

A Proverb a Day to Live a Godly Way Proverbs 1:1-6

My Mom was an avid reader. She always had a book she was working through. Some she had bought, some were gifts. One of the books she passed on to me was this volume titled *10,000 Answers to Questions*. Mom always believed that a Pastor could never have enough material for sermon illustrations. First published in 1937, the author, Frederic Haskins, was the director of the world's largest information bureau. Topics range from advertising to American Government (I thought about forwarding it to Washington). It covers questions on beverages and birds, children and customs, flags and forestry, geology, music, sports, religion, war, weather and many more.

The introduction begins this way: “the asking and answering of questions is a fundamental method of acquiring knowledge. The questions of children sometimes drive parents to distraction, but child minds are growing and developing while mature minds are often stationary and dormant... The printed page is the endless trail of knowledge.”

The accumulation of knowledge is endless. We are constantly seeking to know more about a vast array of topics. Visit any library, especially the Library of Congress, and you will see the extent of man's pursuit of knowledge to what might be termed in Latin – adnauseum. **With all this knowledge has it really made man any wiser? Have we grown in wisdom?** There is a fundamental difference between knowledge and wisdom. Here is how one philosophy website distinguished between the two. “Knowledge is the accumulation of facts and information. Wisdom is the synthesis of knowledge and experiences into insights that deepen one's understanding of relationships and the meaning of life. In other words, knowledge is a tool, and wisdom is the craft in which the tool is used.”

Webster's defines knowledge as the “act, fact, or state of knowing.” It defines wisdom as “the quality of being wise; power of judging rightly and following the soundest course of action, based on knowledge, experience and understanding.” In essence, it's good or sound judgment.

Solomon wrote in **Ecclesiastes 12:12** that the “**there is no end to the making of many books, studying them can go on forever and ever and become very exhausting.**” **Can I get a witness?**

All the teens agree. We are embarking on a new journey in the wisdom writings of Scripture. It is not for the sake of gathering knowledge, although we will grow in knowledge. Our goal is to attain wisdom through the book of Proverbs and how to apply it's principles to daily life.

Why are these Proverbs of wisdom different from man's wisdom?

They are God's Word to obey.

They are God's will to obey.

They are God's wisdom to obey.

Romans 11:33

Colossians 2:2-3

They are God's way to obey.

Holy, godly living

In this journey we will discover ancient wisdom for modern times, wisdom that is just as relevant today as it was when the ink was fresh. I believe that many of the problems we face in life are directly related to our failure to adhere to these principles.

Every culture has its wisdom maxims. Here is a sampling of English proverbs.

“A dose of adversity is often as needful as a dose of medicine.”

“A miss is as good as a mile.”

“A stitch in time saves nine.”

“Close, but no cigar.”

“Don't close the barn door after the horse runs away.”

“Look before you leap.”

“Don't count your chickens before they're hatched.”

Here are some Chinese proverbs.

“A book tightly shut is but a block of paper.”

“A child's life is but a piece of paper on which everyone leaves a mark.”

“A diamond with a flaw is worth more than a pebble without imperfection.”

“A gem is not polished without rubbing, nor a man perfected without trials.”
 “Be the first to the field and the last to the couch.”
 “Do not remove a fly from your friends head with a hatchet.” (My favorite.)
 “He who strikes the first blow admits he lost the argument.”
 “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

While there are many proverbs that have been passed on through various cultures that are sound advice to follow, what makes our study and this book we call Proverbs unique is that though they are common sense, they are also God’s holy word to us. They are meant to instill wisdom in a way that will compel us to godly living.

I want to lay down a challenge to you this morning before we go any further. This being the first message in a new series - the challenge is this: Proverbs contains 31 chapters. Each day I would like you to read the corresponding chapter for the day and I would like you to do it for the year. If you can, read from a different translation each month. If the month ends on the 30th, read chapters 30 and 31. On February 29 read three chapters. If you are a journaling kind of person you may want to journal a thought that grabbed you from the chapter. You may want to memorize a verse or two as well.

Remember these Proverbs are designed not just to help us increase in knowledge or even to become known as a person with wisdom from whom people flock to seek advice. I’m not advocating that you be the guy sitting on top of some mountain where people travel at great peril to seek your wisdom. Our goal is to take these proverbs and through them grow more like Christ in character. I have titled the message today **A Proverb a Day to Live a Godly Way.** *As a paleontologist digs for clues about ancient animals or an archeologist digs for clues about ancient civilizations I want our study together in this ancient book to be an opportunity to dig*

through ancient wisdom for modern times. Part of our vision as a church is to change in character and conduct through our study of the never changing Word of God.

