

The Prologue to Proverbs

(Proverbs 1:1-7)

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Introduction

Every afternoon in the summer, my grandmother laid us down for a nap...

It was the lowlight of my day...

I hated sleeping especially when it was pretty outside and a game of baseball was ready to be played...

But as I have said before, it was her rule and we never considered not obeying it...

Before our naps, the ritual was the same..

She was take us the refrigerator.

Hand us a small cup and pour it full of refrigerated water and send us to nap on a pallet while she slept on the bed...

Now on some days, we would get another treat with our final cup of water...

On those occasions, Mimi would peel and slice an apple and me and my friend Chad would share it at the table before our nap..

I was never a huge apple fan, but anything to delay the nap was a good thing...

So we would eat real slow and enjoy that apple...

And most every time that Mimi handed us that cut up apple, she would say...

“An apple a day keeps the doctor away.”

It was a phrase that stuck with me....

First of all, it rhymed so it was easy to remember...

But second it was short and made me think about whether it was true or not...

Well, we all know the answer to that...

It isn't a completely 100% guarantee statement because there are people who eat apples and end up at the doctor...

But the principle of the statement is that healthy eating tends to keep us healthy....

Though that saying is not a biblical proverb, it is a good example of an everyday proverb...

Proverbs are simply short wisdom statements that express a principle or truth of life...

A penny saved is a penny earned...

Early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy wealthy and wise...

Those are human proverbs attributed to Ben Franklin who authored a number of similar statements of life..

The Bible is also a source of proverbs for life...

Though most of the Biblical proverbs are found in the book of Proverbs, there are proverbs in other books of the Bible as well....

Yet for the next few months, we are going to spend some time in the book of Proverbs...

Proverbs is not a book that is easy to preach and the main reason is that the book is very difficult to outline...

In many chapters, there seem to be little connection from one verse to the next...

For instance, verse 3 may be a proverb on friendship and verse 4 may be a proverb on financial matters..

Therefore, many pastors simply avoid the book all together or they pull on the proverbs on friendship out and preach on them and then pull all the proverbs on financial matters and preach on them...

Well, I am not smart enough to do that, so we are going to look at the book of Proverbs a chapter at a time verse by verse...

It may be helpful to get a notebook as we move through the book and make a list of your won and group the proverbs under some headings as we go...

With all that said and more background to be added, let's simply open our Bibles to Proverbs 1:1 and get started...

I have labelled Proverbs 1:1 as...

I. The Title Page of the Proverbs (1:1)

Proverbs 1:1 reads...

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:

Now, a couple things to note as we look at chapter 1...

The majority of the proverbs are from the hand of Solomon, who was the the wisest man who ever lived (other than Christ, of course)...

And the reason that Solomon was so wise is that he asked for it and God gave it to him...

Take your Bibles and turn to 1 Kings 3....

David was Israel's great king, but upon David's death, Solomon succeeded him on the throne..

Since he came to such an important role as king of Israel at a young age, Solomon needed lots of help, so he turned to the Lord...

1 Kings 3:6...

6 Then Solomon said, "You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in [b]truth and

righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have [c]reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. 7 Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. 8 Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. 9 So give Your servant [d]an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this [e]great people of Yours?"

Solomon understood the enormous task before him in leading a nation of God's people, and it overwhelmed him...

What would he do now that the kingdom was placed upon his shoulders?

So he goes to God and asks God give him an understanding heart...

A heart that could judge and discern right from wrong..

And what a great gift that would be for a king...

So God responds to his request...

Verse 10..

10 It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. 11 God said to him, "Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself [g]long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself [h]discernment to understand justice, 12 behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. 13 I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days. 14 If you walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and commandments, as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days."

Solomon's request was so insightful that God granted his request for a wise and discerning heart and he also made Solomon rich and famous...

And the Bible is clear here that no one in human history was ever as wise as Solomon...

Now, to test out his heart of wisdom and decision making, God sends a dispute his way next...

Skip down to verse 16..

16 Then two women who were harlots came to the king and stood before him. 17 The one woman said, "Oh, my lord, [i]this woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth to a child while she was in the house. 18 It happened on the third day after I gave birth, that this woman also gave birth to a child, and we were together. There was no stranger with us in the house, only the two of us in the house. 19 This woman's son died in the night, because she lay on it. 20 So she arose in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me while your maidservant slept, and laid him in her bosom, and laid her dead son in my bosom. 21 When I rose in the morning to nurse my son, behold, he was dead; but when I looked at him carefully in the morning, behold, he was not my son, whom I had borne." 22 Then the other woman said, "No! For the living one is my son, and the dead one is your son." But [j]the first woman said, "No! For the dead one is your son, and the living one is my son." Thus they spoke before the king.

So here is a dispute to test out Solomon's wisdom...

Two women claim that the same child is their son...

There were no witnesses to the event, either of them could be lying....

It is clear case of he said, she said...

So what will the wisdom of Solomon cause him to do?

Verse 23...

