



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

PROVERBS LESSON 1

First Day

Welcome to our study of the Book of Proverbs. I can't even begin to express how incredible I find this book. God has used so many Proverbs in my life to challenge me, convict me, encourage me, counsel me, strengthen me, and comfort me. My biggest fear in writing this study is that I won't be able to do it justice. Although I know that to be a fact, I will do my very best to lead you on this amazing journey through Proverbs. We are living in the age of information and technology, but we are certainly not living in the age of wisdom! And I, for one, want to be a wise woman. I want to be the kind of woman talked about throughout this book. There are approximately 900 verses in the 31 chapters of Proverbs. The words "wise" and "wisdom" are used over 125 times and the name, Lord (Jehovah), appears 86 times. Over the next 25 weeks, we will explore the riches of its wisdom as the Holy Spirit guides us into right living. The Book of Proverbs is about how to get and use Godly wisdom. As many have said, "It tells us not how to make a living but how to be skillful in the art of making a life." It helps us know what to do, when to do it, how to do it, and why to do it. This requires more than simply having knowledge. This is a skill, which is what the Book of Proverbs is all about. Proverbs help us to understand what to do with the knowledge we have. It helps us know how to navigate life well. The Hebrew word for proverbs comes from a root meaning "to be like" or "to represent." This is appropriate because most proverbs use comparisons to teach their truths. Jensen said, "Proverbs are like small pictures crowded together on the walls of a large gallery." In English, a proverb is a short saying of practical truth that's easy to remember, like, "look before you leap" or "haste makes waste." Proverbs are short phrases or sayings that represent a deeper truth. During Bible times, since most didn't have the written Word, these types of sayings were much easier to memorize and repeat. Proverbs

are full of parallels, comparisons, admonitions, speeches, sayings, commands, rhetorical questions, reflections on experience, personal observations, and metaphors. It's extremely important to remember that they aren't sayings that promise to be true in every situation. This is where many people get tripped up. Each is precisely true in certain situations; neither is true in every circumstance. Knowing when to use them is part of wisdom. We cannot use proverbs, as David Hubbard says, "Like subway tokens, guaranteed to open the turnstiles every time." They are guidelines, not mechanical formulas. They are procedures that we follow, not promises that we claim. The proverbs are not insisting on an absolute law; they are rather putting forward a generally true principle that depends on the right time and circumstance. If we read a proverb as if it is law or true in every situation, we will commit an error. Tremper Longman III explains Proverbs this way, "Wisdom is the skill of living. It is a practical knowledge that helps one know how to act and how to speak in different situations. Wisdom entails the ability to avoid problems, and the skill to handle them when they present themselves. Their validity depends on the right time and the right circumstance." We see this happen when two proverbs seem to contradict each other. They are both speaking truth, yet truth for different situations. We see an example of this in Proverbs 26:4-5. Again, it's not a contradiction, but both proverbs are true if understood according to their intention, and their validity depends on the right time and right circumstance. Proverbs gives us practical wisdom, giving us a window on the world. Some call it "truth in street clothes."

Proverbs is considered part of the "wisdom literature" of the Old Testament, which also includes Job and Ecclesiastes. In the Old Testament, Israel was ruled by kings and judges and was ministered to by priests, prophets, scribes, historians, singers, and "wise men," also known as philosophers. Solomon, the author of most of these Proverbs, was both a king and a philosopher. The wise men, or sages as they are also called, looked at things from different perspectives. For example, let's take the topic of righteousness. A prophet would say "it is just," a priest would say, "it is commanded," and a philosopher would say, "it is prudent." The wise men were extremely practical and they weren't simply concerned with what the Law said, but how to live out the Law in everyday life. Proverbs wastes no words, that's for sure. Proverbs is to the Old Testament what James is to the New ... A very practical guide on living out our life while here on earth. The book is addressed especially to believers, which is important to remember.

Proverbs is not trying to teach a "salvation by works" doctrine, but personal ethics in a believer's walk with God. Jensen writes, "But though the book is not intended to elaborate on the way of salvation, such key phrases as "the fear of the Lord" (1:7) tell basically how a sinner is brought into fellowship with God. The counsel of Proverbs is profitable for all people, saved and unsaved, but the unsaved cannot claim salvation by doing its good deeds" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

As previously mentioned, Solomon, David's son, is the writer of the majority of Proverbs (1:1, 10:1, 25:1). Proverbs 25:1 tells us that the "men of Hezekiah" were responsible 200 years later for collecting and editing other proverbs written by Solomon and including them, probably around 700 B.C. Some scholars believe that Isaiah and Micah had been members of that committee. Chapters 30 and 31 were written by Agur and Lemuel, but their identities are unknown. Solomon wrote Proverbs while he was middle aged. He also is the author of the Song of Solomon, most likely in his younger years, and Ecclesiastes in his Golden Years when he was discouraged by his own carnality. Solomon drew his inspiration for his Proverbs by reflecting on and observing nature and human behavior. The way that Proverbs is addressed makes it applicable to all and pertains to the interests of all people, not just princes or nobility.

