

“WISDOM FOR LIVING WELL FROM PROVERBS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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

Introduction.

This morning I am embarking Lord-willing on a new sermon series, something different from what we have done the past few years. We are going to open up the book of Proverbs and search out how to live wisely in a foolish world. We won't be working through the book chapter by chapter but topic by topic.

The Book of Proverbs

This morning is an introduction. 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. Almost no two verses are on the same topic.

Proverbs steps outside of the chronological narrative history of Israel. It is timeless, it applies to all humanity at all times and addresses what it means to live wisely and well. The rest of the OT is historical, Proverbs is experiential. The other books have to do with the nation of Israel, Proverbs is concerned with the individual and his spiritual life. The other books are about the Hebrew race, Proverbs is about the human heart.

Most of Proverbs was written by King Solomon. He is said in Scripture to be the wisest man who ever lived. He wasn't born that way. In I Kings 4 we read 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, 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.

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 timeless wisdom to us.

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 home and family, finances, friendships and the world.

Proverbs 1:1-9 is a sort of table of contents and introduction for the whole collection. It 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 teaching in nature, like wisdom speeches of a father to a son.

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?

Proverbs 1:2-6 says wisdom is the combination of observation, experience, understanding, prudent conduct, discretion. It is the ability to discern between what is good and bad, what is right and wrong. It is not just knowing, but using that knowing wisely, well, skillfully. It is having discernment and practical common sense in an immature, foolish world.

Wisdom deals with the way the world “works,” and how to live well within it. The goal of wisdom is not to show others how clever we are, but to show us what it means to please God.

You might not be book smart or highly educated. Wisdom is not a product of good grades, it is from God and comes by His Word and His Spirit. Every single person here is able to be wise, to have knowledge, insight, discernment, understanding in the ways of God and of life.

How do we get wisdom? Five steps.

Desiring wisdom is the first step in getting wisdom. Fools don't seek it.

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.

Do you want to flourish like a tree planted by streams of living water?
Get wisdom.

Proverbs 19:8 says, "He who gets wisdom loves himself." In other words, do yourself a favor: Get wisdom!

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.

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 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge/wisdom (9:10).

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? 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.

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, to speak to you through His Word.

What voices shape and influence your life and thinking? Social media, TV, popular culture, peer pressure? What do you listen to? Who do you listen to? What do you want to build your life on, your house on, your marriage, your future?

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. Read the chapter that corresponds to the day of the month. Over and over. Get wisdom.

The staggering thing about Proverbs is it was written over three thousand years ago, yet it is still fresh, real, relevant and modern. The human condition hasn't changed.

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 wisdom. According to the Isaiah 11:2, 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.” 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. 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 wisdom of God is available to us. 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.

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

Implications and application.

If all we do is teach our kids how to tie their shoes, to look both ways, to say please and thank you, how to 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, and how the fear of the Lord is the true beginning of all wisdom and knowledge.

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. Reading a chapter a day is a wise practice that I commend to all of you. It is a great family devotion book.

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.

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.

Proverbs reminds us of what matters more than anything else. It gets to the root, to the core of what matters most.

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:

Holy Father, I pray by your Holy Spirit through 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. Fill us with the knowledge of your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Wisdom for the living of these days. For Jesus sake, Amen.