

Proverbs: Experts in Making Life



We are at exit 20 in Route 66, exiting into the book of Proverbs. We are in a special section of the Old Testament called wisdom literature. The wisdom literature started with Job, then Psalms, and now Proverbs. Therefore, this is our third exit in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. There is no way we can exhaustively teach an entire book in one lesson; therefore, this will be an overview of the book of Proverbs. We're trying to paint the big picture, as well as why that big picture is in the Bible. We also want to see how it points to the big picture of the whole Bible, which is our redemption in Christ and the life He wants us to live as a redeemed person. As we study Proverbs, I think it will become obvious why the book of Proverbs is in the Bible. It was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and even though it was written a long, long, time ago, it is still just as fresh today as the morning dew. Our Scripture will be Proverbs 1:1; 1:7; and 9:10.

Scripture

The book of Proverbs is written by Solomon, Son of David, and King of Israel. (1:1)

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Fools despise wisdom and instruction." (1:7)

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is insight." (9:10)

The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, King of Israel...Imagine your dad has died. He ran the family business, and as the oldest son, you have been chosen to take his place. This may have been a grocery store, co-op, auto dealership, or a Fortune 500 company. You have watched your dad run the business all your life knowing, that one day, you wanted to sit in his chair. Many times, you've sat in his office chair just to see what it would feel like; but this time it feels completely different because now, it is all on your shoulders. The family business is now yours. The family and all the employees now look to you.

Now you have some understanding of how Solomon felt when he sat upon the throne of Israel. He did not receive a family business from his father; instead, he received a kingdom, a nation of people. Solomon is now the king of a peculiar nation of people who is the possession of the Lord of the Universe. He is now sitting on the throne and is now running the nation. Solomon must have quickly realized there will be consequences to the choices he makes as king. Every choice he makes will have a consequence that will affect not only him, but it will affect a whole lot of people. That is why in his reign as king, one of the first things Solomon does is ask God for help. God asked him what he wanted to be given. Solomon could have asked God for anything at this point, yet he chose to ask for wisdom. Why would he ask for wisdom? It was because he knew there would be consequences to the choices he made for everyone in his kingdom.

The reason the book of Proverbs is in the Bible is because there are consequences to the choices you make. You may not be king, but you are a husband. As a husband, the decisions you make doesn't just affect you, it affects somebody else who is now one with you. You can never make a choice where the consequence of the choice will only be about you, it will be about her too, for the rest of your life. You may not be a king, but you are a dad, and there are consequences to your choices that affect not only your wife, but also your kids. Some choices not only affect them in the short term, they affect them forever. The book of James will say in chapter 1:5, "If any man lacks wisdom let him ask of God who gives to all men, liberally to those who ask." The prayer of Solomon as he sat on the throne

of David not only needed to be prayed by him, but it needs to be prayed by every husband, dad, mom, child, and Christian.

God answered Solomon's prayer and he became known as the wisest man who had ever lived on the planet. It wasn't long until not only his subjects were coming to ask him questions, but also foreign kings and queens were coming to sit in his presence and be amazed at his wisdom.

What is a Proverb?

1st Kings, chapter 4:32, tells us that he wrote over 3000 proverbs and 1005 songs. I can barely remember proverbs, but we have a few in our town. "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink." "A bird in the hand is worth more than two in a bush." "Look before you leap." Solomon authored over 3000! In English, a proverb is a compound word, "pro" and "verb." It means 'in place of words'. A proverb takes a grand principle, a huge truth, or huge thought, and makes it fit into a few words so a man can remember it easily. They are on his tongue, in his brain; he can carry it with him. In the Hebrew Bible, it is actually a word that means, 'to compare.' It's very close to what we read in the book of Psalms; they are poems. Except these poems, or wise sayings, were really short and compact. Therefore, when reading Proverbs 10 through 31, Solomon uses little pictures to compare thoughts. The first line is a thought and the second line is another thought intended to give meaning to the first thought. Usually, the second line is most important. The first line is giving you the thought but the second line is saying, "You can't miss this." It gives you the complete opposite, something real close, or it takes the meaning a little deeper. When those two thoughts are put together, we get it. These proverbs are all about wisdom.