Studying Proverbs is a bit challenging because we are used to studying a book of the Bible as a whole, breaking it down into chapters, then verses, etc. Context is always very important. But Proverbs is written completely different. At times you feel like you're being bombarded with advice and counsel, with no rhyme or reason to its organization. There is an amazing diversity of topics and themes, as well as duplicate sayings. They aren't put in order according to a western mindset, that's for sure. Some scholars attempt to put them into related topics and themes to study, while others simply go in order. For our study, we will simply be following the order in which they are presented in our Bible. Although they are practical and straight forward, Proverbs are anything but simple.

To whom was the Book of Proverbs written? Although there are varying opinions on this, most scholars seem to lean towards the thought that Israel's teachers were speaking to their students; young men who were being groomed for positions of leadership. Using proverbial teaching always played a role in Israel's life from the beginning. With Solomon's wisdom, talents, and skill in transmitting that wisdom to others, the Book of Proverbs

was birthed. Proverbs are brief, to the point, and easy to remember and pass on. You could write a lecture or record one of his teachings, or you could simplify it by saying, "Pride goes before a fall," which would serve the purpose more effectively (Proverbs 16:18). It's written like everyday life happens, on everyday life topics. Some scholars believe that God is speaking to us in Proverbs through an actual father advising his son. This interpretation also has merit and we would be wise to view the advice in this book the same; God Himself is our Heavenly Father and we will do well to heed His counsel and instruction.

Before we jump in, let me end with some interesting words by Bruce K. Waltke from his commentary on Proverbs. He writes, "As the course and bulk of Biblical wisdom, the Book of Proverbs remains the model of curriculum to learn how to live under God and before humankind. As a result, it beckons the church to diligent study and application. To uncommitted youth it serves as a stumbling stone, but to committed youth it is a foundation stone. But tragically, the church has practically discarded the Book of Proverbs, which was written for young people as a compass by which to steer their ship of life (1:2-6). Of its 930 ancient sayings many Christians know three—"to fear the Lord" (1:7), to "trust Him" (3:5-6), and to "train their children in the way they should go" (22:6)—and possibly something about the "virtuous wife" (31:10-31). However, to "fear the Lord" is misunderstood, "to trust Him" is a platitude divorced from the book, the promise that the child will not depart from childhood rearing raises more questions than solutions, and the poem about the virtuous wife seems out of date." Waltke goes on to explain how important it is to study and grasp the advice and counsel of Proverbs, rather than give up on them, thinking them irrelevant, ancient, or non-applicable for today. I personally cannot wait to jump right in and start digging!

As you study this Book, may you daily ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten you, teach you, and guide you into all truth. May you learn to be wise as you make decisions and as you deal with people and experience relationships. May you learn to navigate your life more diligently and deliberately, and most of all, may you learn to honor God in all that you say and do. Proverbs is inspired and written by the Holy Spirit, using Solomon and his personality to pen these words. It's pretty obvious to me that the Lord cares about every single detail of our lives. See you tomorrow!

Second Day

1. Before we begin, let's read a little bit about Solomon, the author of the Book of Proverbs. Read the following verses and write a brief character description and summary of Solomon and his life. 1 Kings 3:1-28, 4:20-34, and Ecc. 2:11. Also read Deut. 17:16-17 and 1 Chron.22:9. Add any other information or verses you find.

2. If you could ask God for anything, do you think you would have asked for wisdom? What does that tell us about Solomon?

When you read through the Proverbs, try to notice the different forms the author uses. The forms are poetry, brief parables, sharp questions, and short stories. One of the most common forms are comparisons; comparing opposite things (16:22), similar things (17:10), etc. There is much imagery used (26:27), as well as personification, which is assigning personality to an inanimate thing. (9:1) There is much "contrast" in his writings. Notice the repetition of the words "but" and "like." Irving Jensen calls 1:7 the key verse, encouraging us to "let the key verse be the controller of all your interpretations of the many proverbs of this Book of God."

