

## WISDOM FROM HEAVEN FOR LIFE ON EARTH - Practical Studies From Proverbs

---

Part one - Teaching #1827 - Sunday, September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015 - 6:00 p.m.

Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

### LEARNING TO WALK IN WISDOM BEFORE GOD

Tonight we launch into a study of the book of Proverbs - not a study of the **book** of Proverbs, verse by verse, but a study of the **subjects** covered in the book. And the book is full of practical subjects: **wisdom, foolishness, wealth and poverty, anger and temper, the value and maintaining of friendship, family, honesty, work and leisure, pride and humility, happiness and sorrow, life and death.** We're going to see what some of the wisest people to ever live had to say about these things under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

I say **some** of the wisest people because, contrary to what many people think, Proverbs had more than one author. In fact, the book tells us that, while some of the proverbs were written by Solomon himself, other portions of the book were penned by **Agur the son of Jakeh (30:1)**, while others were composed by **King Lemuel (31:1)**, while still others were the proverbs of Solomon, but penned by some of **King Hezekiah's scribes (25:1)**. So the Holy Spirit used all these people to amalgamate some of the best advice for quality living that has ever been assembled.

I want to say just a brief word about the **structure** of the book of proverbs because, as I hope you will see tonight, in the case of this book, the **structure** has a great deal to do with the **teaching**. Let me show you what I mean:

A rough outline of the entire book of Proverbs would go something like this:

Introduction - **1:1-7**

Praise to the virtue of wisdom - **1:8-9:18**

The proverbs of Solomon - **10:1-22:16**

Words of wise men - **22:17-24:34**

Hezekiah's collection of more of Solomon's proverbs - **25:1-29:27**

Words of Agur - **30:1-33**

Words of King Lemuel - **31:1-9**

The excellent wife - **31:10-31**

This outline has a lot to do with our approach to the study of Proverbs. The point I want to make here, and it's the reason we're starting our study of subjects with the subject of **wisdom**, is long before we actually come to the proverbs of Solomon, we are given nine chapters of heart preparation - a kind of **tilling of the soil** for a fruitful reception of the gems of insight to come.

So we are taught something before we actually get into the proverbs themselves:

**Proverbs 2:1-5** - "My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, [2] **making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding**; [3] **yes, 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.**"

The benefits of the Proverbs must be truly hungered after. You have to bend your back and stretch your muscles for truth just as much as you would dig up your backyard to find the gold or oil underneath. The benefit of these proverbs won't come up and slap you in the face. You actually have to **"call out"** and **"incline your heart"** for what this book has to offer.

Biblical truth won't enter your life the way the television program enters it. You will receive nothing from the Word by being passive. And that's why, before a single proverb comes sparkling into our ears, we are given nine chapters begging us to get down on our knees and start digging. That's why people don't receive. They **wish**. They **admire**. But they don't **dig**.

Tonight we will take a quick tour of the first, and perhaps the primary subject study from the book of Proverbs. The subject is **wisdom**.

#### 1) EXACTLY WHAT IS WISDOM?

If it is so valuable, how is it defined? After all, if we have the wrong definition of wisdom, we're sure to go wrong. And I'll tell you the greatest example of this error that has ever been made. We're all still reaping the consequences of one person who thought she made a decision in the pursuit of wisdom:

**Genesis 3:4-6** - "But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. [5] For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." [6] So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate."

Behold the consequences of **not knowing** the nature of true wisdom. Eve ate the fruit because she was the first person, though not anywhere near the last, to think that there would be some **thing**, some **course of action**, some **elusive prize** that would put her life on a higher level. Millions of people repeat Eve's blunder each day. They try to build a sound life while ignoring God's will. There's something they are trying desperately to do with their lives. They have a goal that doesn't have God's will in it. And they think it will make their lives tick. **But nothing is wise that doesn't have God at its center.**

**Proverbs 9:10** - "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight."

Nothing is more important than **beginning** right. Like getting the first button in the wrong hole and then being wrong all the way down. The "**fear of the Lord**" is the **beginning** point for a wise life. If you can't be sure of everything, and who of us can, than start properly at the beginning. Bring God into the very first part of every confusing issue. Because it's absolutely certain that if you don't **begin** right, you will never **end** right.