With that as the introduction let’s turn to this Old Testament book of wisdom - **Proverbs 1:1-7.** Please stand to honor the reading of God’s Word. Today we will consider these four things:

The outline of Proverbs
 The objective of Proverbs
 The outcome of Proverbs
 Our openness to Proverbs

I. THE OUTLINE OF PROVERBS

Before we launch into the text I want you to understand how Proverbs is written. Some sections you will find lend themselves to an exegetical study. There are paragraphs that follow a theme. Those can be seen in the early portion of the book. Proverbs is a series of collected sayings or thoughts on topics that are written in one or two verses. They are axioms to live by, sound advice if you want to avoid trouble in life. This may help you as you read through it.

Defining the word “**proverb**” we find that the dictionary defines it as “**a brief, popular statement that expresses a general truth.**” For spiritual purposes I like to think of them as action steps to godly living.

Haley’s Bible Handbook describes a proverb as “**wise sayings and practical affairs of everyday living.**” It’s not just common sense application but godly character traits.

The book itself is designed primarily to teach; especially the young. They reveal results depending on which path you follow. The style of writing is intended to help the truths stick with you through life much as we say that oatmeal sticks to your ribs. By making the statements brief they are meant to change our life when the principles are applied and the

lessons learned. When Moses passed on the Laws of God to the people of Israel, he told them they were the commands of God. When Solomon wrote proverbs they were not written as commands. Instead he was saying that life experience shows that God has given commands to us that are best for us when we live by those principles each day. Human wisdom lies in keeping God's Commands.

Proverbs is written to provide practical instruction on how God wants us to live. It also provides the consequences should we choose to disobey.

First, consider the structure. The book is broken up into five parts.

1. The way of wisdom by Solomon – chapters 1-9
2. The main collection of wisdom by Solomon – chapters 10-24
3. Hezekiah's collection of Solomon's proverbs – chapters 25-29
4. The words of Agur – chapter 30
5. The words of King Lemuel – chapter 31

In addition to how the book is divided, it's also important to know the literary style of how the proverbs are stated. There are several such styles. Proverbs is written in what is called "parallelisms." In a parallelism, the author seeks to show a comparison or similarity between one thing and another. The book of Proverbs uses four different types of parallelisms. Knowing these various writing styles will help us understand Proverbs.

1. **Synonymous Parallelism** – In this style one term or phrase or line is repeated using a similar term or phrase or line.

- "New roads; new ruts." G. K. Chesterton
Proverbs 2:11

2. **Antithetical Parallelism** – This refers to contrasting points.

Jesus loves me this I know,
For the Bible tells me so,
Little ones to Him belong,

THEY ARE WEAK BUT HE IS STRONG.

"And so my fellow Americans, ask not, what your country **can do for you**. Ask what you **can do for your country**. President Kennedy

Proverbs 10:1-4

3. **Emblematic Parallelism** – In this type of proverb one line illuminates or sheds light on another line through simile or metaphor. (Webster's - A simile is a figure of speech in which one thing is likened to another. A metaphor is a figure of speech containing an implied comparison, in which a word or phrase ordinarily and primarily used of one thing is applied to another.)

Proverbs 10:26

Psalms 1:3-4

Psalms 42:1 (a deer thirsting for water is compared to the soul thirsting for God)

4. **Synthetic Parallelism** – In this style, the second line completes or compliments the thought of the first line or gives the result first. It may also describe something in the first line, or it may give a preference over what was just said. There are several combinations used in this form. Some include question-answer, proposition-conclusion, or situation-consequence.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Proverbs 6:12-15

Through various literary styles Proverbs is an owner's manual for godly living showing us what to do to avoid serious problems. That is the outline of Proverbs. Now let's consider the objective.

