

"PROVERBS, WALK THRU THE BIBLE."

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for Sermon: Proverbs 1:1-7; 3:5-7; 4:23; 9:10; 16:3,9; 22:3

Introduction.

As we come to the book of Proverbs we have crossed the halfway point of our journey through the books of the OT.

Let's face it, Proverbs is a weird book, there is no other book in the Bible like it. Reading it you feel like a BB in a tin can, as the verses ricochet all over the place. There is no flow, no rhyme or reason. Almost no two verses are on the same topic.

Let's begin with a bit of background. King Solomon is said in Scripture to be the wisest man who ever lived. In I Kings 4 we read that when he was starting out as king God asked Solomon in a dream what he would like God to give him. Remarkably of all the things he could have asked for, he asked for wisdom and this pleased God very much.

I Kings 4:29-34 God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore, 30 so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. ... 32 *He also spoke 3,000 proverbs*, ... 34 And people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom.

Of his 3,000 proverbs the Holy Spirit directed 800 of them be written down and collected into the Bible for the sake of the church and God's people. This is God's wisdom to us.

Proverbs is set up like a conversation between two women, Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly. Proverbs show us the great contrast between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God.

Proverbs might be the most practical, down to earth book in the Bible, of all the "how-to" books you have read this is the best of all, and don't miss the fact it is

completely God-centered and God-oriented. It touches on every facet of normal, practical, daily living, especially family, finances, friendships and the world.

Proverbs 1:1-7 is a sort of table of contents and introduction for the whole collection which explains the book's purpose to impart wisdom for all of life. The simplest outline is to say there are two parts to Proverbs, chapters 1-9 which are more didactic in nature, like wisdom speeches, before getting to the actual list of proverbs starting in chapter 10.

The rest of Proverbs chapters 10 to 31 is collections of wise sayings, mostly of Solomon, but also some other collections. Prominent in this great collection are some characters that you will see over and over, the sluggard, the fool, the wicked, the simple, the wise, and the righteous.

What are proverbs?

A proverb is a short, pithy, popular saying that communicates truth, advice or an observation in an easily remembered form, often using figures of speech that put in a nutshell much truth and wisdom.

All languages and cultures have a collection of proverbs, wise sayings, short, to the point, easy to remember ways of imparting truth.

They are not commands, they are not promises, they are not hard and fast rules. They are not absolute truths, but they are true. They are not axioms like in geometry, but aphorisms that are generally true. They are true, but they are not true in every situation. The question to ask of each proverb is not "Is this true?" but instead, "How is this true?"

They give us generalizations about how life works. If you are a betting man, they give you an idea of which way to bet. In a horse race you generally bet on the horse with the best odds, but that doesn't mean that horse always wins.

Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

That is generally true. But sometimes you train up a child and he departs from the right way. And sometimes a child who has not been trained in the right way somehow manages to find it later in life.

Proverbs 10:4 Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.

That is generally true. But some people are born into great wealth and can be lazy all their life. Other people work hard all their life, but circumstances are such they have little to show for it.

Proverbs are not guarantees but guidelines for practical insight into how to live a good life and avoid a bad life. All things being equal, if you follow this advice, life will go well. They should be interpreted with common sense and good judgment.

What is wisdom and how do we get it?

Proverbs deals with philosophy. A philosopher is, by definition, a lover of wisdom. There is a fundamental difference between the philosophy that we find in the world and what we find in the wisdom books of the Bible. Other philosophies begin with questions. What is the meaning of the universe? What is life? What or who is God?

Hebrew philosophy begins with an affirmation. The fundamental affirmation of Hebrew philosophy is in Proverbs 1:7: “The fear of the Lord [Yahweh] is the beginning of knowledge.”

Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

Its basic affirmation is that God exists, and He has revealed Himself and His wisdom to us and we can know the truth. God is the storehouse of wisdom. And ultimately we can only find wisdom in God.

You might not be book smart or highly educated, but every single person here is able to be wise, to have knowledge, insight, discernment, understanding in the ways of God and of life.

Wisdom is not a product of good grades, it is from God and comes by His Word and His Spirit.

Proverbs 4:7 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.

Whatever else you get in life get wisdom, and if you are really wise you will get wisdom first so you will know what to do with whatever else you get in life. This is possible for all of us.

Desiring wisdom is the first step in getting wisdom. Fools don't seek it. In all your working, getting, striving, attaining, get wisdom.

Proverbs 4:8 Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.

The book of Proverbs is a true gold mine of wisdom:

Proverbs 3:13-14 Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding,

14 for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold.

15 She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

Proverbs 8:10-11 Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold,

11 for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.

One of the chief competitors to wisdom is money. Most people seek money more than wisdom, they make getting money and what it buys more of a priority than getting wisdom.

Solomon, the richest man in history speaking from personal experience says it is far better to have wisdom than gold and silver, than all the riches of the world. The richest and wisest man in the world failed to live up to his own words and pursued the very sins he warned about. His son to whom many of these proverbs were written, failed to heed his father's wisdom and his kingship was a disaster. Desire wisdom over everything else.

If we desire it, then the next step is to ask for it.