Make this practical and doable in your life. Give God the first part of your income. Give God the first part of your day. Give God the first day of each week. This will help you put Him first in the rest of your decisions.

Let's get the right definition of wisdom:

- a) **Wisdom, in Proverbs, is first defined as understanding or insight - Proverbs 2:2-3 - "....making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; [3] yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding...."**

Notice how the words wisdom, understanding and discernment are linked together in these verses. This is really the essence of Proverbial wisdom. It essentially has to do with sorting out **choices**. Whether you are young or old, life comes at you with a constant barrage of **options**. The business of living is never **simple** in the way it presents itself. There are simply so many "**ways that seem right to a man or woman.**"

This is where wisdom will always manifest itself. It is so much deeper than knowledge or the accumulation of factual data. That kind of knowledge is important and necessary as far as it goes. There is certainly no virtue in ignorance. But Wisdom reveals itself in the actual **choice** - the **path** - the **actual direction taken**.

Solomon knew this all through his life. You can even see it in his prayers as King of Israel - **1 Kings 3:9** - "**Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?"**

Let's face it, a King, or any leader, can have his decisions motivated by all sorts of things: there are **political pressures**, the constant tug of the **lure of popularity**, the pressure to **please the people who scream or threaten the loudest**. Anyone in leadership knows how hard it is just to aim your choices at what is **good** and **right**. And how hard it is to fear a thousand other things more than the mere **taint of evil**.

Solomon's prayer is good praying indeed. Wisdom is the ability to choose what is right.

One of the advantages of growing a little older and living through a little more of life is you finally get to act the sage and actually pass on something of what you've learned. Let me tell you what I've learned about life after 34 years of pastoring one congregation:

People are very kind and gracious. They usually say nicer things about you than you deserve. But then, very quickly, you learn something else: Between Thursday and Sunday people can go from loving you to hating you when you make a decision they don't like. If the emotions and pressures and passions of the moment rule your decisions, you don't have a prayer. You need to constantly keep your heart close enough to God to hunger after what is right more than you hunger for anything else.

One of the things that I constantly delight in is the simple fact that I know every Sunday night I can talk straight into the hearts of more young people in one setting than most people address in a month. Let me give you the best advice I know. It's the essence of the wisdom of Solomon:

If in every confusing, perplexing, emotion filled, scary, pressurized decision you ever make, you will blow away all the smoke, get down on your knees, and in the presence of God simply ask **"What is the right thing to do here? What is the thing God would have me do?"**, God will order your steps, guard your mind, protect your future, and give you peace. Never let friends or enemies keep you from doing what you know God wants you to do.

Remember, wisdom reveals itself in the actual **choices** of life. It's not how many verses you **know**, but the **choices you choose** that manifests a heart of wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to wade through all the options and passionately commit to the right.

So, how do we discern the right choice? What is the measuring stick? That question leads into the second ingredient of wisdom:

- b) **Wisdom is obedience to God's laws - Proverbs 7:1-5 - "My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you; [2] keep my commandments and live; keep my teaching as the apple of your eye; [3] bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart. [4] Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call insight your intimate friend, [5] to keep you from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words."**

Of course, the writer of Proverbs faced the same problem communicating this concept that we teachers face today. Everyone already **knows** how important obedience is. And everyone **knows** how important God's laws are too. This is the part of the sermon where people can easily start to yawn, not because they don't agree, but because they can agree without thinking.

So the writer uses his imagination so we will all be forced to use ours:

- i) **First, he links commandments with the entrance of life - "Keep my commandments and live"(7:2).** Very few of us are motivated to keep commandments out of sheer **duty**. And that's not how the writer presents them.

Here's the tricky thing about obedience to the Lord. You have to go **down** the road of obedience a way **before** you discover that it brings more deeply satisfying joy than disobedience. If you measure feelings at the beginning of the process, disobedience will usually **feel** more pleasurable than obedience.