Wisdom and Expertise

When I was growing up, I used to hear people say about preachers, "He is so heavenly minded, he is no earthly good." that meant he was always in his study, head in the clouds thinking about God, and honestly, he wasn't worth a lick in life. But that isn't an accurate statement of a heavenly minded person. In Hebrew thought, the more heavenly minded you were the more earthly good you were. To the Hebrew people, wisdom was not

theoretical. It was not theory that someone authored and then someone else tested to see if it was true. Wisdom was practical. Throughout the Old Testament, the word, wisdom, was used to talk about people who are good at what they do. It was used in the building of the tabernacle. God put His spirit in certain men so they would be wise at building and craftsmanship. Wisdom, put simply, is to be skilled master at what you do. It would refer to wise teacher, a wise carpenter, a wise engineer, or a wise mathematician.

There is a man in our church who practices carpentry. People have asked me if I have ever seen his work. He is skilled! He is master; he is good at what he does. He is an expert at carpentry. The Hebrew word for wisdom, *chokmah*, is best described by the English word "expertise." It means to be an expert in what you do. Many people can be really good at their trade, yet really bad in other areas of their life. There are some skilled carpenters who have multiple failed marriages. There are some skilled businessmen who have gone bankrupt several times. The book of Proverbs is ultimately telling us that God wants us to be good at life. The big picture of Proverbs is to be experts in living. How dare we be foolish enough to become the top at what you do at work, and totally fail at home, or at church? How can we be so gifted at hitting a ball, yet so bad in relationships? That is what Proverbs is about.

Proverbs doesn't contain all 3000 of Solomon's proverbs. It only contains over 500, according to the experts. The first 9 chapters of the book of Proverbs are different than chapters 10-31. There is a dramatic change in chapter 10. As a matter of fact, chapter 10:1 just says, "The proverbs of Solomon," and it starts listing these wise sayings in usually just two sentences.

My grandsons went fishing the other day and caught four fish. They had a hook; they couldn't have caught any without a hook. In Proverbs, the first 9 chapters are the introduction, and they act as the hook for the remainder of the book. Solomon set the hook in your mind. He labors to get you interested in why you need to read his proverbs. Solomon begins by telling us where to start. How do you start becoming wise at living as a husband, a wife, a son, a daughter, a teacher, a businessman, etc.? How do we

become wise as Christians? According to Proverbs 1:7, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*" He continues in Proverbs 9:10 by saying, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, knowledge of the Holy One is the beginning of insight.*" In other words, "the fear of the LORD" is the beginning of expertise for how to make a life for us; "insight" to what it means to be an expert at life.

Fear of the LORD

The phrase, "fear of the LORD," appears 18 times in the book of Proverbs. It is the key to attaining expertise in living. What is the fear of the LORD? The LORD is Yahweh, Sovereign Lord of the universe; the Ever-Present One. He is the One who has always been, and always will be. It is the fear of Him that points to the road of being an expert in life. Fear has a negative side to it that scholars and Christians don't want to face, but you can't stay away from it. You are afraid of it and shrink back from it because there is a danger associated with it. But there is a positive side of this word; it means to be in awe of, to respect. So there is a positive side where we stand in awe God, but then there is a negative side where we tend to back up a little bit. We don't want to get too close.

How does this start us down a right path of living? There are two elements involved:

1. We must fear who Yahweh is.
2. We must fear what Yahweh is ordained to be.

In the introduction of Proverbs, Solomon says He is the Creator. When He created the universe, He created it right. He didn't mess it up, He did it as an expert; He did it skillfully. When you look at what God did with nothing, He did a pretty good job!

- **Who is Yahweh?**

Now, right living starts with that truth. Yahweh, the God you serve is the Creator of the universe. He is also the Creator of life. If God is the Creator and He created life, then He is the expert on how life should be lived. The beginning of wisdom is in knowing God. We have an awe of Him as Creator

and want to run to Him, but then we are careful because He is bigger than we are; He is different from us. He is the transcendent One. He is in time, but He is also outside of time. As creator of life, God knows how life should be lived. We should have a new appreciation for Him; we should desire to listen to what He says.