II. THE OBJECTIVE OF PROVERBS – v. 1-4

We note that Solomon is the primary contributor to this book. **How did he get to be so wise?**

I Kings 3:4-12

What David is to the book of Psalms, Solomon is to the book of Proverbs. Psalms is a book of devotion. Proverbs is a book of practical ethics. Solomon had a passion for knowledge and wisdom. In **I Kings**

4:32 we read that Solomon wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1,500 songs. “He became the literary prodigy of the world of his day. His intellectual attainments were the wonder of the ages. Kings came from the ends of the earth to hear him. He lectured on botany and zoology. He was a scientist, a political ruler, a businessman with vast enterprises, a poet, moralist and a preacher.” God endowed him with great knowledge, wisdom, and insight.

His objective in writing Proverbs is clearly laid out for us in these opening verses. **Verses 2 and 3** are intended to be for the student, the learner, the child. **Verse 4** is intended to be for the teacher, the parent, the authority figure over the student or child.

Notice the verbs that are used. They reveal the action we should take in pursuing after wisdom. He speaks of **attaining**, of **understanding**, of **acquiring**, of **doing**, of **giving**, and of **listening**. If you want wisdom, it’s going to take work. They suggest that striving after wisdom requires diligence and effort along with patience and practice. Implied in this pursuit is that it’s a lifelong endeavor, its quest is ongoing. It requires ambition, drive, and determination. It won’t come easily. There will be temptation to give in or give up. Just when you think you’ve gotten it, you turn the page and find out there’s another whole list of instructions. A person with wisdom acknowledges that its pursuit ends only at death.

Solomon’s desire was teach a person to be wise, to have godly character. So in this book there are such topics as wisdom, righteousness (right living), fearing God, morality, chastity, gossip, truthfulness, relationships, diligence, self-control, trusting God,

the proper use of riches,
giving consideration for the poor,
training children,
control of the tongue,
kindness toward enemies,
choosing right companions,
honesty,
idleness,
laziness,
justice,
helpfulness,
and the list goes on and on.

As I mentioned earlier, **verses 2-3** are for the student while **verse 4** is for the teacher. Notice then the objective of the book.

For attaining wisdom and discipline;
For understanding words of insight;
For acquiring a disciplined and prudent life,
Doing what is right and just and fair;
For giving prudence to the simple,
For giving knowledge and discretion to the young.

While these writings are passed on from one generation to the next it does not imply that those in the older generation have it all together. Age does not necessarily equate to wisdom. There are many adults who have lots of knowledge but whose bank account is empty when it comes to wisdom as it relates to spiritual matters or godly living. There are many intellectually gifted people who don’t have a clue about the stuff that’s written to help them cope in life. And then they wonder why their lives are shattered or empty. On the other hand there are some young people who may not have all the intellectual smarts but who, as the saying goes, have wisdom beyond their years.

Our objective is to apply these principles so as to change into godly character and conduct. Solomon wants us to go after wisdom, not only because it’s the right thing to do, but because living godly will bring us closer in our relationship with God.

The word discipline or instruction refers to admonition of some kind. It is sometimes translated as chastisement. The wise person sees the pros and cons of an issue and is willing to learn from correction. We don't like it, but it's a necessary way to teach. In **Proverbs 13:24** we read **"he that loves his son chastens him early."** The word chasten is the same in our text as discipline. When you discipline your child or grandchild, it should always be with the intent of teaching or instructing so that the child will not do that act for which they were disciplined in the first place. We should never punish, we should always discipline. Learning in this way prevents foolish actions on the part of the learner. If a learner continues to ignore such instruction, it is not ignorance; it is being defiant and rebellious. Its intent is to shape our character.

As teachers, our desire to shape character should never come through coercion or out of anger but out of love. We want to see the learner change through his or her own inner spirit where they see the need to change and then take the necessary action steps to change behavior into godly character. Our motivation to discipline is out of love, just as it is God's motive. **"Whom the Lord loves, He chastens."** (Hebrews 12:6)

It follows then as we see in the passage that the person who seeks wisdom does what is right, just and fair. This simply means right behavior. He understands the difference between right and wrong. Our society believes that truth is relative, that what's right for you may not be right for me. **Several weeks ago I mentioned the hearing with Attorney General Eric Holder in which he asked the senator questioning him to define lying. He then proceeded to say that what he said earlier was not lying because it all depends on the context of which something is said.** The wise person knows and does what is right, not just because it's right, but he does it out of love for the one who gave the commands. To him truth is not *obsolete* it is *absolute*. For the

wise person it is God's Word not man's will that determines right or wrong. Proverbs shows that.

