

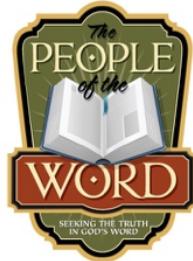
God – The Author Of Wisdom

Proverbs chapters 1-3

Unfinished. Celebrating 60 years of Eastside Christian Church.

Philippians 1:4-6, 9-10

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus...And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, SO THAT you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.



We will return to this passage at the end of our time together.

The Power of Community

“Christ distributes courage through community; he dissipates doubts through fellowship. He never deposits all knowledge in one person but distributes pieces of the jigsaw puzzle to many. When we share our discoveries...When we mix, mingle, confess, and pray, Christ speaks.”

THE LIMITS OF WISDOM

1. **Wisdom literature was common.** Much the ancient Near East wisdom resembles the Old Testament wisdom writings, though **it lacks the firm emphasis on the Lord as the origin of wisdom** (Prov 2:6, “*For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.*”). All truth (regardless of its source) is God’s truth.
2. **Wisdom does not cover all of life.** Intensely practical, it tends not to touch on the theological or historical issues so important elsewhere in the Bible such as the historical/narrative and prophetic books.
3. **Skill at wisdom does not guarantee that it will be properly used.** For example, Solomon’s great wisdom (1 Kgs 3:12; 4:29-34) helped him gain wealth and power but could not keep him from turning away from faithfulness to the Lord in his later years (1 Kgs 11:4).

WISDOM IN PROVERBS

The book of Proverbs is the primary focus of “prudential wisdom”—that is, memorable maxims people can use to help themselves make responsible choices in life.

As a generalization, one can say that Proverbs teaches “old-fashioned basic values.” A good parent does not want his or her child to grow up unhappy, disappointed, lonely, socially rejected, in trouble with the law, immoral, inept, or broke. It is neither selfish nor unrealistic for a parent to wish a child a reasonable level of success in life.

Proverbs provides a collection of concise advisory statements designed to do just that. THERE IS NO GUARANTEE, of course, that a life will always go well for a young person. What Proverbs does say is that all things being equal, there are basic attitudes and patterns of behavior that will help a person grow into responsible adulthood.

USES AND ABUSES OF PROVERBS

In Hebrew proverbs are called *meshullim* (“figures of speech,” “parables,” or “specially contrived sayings”). A proverb, therefore, is a brief, particular expression of a truth.

The briefer a statement is, the less likely it is to be totally precise and universally applicable. We know that long, highly qualified, elaborate, detailed statements of fact are not only often difficult to understand **but very difficult to remember.**

So the proverbs are phrased in a catchy way, so as to be memorable. Indeed, in Hebrew many of the proverbs have some sort of rhythm, sound repetition, or vocabulary qualities that make them particularly easy to learn.

Consider the English proverbs: **FILL IN THE BLANK WITH ME.**

- “Look before you...**leap**”
- “A stitch in time saves...**nine**” (better to fix a problem when it is small than to wait and let it become a bigger)
- “We need to strike when the iron is...**hot**”
- “The early bird catches the...**worm**”
- “A bird in the hand is worth two in the...**bush**”
- “Rome wasn’t built in a...**day**”
- “When the going gets tough, the tough get...**going**”
- “All that glitters is not...**gold**”
- “Beggars can’t be...**choosers**”
- “Every cloud has a silver...**lining**”
- “You can’t have your cake and...**eat it too**”

So it is with Hebrew proverbs. They must be understood reasonably and taken on their own terms. They do not state everything about a truth, but they point toward it. They are, taken literally, often technically inexact. **But as learnable guidelines for the shaping of selected behavior, they are unsurpassed.** Consider Proverbs 6:27-29:

Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Answer: NOPE. Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? NO! So is he who sleeps with another man’s wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished.

Taken in isolation, the last line could be easily misapplied: “What if someone accidentally touches another man’s wife—will he be punished?” **NO!**

Ask, “What’s the point?”

The point is that committing adultery is like playing with fire. God will see to it that sooner or later, in this life or the next, the adulterer will be hurt by his or her actions. To take it otherwise is to distort the Holy Spirit's inspired message. Thus a proverb should not be taken too literally or too universally if its message is to be helpful.