But that's only a deception - a dreamlike like trance that soon bursts. Down the road, if persisted in, obedience will fill the heart with a much better taste than disobedience.

So, how do we coax our distorted minds a little further down the road of obedience? The writer here says we must remember that the issue is one of **life and death**. If you view God's laws as merely **restrictive** - taking all the freedom out of your choices - cramping your style - then you'll never **persist long enough** in obedience to discover how blessed it really is.

Always remember, obedience brings life.

- ii) **Obedience brings light - "Keep my commandments and live, And my teaching as the apple of your eye."**

Honestly, how many people sang Sunday School choruses about "Keep me Jesus as the apple of your eye", and wondered what in the world that was all about?

The apple of the eye is the **pupil** of the eye. It's the part that helps the eye to focus properly. It regulates the proper amount of light so you don't have to squint to see. It promotes **vision**.

This is how **obedience brings wisdom**. It gives moral sight. It brings all the issues of life into focus. It sharpens your senses. **Obedience to God's Law is to your inner self what physical exercise**

*is to your body:*

**Hebrews 5:11-14** - "About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. [12] For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, [13] for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. [14] But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."

I read those verses a long time before I actually asked the more important question. ***How can we train ourselves in the area of discerning good from evil?*** I mean, let's face it, either you *know* good and evil or you don't. How can you *train* yourself to actually be *better* at knowing things you don't know now?

To learn this important secret you have to look at the big picture of those verses. They're all about a word picture. They're about how *spiritual* exercise is like *physical* exercise. So how do you get to the point where you can actually lift more weight than you ever could at an earlier point with the very same arms? **Answer: you start by repeatedly lifting up what you can right now. And you do it over and over.** This builds the muscle. Then you add more weight. And thus the process of the growth of strength begins.

And that's exactly the writers point about the growth of discernment and holiness. And this is exactly where obedience to God's law has everything to do with the growth of discernment and wisdom. ***This is how obedience brings light.***

***You start right now.*** You begin simply by obeying what you *do* know. You do, over and over again, what you know *is* right. You shun, over and over again, what you know *is* wrong. And then, gradually, like muscle grows, you find your understanding growing - your wisdom increasing - without even dwelling on it. And you start to notice, as you root your life in quick obedience to the Word of God, you are making less costly mistakes in other areas.

Like the pupil of your eye sharpens vision and regulates light, your senses are trained to discern good and evil. You're becoming wise right before your eyes!

- iii) ***Wisdom works best when God's law is attached to your life permanently and intimately - Proverbs 7:3-5*** - "...bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart. [4] Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call insight your intimate friend, [5] to keep you from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words."

Two quick thoughts:

First, note the verbs indicating the *permanent attachment* to wisdom - "***bind***", and "***write***." It's like putting something down in indelible ink. It's marking something deeply ("***on the tablets of your heart***") in a way that nothing can remove it.

This won't happen over night. It takes constant work and diligence. That's why the power of wisdom ("***to keep you from the adulteress***") will never be realized in the casual searcher.

Second, notice the *intimacy* implied in the *relationship* to wisdom - "***You're my sister. You're my intimate friend.***" How easy it is to think of the God's Law, even though you respect it, in a *detached* manner - like a map or GPS unit that you take out occasionally when you really need it and then never give it another thought. Proverbs makes the point that a *casual use* of God's law will never carry transforming power into the life.

**Jeremiah 15:16** - "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts."

Everyone knows what you do with a book. You take it off the shelf, you study it, then you close it and put it back on the shelf. But that will never be a transforming approach to God's Law. You *eat* God's Law like you eat food. It becomes a part of who you are and what your body does like

potatoes get into your physical system.

This is what puts the power of wisdom into daily living. You're attachment to the Law of God must be **hard won** in this busy world. You must **fasten it permanently** to your life. And you must **love it like a close friend**.

So there are two "**W's**" Christians must learn to love. **Worship** and **Wisdom**. Don't just love the first. Discipline your heart to walk each day in the wisdom of God's Word.