My dad got a new hay baler in mid-season, and it had a kink in it. We called the man we bought it from to come and fix the baler, but he couldn't fix it. That man called the manufacturer who sent someone out, and he was able to fix the baler. The man we bought it from didn't make the baler, but thought he knew enough to fix it. But he couldn't. It took an expert to fix the baler.

This is how it is with God. This is why we fear Him, respect Him, and stand in awe of Him. We approach life thinking we are the expert. We approach life knowing He is the expert. Don't question Him; He is always right!

It is like me with my dad. I have a fear of him; I fear him for who he is. I get to help him at the farm, and we don't always see things the same way. But I have to remind myself that it is his and I'm just helping. But sometimes I want to believe I know more than he does, and so I question him. Let me tell you what I have learned...when we do it his way, it is usually right! That means if we had done it my way, it would have been wrong. Though Dad doesn't say it, I can sense that he wants to say, you know I'm right.

God is telling us "I am right! Trust me. Believe me. I authored life. I created you. I know how you should live. Trust me!" You need to have the fear that if you don't, what He says is going to come true and it's not going to work out for you. There will be consequences to the wrong choice you make, just as there is a consequence to the right choice you make. Know who He is.

- **What has Yahweh ordained?**

Know what He was ordained to do. God wants us to know the Laws of the Father. They are right. You can spend the rest of your life testing them, and when the test is over, you'll come to believe they are right. But in the

testing process, you're going to pay a price learning they're right. We have this thought that experience is the best teacher; that is wrong...experience is the second best teacher. The best teacher is to believe what the teacher has already said is right. That teacher is God. We don't always believe Him so we test Him. That is called experience, so years later we think experience is the best teacher. We believe we must go out and figure it out for ourselves. Why figure it out for yourself when the entire book of Proverbs tells you how to do it right? That does not make sense to me! Learning the hard way is called being foolish. The book of Proverbs contrasts the way of the fool, the person who does not trust or believe God, and the wise, the expert, who does believe God.

We all agree with the law of nature. The law of nature is true. There are some laws in nature that no matter how many times tested they are still true. If you go to the lake and decide to walk on the water, I promise you are going to get wet. You cannot walk on water without getting wet. It isn't possible because the law of nature says water cannot hold you up, and you will sink. Theoretically, you cannot walk on water. You can walk through water, but you will get wet every single time.

We have this a camp our youth go to that has a climbing pole that is about fifty feet tall. They put a harness on you and you jump from the pole. Imagine if one of our kids decided to jump without a harness...let me just say, it is going to hurt, every time. You might not die, but I promise it will hurt every time you jump at fifty feet because it is a law of nature. It is true!

In the same way, the church needs to believe in the Law of the Father. It is true. What He says is true; it's going to happen. You cannot defy it. The God who created the universe did not create chaos; He created cosmos and order. He does not want His children living chaotically in disorder; He wants them living in order. He said know me, the God of order; fear who I am and what I have ordained to be. If you fear what He is ordained to do, you will bring your life in line with Him. When you bring your life in line with Him, there will be a positive consequence. Disagree with Him and there will be a negative consequence.

Do it His Way

How does Proverbs fit into the big story of the Bible? The New Testament teaches that God is not only Creator, but He is Redeemer. He will step into the life of those making wrong choices, (and we made a terrible choice in the Garden of Eden) and He will bring us back to the right path. He is going to let us know Him perfectly through His Son. As we know Him perfectly through His Son and walk with Him, we become experts in living. If you are a carpenter, you are not going to put your finger under a saw when you are cutting! There will be a terrible consequence; you will lose a finger! So in order to become an expert at living, we must do it His way.

It took Solomon 9 chapters trying to hook us, which means we have a tendency to be really foolish. In fact, Solomon, the wisest man on the planet, the author of the book of Proverbs, made the most foolish decision a man can ever make. He loved another woman who was not his wife, because he had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Some people would call this man a fool. I believe he wrote Proverbs before this, not after. Knowing that he didn't do what he advised us to do and how it turned out in his life, should cause us to understand even more. Do as he said, not as he did. He brought the entire kingdom down; the house of God was burned down.

