

“A WORD TO THE WISE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Proverbs 1:5-9; 3:5-7; 9:10; 22:17-19

Introduction.

Let me test how wise you are. You need to respond out loud and loud enough for me to hear. Complete these proverbs for me.

If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.

The squeaky wheel gets the oil.

The early bird gets the worm.

If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Don't count your chickens before they hatch.

Don't bite the hand that feeds you.

Don't put all your eggs in one basket.

There you have it, you are wise by our cultures standards. I could go on with a hundred more and you would get them as well.

One of my favorites I learned from Gene Tinklenberg is “If you have to eat a frog, don't take too many bites.”

One we said in our house many times that our teenage boys didn't like was “Nothing good happens after midnight.”

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

What is this weird book called Proverbs?

On July 1 I challenged you and your families to read the 31 chapters of Proverbs during the 31 days of July. Some of you have been doing that, some started but have had trouble keeping going, some never even tried. Those who have been trying have some questions.

Let's face it, Proverbs is a weird book, there is no other book in the Bible like it. Reading it you feeling 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 me begin with just a bit of background to this book. 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 And 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 915 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. This conversation is a great conflict that goes on throughout the entire book as it speaks to just about every possible aspect of life.

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, and don't miss the fact that it is completely God-centered and God-oriented. All of life, even the most mundane aspects of life relate to God, the creator and giver and sustainer of life.

What are proverbs?

They are brief, catchy, easy to remember figures of speech that put in a nutshell much truth and wisdom.

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 true, but they are not true in every situation.

They are generally true, but not universally 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. They are often circumstantial and situational.

Proverbs 26:4-5 Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.
5 Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

How can both these proverbs be true when they are contradictory? Should we answer a fool or not? It depends. It takes wisdom to know when it is folly to answer a fool, and when it is necessary to point out a fool's folly.

Sometimes you are casting pearls before swine and sometimes you are saving someone from a cliff. You have to use wisdom to assess what sort of fool you are dealing with.

What is wisdom and how do we get it?

Some of you don't think you're very smart. People who say that usually are making a judgment based on how far you went in your education or how well you did. Some of you stopped after 8th grade. Many of you finished high school but didn't do that well in terms of grades. That may be a measure of being book smart or school smart, 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.

I just learned this week a millionaire by the name of Forrest Fenn in 2010 buried a 10x10 box filled with a million dollars' worth of gold coins and precious jewels somewhere in the Rookie Mountains and left a cryptic poem with clues on where to find it. One news article reports over 350,000 people have searched over the past 8 years, four people have died, in the effort.

It is sort of a mini gold rush. You know how people flocked to different parts of our country whenever gold was discovered, California, Alaska, the Yukon in Canada.

We want treasures, we are attracted to the idea of getting rich quick. Today we have casinos and lotteries, modern day gold mines.

The book of Proverbs is a gold mine of wisdom and as our July memory verse says:

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.

What's of greatest value to us? What do we desire? 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.

Pray **Psalm 119:18** Open my eyes, that I might behold wondrous things out of your Word.

Psalm 19:7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

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.

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

Jesus is called the wisdom of God.

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 whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Jesus Christ is the best wisdom of God given to us. The Gospel is the wisdom of God for sinners.

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.

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 drink from a cup and 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.

Christ is the wisdom of God. 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.

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 know 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.

Proverbs is so practical. It 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 is never too late to start reading Proverbs. If you need the help of dates on a calendar, August just happens to very conveniently have 31 days. Some might want to start over and read it again. Make sure your kids and grandkids know this book, it is written for youth starting out on life. You can't start too early.