Notice as well from **verse 4** the audience of instruction. It is for the simple and the young. Simple means unsuspecting, naïve, immature or inexperienced. We might even say there is an innocence about them. They are easily persuaded, lacking good judgment. Pinocchio comes to mind.

Solomon wants the simple to be taught how to live right and to understand the consequences of what happens when they do wrong and so they are shown what results when either obedient or disobedient.

The objective of our study of Proverbs is to uncover principles that will help us live godly lives. This wisdom is carried out through the instruction of a teacher to his students. The wise person will learn from and obey the principles being taught.

Every objective must have an outcome otherwise we're just spinning our wheels. The outcome gives us the motive to pursue a goal. In **verses 5-6** we see the outcome of Proverbs.

III. THE OUTCOME OF PROVERBS – v. 5-6

It sounds good on paper doesn't it? It's the doing that's the hard part, but here is the outcome:

"Let the wise listen and add to their learning"
"Let the discerning get guidance"

Acts 18:24-28 (Apollos with Aquila and Priscilla)

This is a good example of a person who was teachable. He was already skilled in the Scriptures but there were some additional things that he needed to know and he was willing to listen and learn from Aquila and Priscilla. Unlike the Pharisees of Jesus and Paul's day, Apollos was willing to be shown something else to help him grow. Don't be so set in your ways that you can't learn from someone else. Be humble. Admit you

don't know it all and add to your learning. That's the approach of the wise person.

Solomon is telling us not to be a know it all. There is always something that we can learn from someone else that can make us a wiser person, a person who is willing to learn, willing to get additional instruction from others, willing to put into practice something else that will help him grow closer to God. Arrogance and pride are the enemies of wisdom, they keep us from growing.

Proverbs 9:9 “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will increase in learning.”

When someone pulls you aside because they see something that is not godly character and wants to help set you on the right path, don't look at it as criticism, take it as instruction. They don't want you to go down a path that may lead to some bad consequences. Maybe they know what you're going through because they themselves did the same thing and so they want you to avoid making wrong choices because they know where those choices lead. The wise will listen and follow sound counsel or guidance.

The outcome of Proverbs is godly character in everyday life. John will say it this **“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” (I John 3:2-3)**

Let's look at our study of Proverbs as a way to become more like Christ in everyday events while we wait for His return. Proverbs is about living godly every day. We choose to be wise or fools, obedient or disobedient.

Well there is one more point I want to address before we close for the day. It's found in **verse 7**. Here we see our openness to Proverbs.

IV. OUR OPENNESS TO PROVERBS – v. 7

This verse states that the beginning of any pursuit of knowledge must begin with God. Beginning can mean head or chief. It's used of Jesus who is the head of the church and who has been called the chief cornerstone. It can also mean choicest, first or best of a group or the beginning of a series. They suggest that the very first and the very best place to start when pursuing knowledge and wisdom is with fearing God. By that we mean he shows reverence or awe for who God is. Having a proper view and respect for God leads us both to right behavior and real worship. This person is considered wise.

As Isaiah saw God in all His glory (**Isaiah 6:1ff**), he quickly humbled himself realizing he was unworthy to stand in God's presence because of sin. When the angel came and cleansed him with the live coal, he told Isaiah his guilt was taken away. A right walk will always lead to real worship and to a deeper relationship with God. Proverbs gives us guidance as to how we should live. As we come to God's Word remember that we come into the presence of God listening to the very voice of God speaking His truth through the written Word. Reading His Word should bring us to a place of humility and only in humility can we begin to know God and so become filled with wisdom as we obey how God wants us to live.

J.I. Packer in his book *Knowing God*, states “Not till we have become humble and teachable, standing in awe of God's holiness and sovereignty, acknowledging our own littleness, distrusting our own thoughts and willing to have our minds turned upside down, can divine wisdom become ours. It is to be feared that many Christians spend all their lives in too unhumbled and conceited a frame of mind ever to gain wisdom from God at all.”

Proverbs 11:2 “with humility comes wisdom.”

Packer quotes from a message delivered by the pastor of New Park Street Chapel of Southwark, England January 7, 1855 “No subject of

contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God...But while the subject humbles the mind, it also expands it.”

Paul admonishes the Colossians **“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly...with all wisdom.” (Colossians 3:16)** If you want wisdom, start in the Bible. Seek to know God and revere Him. **Joshua 1:8** is clear that when we meditate on God’s Word, and that implies obedience to it, that there will be a reward.

