1:1 tells us that (at least the majority of) these proverbs came from **King Solomon**. That fact alone ought to make us curious about what's in this book because Solomon was one of the wisest humans who ever lived.

READ 1 Kings 4:29–34

- Of the **3,000** proverbs that he wrote, somewhere around **800** of them are recorded here.¹⁰

Long after Solomon's lifetime, a group of people collected a bunch of Solomon's proverbs (as well as some proverbs from other people) and put them in the book.¹¹

Divided into Two Parts:

1. The first section (**chapters 1–9**) are talking about why wisdom is so important.

“Happy is the man who finds wisdom,
and the man who gains understanding;
For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver,
and her gain than fine gold.”

~ **Proverbs 3:13–14**

⁹ See the song “Words” by Hawk Nelson.

¹⁰ Ecclesiastes 12:9.

¹¹ Proverbs 25:1.

“Get wisdom! Get understanding!
Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.
Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you;
Love her, and she will keep you.
Wisdom is the principal thing;
Therefore get **wisdom**.
And in all your getting, get understanding.”¹²
~ **Proverbs 4:5-7**

This isn't the kind of wisdom that leaves the world standing in awe of you. It's the kind of wisdom that leaves you standing in awe of God. It's the kind of wisdom that makes you fall to your knees in worship.

I've spent quite a few hours over the past few months reading the writings of *atheists*.¹³

One of the most prominent atheists today is a British biologist named **Richard Dawkins**. Dawkins has a Doctor of Philosophy. He has written numerous best-selling books; he has received all sorts of awards for his academic work; and if you ever heard him speak, you might conclude that Dawkins' mind is a wealth of wisdom.

But the Bible says that he is a fool because “*the fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no god’*” (**Psalm 14:1**).¹⁴ Dawkins hates the idea of God and has devoted his life trying to convince people that there is no God. Dawkins is an exceptionally smart person. But he is also a fool, and he will die as a fool unless God breaks through his heart with the truth of Jesus.

True wisdom is not *ultimately* about *what* you know; it's about *who* you know.¹⁵ And that's really important to understand as you read through the book of Proverbs. The wisdom in Proverbs is not primarily about science or sociology or economics or psychology...it's primarily about knowing God.

This is where wisdom begins.

“**The fear of the Lord** is the **beginning** of wisdom...”
~ **Proverbs 9:10**

That's a really intriguing phrase... *What does it mean to fear the Lord?*

We often think of “fear” as something you are afraid of – like spiders. Or heights. Or maybe the long shadows of trees in a dark forest. In other words, we often think of fear as a bad thing – or a scary thing, but that isn't what **this Hebrew word** (יִרְאָה) means – at least not when its referring to our relationship with God.

¹² “Receive my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for **wisdom** is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her” (**Proverbs 8:10-11**).

¹³ Atheist is the fancy term describing someone who doesn't believe in God.

¹⁴ “There is no wisdom or understanding or counsel against the Lord” (**Proverbs 21:30**).

¹⁵ Newsboys, “It's All Who You Know”

Rather, this kind of fear is more like an overwhelming awe of God (of His holiness) that causes our hearts to tremble at the thought of rebelling against Him.¹⁶

It's this idea of really knowing God.

When Proverbs talks about “fearing God” (especially in the first half of the book) it's in the context of “knowing God.”

E.g., **2:5**, “Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.”¹⁷

So when Solomon writes, “The *fear* of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”; it essentially is the same thing as saying “*Knowing* the Lord is the **beginning** of wisdom.”

So it's the beginning of wisdom, and it's also the **climax** of wisdom. Notice the verse we just read:

If your heart seeks after wisdom
“**Then** you will understand *the fear of the Lord*...”¹⁸
~ *Proverbs 2:5*

From beginning to end, wisdom is about knowing God & standing in awe of God & trembling in the presence of His holiness.

2. Then the second half (*chapters 10–31*) is predominately made up of those short, one-sentence proverbs.

And (like the psalms) these proverbs cover nearly every sphere of the human experience: family, marriage, childhood, parenting, aging, friendships, morality, work ethics, financial stewardship, counseling, rich & poor, justice, discipline, war, words, pride & humility...

- They are written to married couples; singles; children; elderly...

And they are designed to help us grow in wisdom in every area of our lives.

I think maybe the best way to summarize **chapters 10–31** is to put the proverbs into three broad categories.

Proverbs was written to help us grow in wisdom in how we relate...¹⁹

1. To ourselves (*center*)
2. To others (*horizontal*)
3. To God (*vertical*)

¹⁶ Prov 16:6.

¹⁷ See also: Prov 1:7, 29; 2:5; 9:10.

¹⁸ **אִם** תִּבְיִן יִרְאַת יְהוָה וְדָעַת אֱלֹהִים תִּמְצָא:

¹⁹ Our *resources*, our *relationships*, and our *religion*.

We'll look at just one example of each.

1. **Your life** (*how you relate to your resources*)

“The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing;
But the soul of the diligent shall be made rich.”

~ *Proverbs 13:4*

This Proverb is contrasting the one who sees the value in working hard (the diligent) and the one who hates work (the lazy one).

The basic teaching here is simply that work is a good thing – which is not the way many people in our culture think about work.