Another example can be found in Proverbs 16:3, a well-known and often cited proverb:

Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. (NIV)

This is the sort of proverb that is most often misinterpreted. Not realizing that proverbs tend to be inexact statements pointing to the truth in figurative ways, people often assume that this is a direct, clear-cut, always applicable promise from God—that if one dedicates his or her plans to God, those plans must succeed.

Not so fast. The proverb is not a categorical, always applicable, ironclad promise, but a more general truth; it teaches that lives committed to God and lived according to his will succeed **ACCORDING TO GOD'S DEFINITION OF SUCCESS** which may or may not be our definition of success.

SOME INTERPRETATIVE GUIDELINES

1. Proverbs Are Not Legal Guarantees from God

Proverbs state a wise way to approach certain selected practical goals but do so in terms that cannot be treated like a divine warranty of success. The particular blessings, rewards, and opportunities mentioned in Proverbs **ARE LIKELY TO FOLLOW** **if** one will choose the wise courses of action outlined. But nowhere does Proverbs teach automatic success.

2. Proverbs Must Be Read as a Collection

Each inspired proverb must be balanced with others and understood in comparison with the rest of Scripture.

Proverbs 21:22 - *One who is wise can go up against the city of the mighty and pull down the stronghold in which they trust.*

The point is that wisdom can be stronger even than military might. This is a hyperbolic statement. In style it is not unlike the modern proverb, "The pen is mightier than the sword." It is not a command. It is a symbolic, figurative portrayal of the power of wisdom. Only when one relates this proverb to the many other proverbs that praise the usefulness and effectiveness of wisdom (e.g., 1:1-6; chs. 2-3,8; 22:17-29; et al.)

3. Some Proverbs Need to Be "Translated" to Be Appreciated

A good many proverbs express their truths according to practices and institutions that no longer exist, although they were common to the Old Testament Israelites.

Proverbs 25:24, *Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.*

Most of us do not live in flat-roof houses of Bible times, where lodging on a roof was not only possible but common (cf. Josh 2:6). Therefore, the meaning is not difficult to discern if we make the necessary “translation” from that culture to ours. We could even paraphrase: “*It’s better to live in a garage than in a spacious house with a woman you never should have married.*”

SPECIFIC ADVICE FOR READING PROVERBS

1. First, some observations about structure. The preamble (1:1–7) prepares you for reading the book as a whole, setting forth its theme (v. 2, attaining wisdom), its purpose (vv. 3–5), the basic contrasts between wisdom and folly (v. 7), and its theological foundation (v. 7). At the same time verse 6 offers an outline of the book, according to its main “authors” (proverbs belonging to Solomon and the sayings of the wise).
2. Second, their form is that of poetry, Hebrew poetry which means that some things translate into English, and some do not. Their function is to offer practical instruction for the young, with the focus on how to live uprightly and well in a society that understands itself to be under God. It is important to remember that these proverbs functioned primarily in the home to reinforce the benefits of living prudently and well in everyday life; they are not religious instruction as such. Nonetheless, their goal is to mold the character of the young in ways that conform to the law, even if the law itself is not mentioned.

Their method is the same as with proverbs universally—to express important truths for practical living in ways that are memorable and thus repeatable. Take, for example, the American proverb, “A penny saved is a penny earned.” While true, its point is thrift, not that one should never spend. Or take its reverse, “A fool and his money are soon parted,” which reminds one of the need to manage their finances in a different way.

OPENING LINES – PURPOSE STATEMENT (1:1-7)

¹ *These are the proverbs of Solomon, David’s son, king of Israel.* ² *Their purpose is to teach people wisdom and discipline, to help them understand the insights of the wise.* ³ *Their purpose is to teach people to live disciplined and successful lives, to help them do what is right, just, and fair.* ⁴ *These proverbs will give insight to the simple, knowledge and discernment to the young.* ⁵ *Let the wise listen. Let those with understanding receive guidance* ⁶ *by exploring the meaning in these proverbs and parables, the words of the wise and their riddles.* ⁷ *Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.*

- The proverbs originate with Solomon, who is significantly noted as the son of David, king of Israel (v. 1);
- their purpose is given (vv. 2–5)—to live disciplined and successful lives, to help them do what is right, just, and fair.
- they are addressed to the young and “simple” (v. 4, the latter word meaning something like “gullible”—those who are easily led astray); **I WILL PUT MYSELF IN THAT CATEGORY.**

- their content requires a level of mining, contemplation, and assimilation (v. 5-6). Those are key words that we will return to.
- their basic perspective and basic contrasts are spelled out (v. 7).