We find so many things in God’s Word when we approach it in reverence. We find in **Proverbs 8:13** that someone who fears God hates evil. From **Proverbs 14:27** someone who fears God finds the fountain of life. In **Proverbs 21:27** someone who fears God will have his days prolonged. **Jeremiah 32:40** says that someone who fears God is motivated to live faithfully. Proverbs will show us time and again how happy the man is who fears God and the rewards for such obedience to His principles.

John Phillips writes that **“unless the Lord is enthroned in the human heart, there can be no knowledge of His truth.”** The person who does not begin from the foundation of fearing God will always come up with the wrong conclusion about what is the right way. As the alphabet is to reading and what numbers are to math so fearing God is to gaining knowledge/wisdom.

This verse tells us that we must revere Him if we are to know Him, if we are to grow in wisdom. The natural response of such reverence is obedience. To ignore His counsel is to be the fool, one who is arrogant, despising and willfully disobeying the advice of sound counsel whether from God and His Word or from God’s people.

Packer asks this question: **“But what sort of thing is God’s gift of wisdom? What affect does it have on a person?”** His answer is compelling: **“The kind of**

wisdom that God waits to give to those who ask Him is a wisdom that will bind us to Himself, a wisdom that will find expression in a spirit of faith and a life of faithfulness.”

Wisdom, Packer states, is a means by which God restores and perfects the relationship between Himself and us, the reason He created us in the first place. Proverbs is more than just a book about right living or avoiding pitfalls that lead to moral or financial, or relational ruin, it is about living righteously before God in a way that is the only way to know Him. When that occurs He in turn gives us more wisdom.

The world longs for wisdom to guide in everyday living. It has searched the archives of ancient civilizations in pursuit. It has looked through the vast expanse of the universe for it but are left just as baffled as when they began. World religions and sayings of great gurus and philosophers have been pondered, but it provides no lasting peace. Every attempt to find wisdom falls short, it comes up empty, no closer to its goal. There is only one source from which we can confidently claim the pursuit of wisdom finds a home. It begins and ends with God and His Word.

You may well remember the commercial where a little boy was seeking after the answer to one of life’s most perplexing question. How many licks does it take to get to the center of a Tootsie Pop? He asked a cow who didn’t know but suggested asking the fox who was clever. The fox didn’t now and suggested asking the turtle because he had lived much longer. The turtle didn’t know and suggested he ask the owl because he was wiser. They had all given in to the temptation to bite the sucker. The owl got to three licks before biting to the irresistible chocolate center and emphatically announced that it took three licks. The boy remarked that he couldn’t stand a smart owl. The commercial ended with the narrator asking again **“How many licks does it take**

to get to the center of a tootsie pop? The world may never know.”

Where have you gone to seek for wisdom? Are you willing to begin a journey of seeking after wisdom? Are you willing to commit to doing what it takes to be such a person?

Owls have long been associated with wisdom. The earliest link shows the Greek goddess Athena, goddess of wisdom, holding an owl. But wisdom and knowledge don't come from animals or creatures, but from God. It was James, the brother of Jesus, who wrote that if anyone **“lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” (James 1:5)**

Those hungry and eager for wisdom begin with learning to fear God. The fool rejects such a beginning place. The fool is someone who is considered thickheaded, morally deficient and generally corrupt. He knows what right conduct is but he arrogantly rejects and flippantly refuses to follow God's principles. He makes a conscious choice to despise following the principles of God's Word. He views the things of God with contempt, belittling and ridiculing them. Rather than being humble like the wise man, the fool is filled with pride. Proverbs tells us that the person who despises God's commands will be subject to God's punishment. It is not me but God's Word itself that says if you choose to despise the path of wisdom you are a fool.

Every day we face choices of following the principles of God. **Will we be wise or will we be a fool?** Proverbs will give us sound counsel on which is the best path to take.

As you leave today take a tootsie pop with you and let it be a reminder to choose the wise path – follow and obey God.

(decision time – a search for wisdom must begin with God. Is there anyone here today who would want to start that search by beginning with personal faith in Christ as Savior?

Is there anyone who would before God admit that they have chosen a path of the fool but would want to begin today with following God, giving Him proper reverence so you can pursue wisdom? Maybe today you just want to reaffirm before God a desire to fear Him and avoid the path of the fool.)