Solomon wrote his son, Rehoboam, begging him to be skillful at living, yet Rehoboam rejected his words. Because he rejected his words, ten tribes of the kingdom was taken from Rehoboam and given to Jeremiah. Please don't reject the thought that you shouldn't desire to be skilled in your job or business, you should desire to be skilled at life and living.

Stay on the Path

These first 9 chapters tell us to get on the right path, the path of wisdom and become an expert at living. Stay on the path, and do not swerve off of it. I've been told there is a dirt road in Canada that has a sign at an intersection that reads, "Be careful which rut you take--you'll be on it a long time!" Be careful what you choose. You can choose to be wise, or you can choose to be foolish. Foolish has nothing to do with your intellect; it has everything to do with your morality. To be foolish is to reject the fear

of the Lord as your guide, your premise, and as your foundation. To be wise is to accept that and make decisions based on that.

Choose the Right Gang

In the 9 chapter introduction of the book of Proverbs, Solomon is telling us to be careful of what gang we join. I know we don't have gangs in our area like those in big cities, but we still have them. You just don't hear about it as you do the big cities. In big cities, you choose a gang to be accepted. You fit it, they influence you, and you become like them. As a father, Solomon is worried about what gang his son is going to choose. Solomon knows that his son's choice of friends will determine who he will become and what choices he will make. His choice of friends will reveal who he truly is.

Do you understand that? My wife and I were fearful of who our kids friends would be when they started school. The reason is because the 'yahoo' who was in my class when I went to school had a son who was a 'yahoo' who was in my son's class. He was just like his daddy. His daddy was just like his granddaddy. I wondered if that cycle had been broken, but it hadn't. My parents encouraged me not to run with 'yahoo,' and I encouraged my son not to run with 'yahoo.' The reason is because my son might not have influenced him, but he might have influenced my son. The consequence could have been be disastrous. Then, when my son went to college, he was going to join a gang and I wrote him a letter asking him not to do it. You call them fraternities and sororities, but I call them gangs, and I tried to talk him out of joining one. I knew what an influence it would be on him. I am not saying that all gangs are bad. There are good gangs, but the wisdom of the world is that you need to join the right gang if you want to be an expert in living. You will be influenced by the gang you hang around.

Life was different 150 years ago. Back then, the number one influence in a person's life was their family. Family all lived really close, so family values didn't change. Today, we hang out with people from everywhere and at an early age. The Bible says to be careful who you hang around. Dads, be careful, because if you hang with the wrong people and you start making the choices they make, there will be consequences if you are a Christian.

Men, be careful of the woman who is willing to break the covenant she has with her husband and her God. Stay away from that woman. Women, be careful of the man willing to break the relationship with the wife of his youth. Stay away from that man. They may not be good at home and it may look right, but it is not right. It will not bring you what you think it will; it will bring you death.

In these first 9 chapters, Solomon frequently talks about the adulterous woman. He tells men to drink water from his own cistern; do not test the water over there, because in the end, it will kill him. He writes of two women standing in the street, one dressed like a prostitute, and lady wisdom dressed appropriately. Wisdom is saying *come, come, follow me; don't fall for her over there!*

Become an Expert

This is a book about marriage, a book about parenting, about finances, borrowing, and the beverages you drink. This is a book that covers just about every area of your life! It is wise saying, principles of truth that are true. Don't buck it; don't test it! My daddy taught me that if you play with fire, you are going to get burned. I played with fire twice before I got burned. My dad was right. God is right. Do life His way and become an expert in living.

Have you ever needed more money or thought more money would change your circumstances for the better? The book of Proverbs says you don't need more money; you need is more wisdom. If you had more expertise in living, it would really change your life. Become an expert at life. It starts with the fear of the Lord. Ultimately, the New Testament teaches that Jesus is our wisdom. I do not want to make wise a wrong decision as a dad, husband, or pastor because my choice will have a consequence to you and my family. Choose to be wise. Choose to be an expert at living. Know who the Creator is and know that His design is right. Don't let experience be your teacher; let God be your teacher.