The main theme of the book is "wisdom." Again, wisdom is the "skill" to manage our lives in a way that God's purposes are fulfilled in our lives. Other words used in Proverbs to help us understand the meaning of wisdom are discipline, correction, successful, understanding, knowledge, discretion, prudence, just, right, and fair. All these words add "color" to our word wisdom. Proverbs is divided up in various ways, but for the purpose of our study, we will be breaking them up into the following six segments:

- (1) The Purpose of the Proverbs: 1:1-7
- (2) The Proverbs to the Youth: 1:8-9:18
- (3) The Proverbs of Solomon: 10:1-24:34

(4) The Proverbs of Solomon, copied by Hezekiah's men: 25:1-29:27

(5) The words of Agur (30:1-33)

(6) The words of King Lemuel (31:1-31)

3. Jesus is wisdom incarnate. What does that mean? Read the following verses and write your thoughts. Colossians 2:3, 1 Cor. 1:24,30, Matthew 12:42.

In Proverbs 9, wisdom is personified as a woman. We have Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly on opposite sides of the road, calling out to us as we journey through life. If we turn down the road of folly, we turn toward the grave! But when we turn toward wisdom, Proverbs 15:24 tells us that "the path of life leads upward for the wise; they leave the grave behind!" Ray Ortlund wrote, "True wisdom is walking further with Jesus than we've ever gone before, further than we've dreamed of going. It is not risky. All we leave behind is the grave. All we leave behind is our stupidity and futility and ultimate damnation. But His path is marked by promise every step of the way. Here is His promise to every fool who chooses the way of the cross: "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.'" (Philippians 1:6)

4. Are you ready to embark on this journey? Are you committed to study this book with the intentions of applying its truth? Are you willing to allow the Holy Spirit to search every nook and cranny of your heart and conform you into the image of His Son? I hope so! Will you write out your prayer for this year's study, sharing with Him the desires of your heart?

Memory Verse of the Week: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction." Proverbs 1:7

Third Day

Review your memory verse.

1. Begin today by reading Proverbs 1:1-33. After reading it through, how would you break it up into topics or main ideas? How many times is "wise" or "wisdom" used?

2. After stating his name, verses 2-6 tell us the purpose of the book. Why did Solomon write it?

3. According to these verses, who is he writing to?

4. Define the following words:
 - A. prudence
 - B. discretion:
 - C. equity:
 - D. enigma:
 - E. riddle:

The word "instruction" includes correction and discipline. Understanding is the ability to look to the heart of an issue and discern the differences at stake in the choices being weighed. Prudence can see the reason behind things and make wise decisions. The word "simple" in verse four means "naïve" or "ignorant." It also means "to be open." A simple man keeps his options open. He is uncommitted. He easily gets into trouble (Proverbs 22:3). He may also be considered immature or uneducated. Solomon is writing to the simple, as well as the wise, for even the wise don't know everything. Matthew Henry said, "This book not only makes the foolish wise but the wise better." I think Solomon would agree with that quote. Do you consider yourself simple or wise? Either way, this book is for you! Also notice that the word "hear" in verse 5 is translated "obey" in Deuteronomy 11:27.

5. How does "obedience" play into this whole topic of gaining wisdom?

Chapters 1-9 are not, strictly speaking, proverbs. "They introduce the Proverbs proper by explaining what wisdom is, why it is so desirable and how to acquire it. They are therefore written in continuous style." (Eric Lane) These chapters are considered the "Prologue." These first nine chapters present two women, Wisdom and Folly, personified as they seek to draw people to themselves.

6. According to verse 7, where does wisdom begin? How does this verse or Proverb govern all the rest?

7. How would you define the "fear of the Lord"? Read the following Proverbs for help: 2:5; 9:10; 14:27; 23:17.

Verse 7 mentions the Lord's name for the first time. "Fear of the Lord" can be simply defined as "reverent obedience." But I found a deeper definition that I liked. Ortlund wrote, "Obviously it's the opposite of being foolish. Foolishness is the arrogance of being above instruction, too smart for it, too good for it, too busy for it. What then is the fear of the Lord? It is an openness to Him, eagerness to please Him, humility to be instructed by Him (Proverbs 15:33). The fear of the Lord is a willingness to turn from evil and change (Job 28:28). The fear of the Lord is surrender to His will (Genesis 22:12). The fear of the Lord is one way we love Him (Deut. 6:2,5). The fear of Christ is meekly fitting in with one another (Ephesians 5:21). The fear of the Lord is when we realize that we are not the measure of all things. We are being measured. That reverence toward God, perhaps surprisingly, builds our confidence and flows out as a "fountain of life" into everyone and everything we care about (Proverbs 14:26,27). It takes us to that place of maturity where no one has to follow us around with a tedious list of do's and don'ts, constantly telling us what to do. We are motivated from deep within. We know what is right, and it is what we love, because it is of God."