For example: if you were to go shopping tomorrow and ask the person at the cash register how their day is going, there is good chance they'll say something like, “**It's a Monday.**” Have you ever heard somebody say that? What do they mean? They mean, “*It's the beginning of the work week, and therefore, it's a bad day.*”

Or, at the end of a work week, have you ever heard somebody say something like, “**Thank God, it's Friday.**” What do they mean? They mean, “*I'm so excited that I don't have to work for a couple days.*”

In our culture, the **younger generation** is *living for the weekends*, and the **older generation** is *living for retirement*. From both ends of the spectrum, there is this dream of enjoying life without working.

This Proverb says, if that's the way I view work, then my soul will always be empty, because that's not how God made me.²⁰

God made us to work!

- He put Adam in the Garden of Eden to work it (*Gen 2:15*)
- We were created in Christ Jesus for good works (*Eph 2:10*)

In other words, work is part of the original creation (when everything was very good), and it is part of the new creation (when all things are made new). **So work is a good thing!**

Another thing we notice in this Proverb is that it isn't ultimately talking about the kind of riches that goes into your pocket or into your bank account. It's talking about the kind of riches that goes into your soul.

There are some lazy people who have plenty of money (i.e., inheritance, lottery, government handouts...), but this Proverb is saying that (*as a general rule*) the soul that hates work is a soul that is almost never satisfied.

²⁰ According to some statistics, somewhere around 70% of lottery winners end up broke, and 1/3rd go on to declare bankruptcy.

On the other hand, (*as a general rule*) the one who puts their soul into the work that God gives them to do, the soul of this person will be rich regardless of how much they have in their bank.

What work has God given to you?

- School. Parenting. Pulling a 9-5.

Do it with all your heart, as unto the Lord,²¹ and you will find a satisfaction in your work that so many people in this world don't have.

So there are proverbs that relate to your life and your *resources*.
And then there are proverbs that relate to your *relationships*.

2. **Your relationships** (*how you relate to others*)

“As iron sharpens iron,²²
So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”²³
~ *Proverbs 27:17*

For all of my childhood and for most of my adult life, **I hated conflict**. I hated the idea of hurting someone's feelings. If there was any way of avoiding tension, I would choose that path every single time. If being honest was going to hurt somebody's feeling, I would either ignore it (and pretend like the problem didn't exist), or I simply wouldn't be honest in that situation.

For years, conflict *felt* like a **bad thing**, and so I treated it like a bad thing.

I knew how much Jesus longed for unity (*John 17:20–23*)²⁴, and I thought that conflict was the **opposite of unity**.

But that's not the way the Bible talks about conflict.

- Conflict doesn't *sabotage* our unity; it *sharpens* it.

The image in this Proverb of iron sharpening iron is a concept that the majority of Solomon's listeners would have quickly understood. The only way to sharpen metal is by submitting it to friction against other metal.

As a kid, I remember watching **Dad sharpening different metal objects**.

- Dad would sharpen his ax by using his benchtop grinder.
- He would sharpen his knife using a sharpening rod.
- If he did it **the wrong way** (like by beating his ax against the grinder or hitting the knife against the sharpening rod) it would destroy the blade.
- But when he did it **the right way** (carefully, patiently, precisely) that friction was the only way to keep the blades sharp.

²¹ 1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17.

²² בַּרְזֵל יְבִרְזֵל בְּבִרְזֵל יִשְׁתָּרֵץ

²³ See also: 27:6

²⁴ See also: Psalm 133:1, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”

Proverbs says that it's the same thing with our relationships.

- Your relationship with others will never be what God designed it to be if you avoid tension (conflict).
- We will never experience true unity in our marriages, friendships, or in our church if we care more about *keeping the peace* than we do about *keeping our brother*.
- This is one of the things that **the leadership of NC is pursuing** big time: honesty, transparency, vulnerability, willingness to be honest even when honesty hurts.

Unity demands honesty & humility.

- I love you enough to be honest with you (especially when it comes to sin in your life)
- And I trust you enough to humbly receive what you say when you are honest about my sin.

1. Your resources
2. Your relationships
3. **Your religion** (*how you relate to God*)

**“Do not say, ‘I will recompense evil’;
Wait for the Lord, and He will save you.”**

~ Proverbs 20:22

My boys love the superhero movies, and they especially like the **Avengers**: *Iron Man, Black Panther, Hulk...*

Q. What is an avenger?

A. The definition of an “avenger” is someone who punishes people because of some wrong that was committed.

It makes for an entertaining superhero movie, but it doesn't a good Christian.

This Proverbs says, “*Don't do that.*”

Don't be that person.

Don't spend your life making sure other people get what's coming to them.

That's God's job (**Romans 12:19**).

- That doesn't mean we can't advocate for justice
- Or call the police if we need to
- Or protect our family...

It means we don't seek revenge. That's God's job.

Our job...is to wait on the Lord, and trust that He knows what we're going through – and that He will make all things right.

That's the theme over and over throughout the Proverbs: wait on the Lord; trust in the Lord.

CLOSING

Ultimately, wisdom is about knowing Jesus.

1 Corinthians 1:30.

When this life is over, that is the only thing that is going to matter.

- Did you know Jesus as your Savior?
- Was He the King of your heart?
- Did you trust in Him for the forgiveness of your sins?
- Did you surrender your life to be used by Him?

He is our wisdom.

And when you know that...when you know that Jesus is our wisdom, you will discover that Jesus shows up everywhere in Proverbs. But I'll let you make those discoveries on your own!

PRAY