

The Beginning of Wisdom

1 Kings 4:32-34, Psalms 1:1-6, Deuteronomy 10:12-13, Proverbs 1:1-33, Proverbs 4:5-6, Proverbs 3:1-8

Slide 1

The Bible contains stories, history, poetry, adventure, drama, hymns, theology, philosophy, and wisdom.

But not all the ancient writings made it into the Bible. The *“Infancy Gospel of Thomas”* or *“The Book of Enoch”* are not in it.

Though the Catholic church did choose to preserve such writings as *1st and 2nd Esdras*, *Tobit*, *Ecclesiasticus*, *1st and 2nd Maccabees*, the *Letter of Jeremiah*, the *Prayer of Manasseh*, and the *Wisdom of Solomon*, which is different from the Book of Proverbs.

My point is this: Every book in this Bible was included in the canon for a reason. Proverbs wasn't included in the Bible for sentimental reasons.

The scholars and theologians included it for a reason. They didn't designate it as an apocryphal book like they did *Tobit* or *Judith*.

Great theologians, religious scholars, and leaders read, examined, and debated over what to include and what to exclude, and this is the result of their 'wisdom.'

So, let me ask you, when was the last time you read the Book of Proverbs?

How many of you have studied its wisdom, tried to absorb its teaching, or lived by the profound, tried-and-true wisdom that has been preserved and passed down to us in this book?

You see, despite all the technology and gadgets that we have today, the basic issues and challenges of life are the same today as they were when Proverbs was written.

Even the title of the book, “Proverbs” is a warning for how we’re to approach this book.

If we break the word *Proverbs* down, we see it is made up of two words, “Pro” and “Verbs.”

“Pro” means what? You might think “professional,” but in this case, “pro” means “positive” as in, “I’m pro-Bible study” or “I’m pro-prayer.”

Then you have the second part, “Verb.” What’s a “verb”? In grammar it means “action.” Verbs are action words like run, jump, or swim. “Pro-verb” means “pro” or “positive” “action.”

This is a collection of sayings to encourage us to take positive actions in our lives that will produce the best results or outcomes.

But they also warn us about the kinds of negative actions that can lead to suffering, destruction, and ruin. They’re meant to be read, taken seriously, and acted on.

The first nine chapters of Proverbs are written in the form of a father advising his son, giving him advice to help him live wisely in the world.

In Solomon’s time, it was used as an instruction manual for parents to help them raise Godly, righteous children, as it should be used today.

Chapters 10 through 24 are a collection of wisdom for people of all ages.

Chapters 25 through 31 are a collection of wisdom for leaders and future leaders.

What the Book of Psalms is to prayer and devotion, Proverbs is to everyday life, as it contains deep spiritual insight as well as practical advice for daily life.

Practical advice and spiritual insight makes Proverbs a book that we should be reading, studying, and discussing more than we do.

So, like any book, we should start at the beginning, especially since it sets the stage for what's to follow.

Slide 2

The first line of the Book of Proverbs states, *“The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel.”*

This establishes the primary authorship of the book, though other authors, like Agur, the son of Jakeh, and King Lemuel are included. Listen to how God blessed Solomon... 1 Kings 4:32-34, *“He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. From all nations people came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.”*

Proverbs 1:2-3 state the purpose of the book: *“for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight; for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair.”*

Verses 4 and 5, explain who the book is for: *“for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young—let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance.”*

Verse 4 tells us that the purpose of this book was to teach “*prudence to those who are simple*” and “*knowledge and discretion to the young.*”

Then verse 5 says it’s also written so that the “*discerning,*” that’s you and me, can also “*get guidance.*”

No matter how old you are, you should never stop learning. The minute we know it all is the minute that we stop learning.

The amazing thing about the Bible is that there’s always something new to learn, some new insight to be gained, regardless of how old you are or how many times you’ve read it.

None of us here this morning is too old or too wise to not gain from reading and studying the wisdom in the Book of Proverbs.