1:8–33 LESSON 1: WARNING AND REBUKE

Note that this first introduction (vv. 8–9) includes both the father and mother. You will see that this lesson is a strong warning against the enticements of wicked men (v. 10) and the results if you do (vvs. 16–19).

Again, the call to heed wisdom in verse 20 and the contrast of those who refuse to listen (and obey) with those who do in verses 32–33.

2:1–22 LESSON 2: SAFEGUARD AGAINST THE WICKED

Watch for the four distinct parts of this lesson:

- (1) The son is urged to **SEEK** wisdom (vv. 1–4);
- (2) then he will “understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God” (vv. 5–6),
- (3) which in turn will protect his way (vv. 7–8) and
- (4) enter his heart to guard him (vv. 9–11).

At the British Library in London, you can find two of the three oldest Greek Bibles. You can also find the remains of some 227 manuscripts of the Greek New Testament.

Now of course, you can't just wander in and have an idle flick through an ancient Bible. You need to apply for a Reader Pass first. And even then, you can't get access to certain documents unless you have a letter of introduction, or special dispensation from someone important. Then you have to abide by certain guidelines for handling old documents: you have to make sure your hands are clean and dry, you have to lift and turn unbound items individually, use special book supports if you're using bound archives, and so on.

We are extremely careful when handling these ancient copies of Scripture physically. How careful are we when handling Scripture intellectually?

In his second letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul writes, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”

How careful are we to mine the truths of the bible, but to contemplate the implications and above all, apply them to our daily lives?

3:1–35: LESSONS 3–4: THE VALUE OF WISDOM

Lesson 3 (verses 1–10) sets forth God's promises:

- **love and faithfulness** = favor with God and people (vv. 3–4); “*My son...Let love (goodness) and faithfulness (to the truth) never leave you (loyalty); bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.*”
- **trust in the Lord** = straight paths (vv. 5–6); “*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding (you’re not smart enough); in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*”
- **humility** = good health (vv. 7–8) “*Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.*”
- **tithes and offerings** = abundant crops (vv. 9–10). “*Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.*”

Lesson 4 (verses 27-35) A series of practical instructions.

Note how similar verses 27-28 are to 1 John 3:16-18.

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, “Come back tomorrow and I’ll give it to you”—when you already have it with you.

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

A long time Eastsider Margaret Dix shared with a group of us that when Ben Merold first came to Eastside, he made this statement... *“This is the church. We are the people. Now is the time.”* I love that! It begs the question, if not now, when? Act on the promptings!!!

And how verse 34, *“He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed”* is to James 4:6, *“God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”*

KNOWLEDGE (Mine the *what*) > **DISCERNMENT** (the *who*) > **WISDOM** (the *how and when*) i.e. mine the what, discern the who, be wise with the how and when.

Knowledge is the collective information and facts acquired through education or experience.

Discernment is the quality of having good judgment based on knowledge. If knowledge is information, discernment is our choice to use or apply that information.

Wisdom is knowledge and discernment put into action. If knowledge is information and discernment is our choice to use that knowledge, wisdom is the proper execution of that knowledge.

How To Obtain Them: Listen > Obey > Ask

Jeremiah 11:1-4, *This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD:*² **“Listen to the terms of this covenant and tell them to the people of Judah and to those who live in Jerusalem.**³ *Tell them that this is*

what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Cursed is the one who does not obey the terms of this covenant—⁴ the terms I commanded your ancestors when I brought them out of Egypt, out of the iron-smelting furnace.’ I said, ‘Obey me and do everything I command you, and you will be my people, and I will be your God.

John 8:47, Anyone who belongs to God listens gladly (“with gusto”) to the words of God. But you don’t listen because you don’t belong to God.”

James 1:5, If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

Knowing what to do must become doing what we know.

Back to Paul’s prayer for the Philippian church...*that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, SO THAT you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.*