23 Then the king said, “[k]The one says, ‘This is my son who is living, and your son is the dead one’; and [l]the other says, ‘No! For your son is the dead one, and my son is the living one.’”
24 The king said, “Get me a sword.” So they brought a sword before the king. 25 The king said, “Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other.” 26 Then the woman whose child was the living one spoke to the king, for [m]she was deeply stirred over her son and said, “Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him.” But the other said, “He shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him!”
27 Then the king said, “Give [n]the first woman the living child, and by no means kill him. She is his mother.” 28 When all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had [o]handed down, they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to [p]administer justice.

To get to the truth, Solomon does a very wise thing...

He threatens to cut the child in half, knowing that the real mother would not stand for such a thing even if it meant her losing her son...

So, when she gives in to avoid his death, Solomon knows that she is the real mother..

According to verse 28, such wisdom led the entire nation of Israel to praise Solomon..

Now, Solomon also presents a difficulty to us as well...

Because Solomon was not the poster boy for righteous living...

Though he possessed wisdom, he did not practice it...

In fact, Solomon's wisdom came with fame and riches that led him to marry multiple women and have professional wives...

According to 1 Kings 11:3, Solomon had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines...

And these relationships were not only sinful in relation to one man for one woman, these women turned Solomon's heart away from the Lord..

So though we see a wise man, we must remember that knowing wisdom is not enough, we must practice it as well...

Therefore, Solomon's life serves as a warning to anyone who reads the book but fails to put it to practice...

The happy ending is that at the end of Solomon's life, he came back to the Lord, walked in God's wisdom and wrote the book of Ecclesiastes.

Now, let's the title page and author of the book of Proverbs and find the purpose of the book of Proverbs in verses 2-6...

II. The Purpose of the Book of Proverbs (2-6)

Verse 2-6..

2

*To know wisdom and instruction,
To discern the sayings of understanding,*

3

*To receive instruction in wise behavior,
Righteousness, justice and equity;*

4

*To give prudence to the [a]naive,
To the youth knowledge and discretion,*

5

*A wise man will hear and increase in learning,
And a man of understanding will acquire wise
counsel,*

6

*To understand a proverb and a figure,
The words of the wise and their riddles.*

The purposes of the book of Proverbs are summed up in these verses...

The primary purpose ebbing found in verse 2...

This book is designed to help the reader know wisdom...

Now, what is wisdom?

Well, wisdom is knowledge about living skillfully in the world...

But it is not knowledge alone but the practice of that knowledge as well...

Wisdom can be thought of in 4 ways...

First, wisdom is practical....

In other words, wisdom is part common sense...

The book of proverbs tells us that borrowing money puts us under the authority of the one who lends us money...

That is a common sense idea that most people understand even if they never read the Bible...

Now we may call it common sense, even common sense has its origin in the Bible...

So wisdom has practical everyday purposes...

Another aspect of wisdom is that it is intellectual...

In other words, wisdom makes us think and challenges our understanding of the world around us...

A third characteristic of wisdom is that it is moral...

Wisdom teaches us how to behave...

It lays out the boundaries where our self control is tested...

A fourth and final characteristic of wisdom is that it revelatory...

What I mean by that is this....

Wisdom gives us a behind the scenes look at how the world works...

You see God is all wise...

All wisdom about how to live well comes from Him...

Now, we aren't given all of God's wisdom...

For instance, we wonder why people die before their time..

We wonder why natural disasters and accidents occur...

We aren't able to understand the wisdom of those things and make never gain that wisdom this side of heaven, yet we know they are wise actions since God allowed them...

And so even though some wisdom is beyond our grasp, God has made so much of his wisdom available to us in his Word in even in how the universe is put together...

And that available wisdom helps us understand the world...

For instance, we are learning about the end times and where the world is headed in the book of Revelation...

And because I am gaining wisdom about the end of the world, I can now pick up a paper and understand why globalism is so popular...

I can understand why nations are joining together like never before in human history...

I can understand and even anticipate that the world will eventually move toward one form of currency...

You see the revealed wisdom of God helps me understand the world better...

Well, the book of proverbs is full of this wisdom that God has made available to help us better understand the world around us and in which we live..

So, wisdom is practical, intellectual, moral, and revelatory....

And the primary purpose of this book of proverbs is to give us that wisdom...

So according to the next part of verse 2, the book of proverbs instructs...

It teaches.

And it teaches through a collection of sayings, according to the last part of verse 2...

Saying that are often just a few lines and words...

And the purpose of that is to make them easily remembered..

Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses...Proverbs 27:6

Verse 3 then stresses the fact that proverbs lead to wise living..

Wise behavior comes from the proverbs...

And you see what wise behavior looks like...

It is righteous, which means that it is pleasing and right to the Lord...

Wise living is marked by justice, which means we live by a standard of God's law that we also call others to live by as well..

Wise living is also marked by equity which means that we live in a fair way, not showing sinful preferences to people or things...

That is what wisdom does when we acquire it and practice it...

It leads to a well rounded and balanced life that is pleasing to the Lord...

Then we find an additional purpose of the book of proverbs...

Verse 4 says that proverbs give prudence to the naive...

Now, your translation may say simple...