Which is what Solomon’s saying in verse 6. We read and study the Book of Proverbs “*for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.*”

No matter how young you are or, in the words of Solomon, how simple or unacquainted you are with the wisdom contained within Proverbs, read it, study it and it will teach you how to “understand” it.

In fact, the first seven verses of Proverbs 1 introduce you to key words and concepts that are repeated throughout not only the Book of Proverbs, but the Bible itself.

Terms like: wisdom, righteousness, justice, and “fear of the LORD.”

For example, in Psalm 1:1-3, 6 it states that the purpose of the Torah or the Pentateuch was to advise the reader to “*not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take*” but to “*meditates on his law day and night*” so that they may prosper and not perish.

Slide 3

Solomon was known throughout the world for his “wisdom” which he acknowledged came from the LORD. In verse 7, Solomon tells us...
“For the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.”

This same sentiment is found in Psalm 111:10, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding.”*

When Job asked in Job 28:20, *“Where then does wisdom come from? And where is the place of its understanding?”* his answer in verse 28 was that *“fear of the LORD, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.”*

You’ll note that the word “LORD” is in all capital letters. When you see this in the Bible it means specifically the personal name of God, “Yahweh.”

With very few exceptions, Proverbs refers to God as LORD (all caps) as Yahweh because it reminds the reader that the beginning and the source of all wisdom come from Yahweh, not just any god.

When Yahweh entered into a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, He gave them a command in Deuteronomy 10:12-13, *“So now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God and [My] decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being.”*

Solomon goes on to say in Proverb 1:7 that *“fools despise wisdom and instruction.”*

We live in a time where we have the whole world of information at our fingertips. Because of this, we often turn to Google instead of God.

We think that all this information, all this knowledge, makes us “wise.” Now, it might make us smart. We might know a lot of things, but true wisdom only comes from God.

According to the dictionary, “wisdom” is the ability to discern what is true or right. Our English word “wisdom” has moral implications as in discerning what is right.

It also has intellectual implications as in, discerning what’s true but the Hebrew word that Solomon uses Khokmah (hokmah) has a much more useful and practical meaning to it.

It distinguishes between wisdom and knowledge because a person can have a mind full of facts and, well, so what?

What good is having a head full of facts or all the information in the world at your fingertips if you don’t do something with that information.

“Khokmah” is the “skill” that it takes to use knowledge in the right way for the right purpose. Wisdom is the ability to use the tools of knowledge and intellect to live righteously.

Khokmah is the skill or the ability to discern and to judge which aspects of our knowledge are true, right, lasting, and applicable to our lives.

As author and religious scholar Gerhard von Rad explains it, wisdom is *“becoming competent with regard to the realities of life. Knowing how things really happen, knowing how things really are, and knowing what to do about it.”*

Slide 4

“For the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” The “fear” that we’re talking about here isn’t terror. It means reverence or awe.

It's the fear that comes from the awareness that we, the finite, stand in presence of the Infinite, the sinful in the presence of the Holy.

"Fear of the LORD" means more than simply acknowledging God in our lives.

"Fear of Yahweh" refers to a special kind of relationship, one that's best described as a "covenant" relationship, a relationship based on mutual trust and commitment.

"Fear" of the LORD is the "beginning" of knowledge. It's the start of a life-long process of getting to know God and, in the process of getting to know God, we begin to love Him more and more.

Therefore, because we love God and want to know God more, we want to walk in all His ways.

The more we love Him, the more we want to serve Him until we're serving Him with all our hearts, with all our strength, with all our minds, and with all our souls.

Verse 8 starts out, *"Listen, my son."* The father, who is farther along in his journey, shares his knowledge, his insight, his wisdom with his son or daughter that he has learned.

In passing on this wisdom to his son or daughter, he remembers and reaffirms what he's learned. In doing so, he also remembers that his learning isn't over, either.

He, like his child, is still on a journey to learn more about God so that his fear, his awe, his reverence will continue to grow along with his love of God and his desire to serve God.

Every journey has a beginning and must follow a certain path. In other words, a journey involves "action."

There's an old proverb about three frogs sitting on a log. One of them decides to hop off the log.