Pray. Be like Solomon and ask for it.

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

Colossians 1:9 We have not ceased to pray for you, that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Proverbs 2:3-6 If you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding,
4 if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures,
5 then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.
6 For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Ask God for wisdom. Ask Him again and again. Ask Him for wisdom for every situation and circumstance you are faced with. Never cease in pursuing wisdom.

Fear the Lord.

Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

What does the fear of the Lord mean? That little word fear sounds a bit strange to us in this context. Why should Christians fear the Lord? Wouldn't love be a better word? And of course we should love the Lord as He loves us.

The fear of the Lord means a reverence for the Lord, a holy awe of the Lord, a humble honoring of God, trusting Him completely. To fear the Lord is to love what He loves and hate what He hates. It is not a fear that causes us to distance ourselves from God, but a kind of fear that seeks intimacy with God, drawing near in a desire to know God and obey and enjoy Him.

In fact the fear of the Lord includes fearing to turn away from the Lord. Fearing the Lord means fearing to find hope or help in anything else but the Lord. The fear of the Lord means fearing anything that takes us away from the Lord.

Seek wisdom in God's Word.

Always begin with prayer. Ask God to open your mind and heart, ask God to speak to you through His Word.

Here is God's gift, the practical wisdom of God for daily life. This is the very wisdom of God.

It's like a mine, the riches aren't on the surface, you have to dig, and you need God's help.

Pray, read, reflect, mediate, ponder, chew, consider, study. Blessing belongs to the diligent. Effort will pay off. No pain, no gain. Read Proverbs.

The last and most important step to gaining wisdom is to love Jesus.

I Corinthians 1:22-25 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and *the wisdom of God*. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Colossians 2:3 in [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

“Jesus is the one who perfectly embodies this unique wisdom. According to the Old Testament, the Messiah would be anointed with “the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord” (Isa. 11:2). According to the New Testament, Jesus is God's gift of wisdom to sinners (1 Cor. 1:30). Solomon was a genius, but One greater than Solomon has come. (Matt. 12:42) (Raymond C. Ortlund Jr.).

Jesus is called the power of God and the wisdom of God. Wisdom became incarnate in Christ. He created all things, He sustains all things.

If you want wisdom, follow Jesus, take Him at His Word. If you want it to go well with your life, follow Jesus and what He says. Even if it doesn't make sense, even if you don't understand it right now, follow His way and it will lead you to life.

The way of wisdom is following in the way of Jesus as His disciple.

If you don't follow the wisdom of Jesus you will end up in chaos, confusion, misery, despair, depression, and eventually death.

If all we do is teach our kids how to tie their shoes and look both ways and say please and thank you and wash dishes and drive a car we have not gone far enough. The home and family are where we learn who God is, what He is like, what He has done, what our relationship to Him is to be like, how the glory of God is over all the earth and the fear of the Lord is the true beginning of all wisdom and knowledge.

Matthew 12:42 The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

The wisdom of God is available to us because Jesus paved the way for it to come into our hearts with His bloody sacrifice on the cross. The path of wisdom leads through the cross.

Let me put it as plainly and starkly as possible, there is no wisdom apart from Jesus. You cannot know the meaning of life, the universe and everything apart from Him. This means that there is no wisdom without humility, because humility is required to stop seeking wisdom in ourselves and in the world and seek it in Christ.

Proverbs points us to Christ. You are wise if you have Jesus, you are wise if you give your children Jesus.

Implications and application.

In this information age we live in we cannot keep up with the ever-expanding vast amounts of information and knowledge coming at us. We can't keep up with that pace, but we can increase in wisdom.

We all need wisdom to navigate the waters of life, the waters of growing up, the waters of home and school and work, the waters of marriage and parenting, the waters of relationships and trials and troubles and problems, the waters of fears and doubts.

Think about how especially crucial this wisdom is for those who will be leaders. How big a difference would this book make if our current leaders knew and practiced this wisdom? Wisdom about how to control the tongue, how to treat women, how to handle money, how to deal with evil and injustice, how to treat those less fortunate.

Make sure your kids and grandkids know this book, it is written for youth starting out on life. You can't start too early and it's never too late to start reading Proverbs. If you read a chapter a day you can get through it in a month. It is a wise practice that I commend to all of you. It is a great family devotion book.

Proverbs reminds us of what matters more than anything else. It gets to the root, to the core, to our souls to what matters most. It guides us in how to live Coram Deo, to live before the face of God.

From getting out of bed in the morning to building a strong foundation in our relationships with others to dealing with life and death. Proverbs reminds us that God concerns Himself not just with the big events of life but even those mundane, “invisible” moments in our lives as well.

Proverbs 4:7 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Prayer:

I pray by your Holy Spirit and by your Word you would continue to nurture the seeds of faith and repentance in our hearts, that the Spirit by your Word would give us a hunger and thirst for God’s Word and would fill us with godly wisdom, that we would be able to discern good and evil, right and wrong, and flee from the evil one and pursue righteousness and truth, that we would increase in a fear of the Lord.

Ephesians 1:16-18 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.

Colossians 1:9 We have not ceased to pray for you, that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.