And this is a category of person that is going to appear often in the book of proverbs...

The naive or simple person is the person who lacks common sense...

The word for naive in Hebrew means "an open door," and this is a great description of the simple or the naive...

Their lives are an open door to anything...

If it knocks on their brain, they let it in...

This is why you see an incredible rise in deadly stunts and accidents in the world...

People will see something on TV or the internet and their mind will say, "I can do that."

The naive are people who allow just about anything into their life without careful thought...

The naive lack prudence or what is better called discernment...

Let me give you an example...

A baby or toddler will pick up a metal toy and try to stick it in the light socket...

Why will they do that?

Their minds are an open door....

If an idea comes into it, they try it...

That is a dangerous way to live...

Yet, guess what?

There are people who never grow out of this mindset...

They never gain enough wisdom to even live safely..

Their minds remain an open door even into adulthood and they usually suffer greatly because of it..

The shame is that we call these people free-spirits or courageous daredevils, but the Bible calls them fools and simple and naive...

Now the most common excuse of the simple minded is this, "Well, I didn't know any better," which is usually accompanied by a laugh...

But the reality is that most never picked up the book of proverbs...

You see the book of proverbs and the entire Bible exists to make the simple minded into wise people...

God has promised to make the foolish wise if they will simply pick up the book of Proverbs and begin to read it...

Now, a major source of foolishness and naivety is found in kids and teens....

Look at the second half of verse 4...

To give the youth knowledge and discretion...

Now, let me be clear, the book of Proverbs is not for kids and teens, but it can be great help to them...

How many kids today die foolish deaths due to peer pressure?

The book of Proverbs frequently speaks of the dangers of following your friends into sinful behavior...

Clearly, this is book for those who lack wisdom, but in case you think you have no need of the book of Proverbs, look at verse 5...

A wise man will also come to the book of proverbs...

In other words, even if you are spiritually mature, the book of proverbs is still of much benefit...

There is always more wisdom to be had...

One reason I love the Bible is because it is a bottomless well of living water...

The more I read it and study it, the more I see that there is so much to be learned from it...

The proverbs are much the same...

Many people read the proverbs as their devotion-al...

Since there are 31 proverbs, it fits neatly into a monthly reading plan....

One chapter for each day of the month...

And though you would read it through 12 times in a year, I would assure you that you would never reach the end of wisdom if you read this book for the rest of the years of your life....

So though the book of proverbs is for the simple minded and young, it is also of great benefit to the wise and mature...

Not only will the mature gain more wisdom from the book of proverbs, according to the end of verse 5, he will become a wise counselor as well...

Wisdom helps us live better but it also equips us to teach others how to live well also...

So, we have seen the title of the book of Proverbs and the purpose of the book of Proverbs, so let's end with the requirement of the book of Proverbs...

III. The Requirement of the Book of Proverbs (7)

Verse 7...

7

***The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
Fools despise wisdom and instruction.***

A person cannot fully benefit from the book of Proverbs until he has a proper fear of God...

This is not fear in the sense of being scared so much as being in awe of God and in admiration of His power and strength and might...

If you come to the book of Proverbs without a proper attitude of who God is, you will not acquire any knowledge or wisdom that lasts...

The gateway to wisdom is acknowledging the source of all wisdom and that is God Himself...

When I worked at Midway, our claim to fame was hash...

Well, every holiday, there were still lots of people that cooked their own pot of hash to sell...

So many people came to buy their hash meat from us....

One guy came in one day, and it just so happened that the old man who started Midway was working...

Well, the guy came up to Jack and asked if he would sell him some meat to cook a hash...

Well, Jack loved to do that...

He always said that if we could see the meat without having to cook it, we could make more money..

Well, just as Jack told him yeah, the guy said, "Well that's good. I am going to cook my own this year since yours is too high to buy and really has way too much butter in it."

Well, that did it...

Jack told him...

"Well, I would love to provide the meat to you, but I can't handle the disrespect, so head down to BiLo where you can double the price for it..."

Now look, that was prideful but the point is the same...

If you come to God for wisdom, you better see him as the source of all wisdom...

If you come to him and never see him as the God of wisdom, you will leave a fool...

And there is another requirement of the book of proverbs in the last part of verse 7...

We will see this many times as we study the proverbs, but in order to gain wisdom, you must be teachable...

Fools despise being taught, and we have plenty of foolish people in the world and even in the church...

People who think they have nothing else to learn will learn nothing else..

You must be humble and teachable in order to gain the wisdom of the proverbs...

Conclusion

Let me end this introduction to Proverbs with a theme of Proverbs that I will repeat often, but must state here..

Knowledge and wisdom are good things...

God encourages you to pursue them and get them..

But all the knowledge and wisdom in the world are worthless apart from Christ...

That is why the Bible in 1 Corinthians describes Jesus as the ultimate picture of God's wisdom...

And as the source of all wisdom...

All roads may lead to Rome..

But all wisdom leads to Christ...

He is both the beginning and end of wisdom...

You won't find wisdom unless you begin with him,
and you won't know wisdom unless you end with Him...

Let us pray.