8. Isn't that a great definition? Let me ask you now, after reading that, do you have a healthy "fear of the Lord"? Referencing the paragraph above, in what areas do you struggle?

9. How does "fearing the Lord" make us wise?

10. From the first seven verses, can you explain the difference between being smart and being wise? Can you be one without being the other?

That's all for today. I pray that the Holy Spirit teaches us how to listen to the voice of wisdom!

Fourth Day

What's your memory verse? Meditate on what it means to fear Him

1. Read Proverbs 1:8-33 to see the contrast between wisdom and folly. Then go back and reread verses 8-19. In what three verses does the phrase "my son" appear? What is the main point of each of the three sections?

2. What contrasts do you see in verses 8-19?

3. According to verses 8-9, what is a child's role in the family? Also read Ephesians 6:1-3 and Colossians 3:20. What promise do you find?

The "Law" in verse 8 is not referring to just the Ten Commandments (Mosaic Law), but all the necessary instructions on living a wise and Godly life.

4. Something to notice is that according to verse 8-9, the parents have been instructing the child in the ways of God (Deut. 6:6-9). If you are a parent, are you teaching your children the Word of God and instructing them in His ways? Are you teaching them how to know God for themselves?

Solomon began with some instruction in verses 8-9, now he moves on to some warnings. Lady Wisdom is speaking loud and clear and we need to listen!

5. What is he warning against?
6. What kinds of things can happen if our children, or ourselves, keep bad company? Do you have any examples from your own life that support this point? What's the balance between staying away from our friends or influencing them for good? What are the boundaries?

During ancient days, the society of Israel was deeply affected by Israel's tribes and clans. They lived in groups, and although the parents had a great amount of influence, so did others. Solomon was concerned about that. Often times what we become is strongly determined in some significant measure by the company we keep. The same holds true in our day and age.

As parents, we need to be concerned, careful, and realistic. David Hubbard wrote that "Unsound friendships may be empty, may prove harmful, and may lead to disaster." This is definitely shown by Solomon's words in these verses. Bad company doesn't only affect individuals, but societies as well, as seen from this chapter. (shedding blood, etc.)

7. Take a look at your own friendships. Are any of them empty? Harmful? Leading you down a foolish path? What should you do?

8. Verse 19 is a general conclusion to this section. What seems to be the cause of the folly, according to the author? How does greed take away the life of its owners?

9. I think we should check our hearts on this one. In what ways are you "greedy for gain"? (I think almost all of us would have to honestly say this is a problem for us in some area of our life.)

Tomorrow we'll wrap up our first chapter of Proverbs. I apologize that we couldn't go as in depth as you may have liked because the introduction was a bit long. If some topic discussed, or a particular verse really grabbed your heart as we read through chapter one, please take time to meditate and dig into it.

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory.

1. Read Proverbs 1:1-33 and focus on 20-33. Here we find Lady Wisdom calling out for us to follow her down the right path. What will happen to

those whom she calls, but who reject her counsel?

Warren Wiersbe calls this section the "voice of salvation." Wisdom is speaking where everyone can hear, offering an invitation to all who are willing to turn from their evil ways and receive her gift.

2. If they receive and respond to her invitation, what will they receive, according to verses 23 and 33?

3. How does this parallel our own call to salvation? (Read Romans 10:8-13, 6:23, and Ephesians 2:4-10 for help)

4. Have you personally chosen the path of wisdom, or are you continuing down the path of folly? Have you made a decision to follow Christ? If you haven't, your group leader would love to talk with you about it if you have any questions. Folly leads to destruction. Make sure you're on the right path!

5. There are many voices calling to us as we walk down this path of life. What kinds of things call out to you? What types of temptations do you seem to face?

6. Proverbs offers us a voice of instruction. How willing are you to be instructed? Are you teachable or do you tend to think you know pretty much everything you need to? Why is being teachable so wise? What character trait is needed to be teachable?

See you next week ladies as we move down the road of wisdom.

"By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life."

Proverbs 22:4