Now, do the math, how many frogs are left on the log? Three. A decision to leap off the log is just that, a decision.

You can think about leaping off a log or taking the journey that Solomon's inviting us to take but nothing, absolutely nothing will happen until we take that first step and then another and another.

Psalms 1:1-2 says that there are two paths. *"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take."* That path leads to destruction.

"But whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night," this path leads to life.

Proverbs 1:9a says that if we follow our father's instructions, if we do not reject our mother's teaching, the "wisdom" that we receive from them, the wisdom that they received from God will be like a *"garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck."*

Verses 15-16 tells us what may happen if we don't follow our father's instructions, *"Do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths for their feet rush into evil, they are swift to shed blood."*

Proverbs describes two paths and makes it pretty clear which path we should choose.

The choice is ours but, unfortunately, we can choose the wrong path, the path that leads to destruction. Again, the father beseeches us to listen to his instruction:

Proverbs 4:14-15, 18, *“Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evildoers. Avoid it, do not travel on it; The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.”*

The path of the righteous starts out as a glimmer but grows brighter and brighter as we continue to seek wisdom, as we continue to learn more about God, as we grow closer to God.

The other path is one that keeps getting darker and darker, one that is littered with objects and obstacles that we stumble and trip over because we can't see them.

Slide 5

Notice the father keeps referring to “wisdom” as a “she.” The word “Khokmah” is feminine.

Personification, such as portraying “Wisdom” as a woman, is a poetic and personal way of capturing and conveying a message.

Wisdom is not a matter of mastering a bunch of rules. It's something that you must seek, embrace, and fall in love with.

The ultimate personification of wisdom is Jesus Christ Himself, Emmanuel, Wisdom incarnate.

John 14:9-11, *“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father,”* says Jesus. *“The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does His works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”*

In other words, wisdom isn't a body of principles or rules to memorize. It's knowing Jesus. It's living for Jesus. It is learning from Jesus.

Like the father and mother in Proverbs 1, if we listen to Jesus' instruction, if we do not reject His teaching, they'll become a *"garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck."*

Remember, we're on a journey. The Bible's a pathway, not a door. It's not a destination, it's a process.

Wisdom calls for us to listen for her voice and then calls us to take action.

We should be constantly seeking the Lord and His wisdom and His instruction. To live wisely, we need to passionately pursue wisdom.

Proverbs 4:5-6, *"Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or turn away from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you."*

We start our pursuit of Wisdom by reading the Bible. So, I want to help you with that today.

Like I asked you at the beginning of the sermon, when was the last time you read and took it to heart the teachings in Proverbs?

How many chapters there in the Book of Proverbs. Yes, 31! And most months have how many days? That's right, 31.

See where I'm going with this? February only has 28 days so, starting next month, March, get pro-active and read a chapter of Proverbs every day.

The pursuit of Wisdom is one of the most important things that we can do in life. Therefore, we must avidly pursue it.

If we honor Wisdom, Wisdom will lift us up. If we embrace Wisdom, Wisdom will pour her thoughts into us and make her words known to us.

If we listen to Wisdom, if we pursue Wisdom, then we'll be secure, we'll live at ease, without dread of disaster.

Slide 6

Conclusion

Proverbs 3:1-2, "My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity."

You can't remember the Father's teaching or keep His commands if you don't know them.

How can you bind them around your neck or write them on the tablet of your heart if you never read them, over and over and over again if necessary.

The love and faithfulness about which the Father is talking is the love and faithfulness that comes from having a personal, intimate, covenant relationship with God.

You can't have a personal, intimate, covenant relationship with Yahweh unless you seek Him out. Follow His ways.

Going down the path of wisdom means that you adopt certain practices, certain daily disciplines.

It's not enough to know that God absolutely, positively loves us, that He can and will do anything for us, that He is committed to us and will never leave us nor forsake us.

We must know it in our heart of hearts and the way that we write God's love on our hearts and on our very souls is through prayer, worship, music, poetry, and memorization.

Remember Proverbs 1:7, *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."*

I pray that there are no fools here today.