

## Mid Week • Proverbs 1-4

### INTRODUCTION

Whenever we start a new book of the bible I like to take a little time to do some introduction to it so that we can better understand its place in the larger canon of scripture

By the way - the word *canon*, as we use it in regards to the bible, means the accepted list of books that comprise the bible

*Canon* means "measure" or "standard"

When we speak of the *canon of scripture*, we are referring to that list of books that the Jewish scribes, and then later, the Early church fathers accepted as inspired and authoritative

It's important to note that the process of determining which books would be a part of the canon was an intense and exacting one

So much so that if you read about it, you will have every confidence in the inspiration and composition of the bible as we have it today

Proverbs is part of the poetic books of the OT

It is a collection of pithy sayings meant to communicate the accumulated wisdom of those who have known God and lived by faith in Him

Really, this is a parenting manual - as its setting is the speech of a father to his son

Solomon is the author and compiler of most of the proverbs, though we have a couple other guys comments as well

Most of the proverbs were actually written down by Solomon, but it seems that there were others he had spoken that King Hezekiah later wrote down and included in the book of Proverbs

In 1 Kings 4:32, it says he spoke 3000 proverbs - the book of Proverbs contains only about 800

A basic outline for Proverbs can be found in your study guide

Now, before we begin reading, let me say that we are going to be studying through Proverbs a bit differently than usual

The first 9 chapters we will cover tonight in our typical fashion; verse by verse  
The reason why is because these first 9 chapters are Solomon's opening exhortations to his son about living wisely

But beginning with chapter 10 all the way through to chapter 29, we have the specific Proverbs that deal with a dozens of subjects, all mixed together

So, beginning next week - rather than going through chapter 10-29 verse by verse, we will cover them *thematically*

In other words, we'll look at what they have to say about the tongue, about marriage, about gossip, about work and so on

The book of Proverbs aim is to deepen a healthy fear of God and to apply that fear to daily life

Every event is an opportunity to make wise or foolish choices that could bring either blessing or disaster.

The book probes deeply into how people's *thoughts* affect their *actions*.

It divides thoughts and acts into two major categories, each one based on either true or false understandings of God's involvement in the world.

The fool acts as if God does not exist while the wise conducts him or herself in the full realization that God exists and that actions have unavoidable consequences, good or bad.

Here is the practical bottom line that differentiates wisdom from folly

Wisdom knows that every thought, as well as every action will bear specific consequences

Folly ignores consequences and lives only for the moment - or for some hoped for moment

So Proverbs main purpose is to correct the worldviews of its readers—to turn them away from foolish fantasies and back to the fear of God

Proverbs is godliness in work clothes

It's important that we say right at the outset that the Proverbs are *general statements* about how to live skillfully

They are not hard and fast rules

Rather, they are short, terse expressions of *principles*

We would err if we made the book of Proverbs a rule list and observed them slavishly

What the Proverbs do collectively is peel back the external, observable layer of life and expose the moral principles that undergird creation

But we need to remember that their repeated appeal is to live *wisely* - not *slavishly*

Wisdom demands that we be *adaptable*, recognizing that life is complex and fraught with various challenges that don't always fit cleanly into a list of rules and regulations

Most important, living skillfully means living in relationship with God - and no relationship can be framed by mere rules

## CHAPTER 1

### **Vs. 1-6**

Right at the outset, Solomon tells the purpose of the proverbs - To make one wise!

Notice the rainbow of wisdom by the words he uses here to define it . . .

Instruction

Understanding

Justice

Judgment

Equity  
Prudence  
Knowledge  
Discretion  
Counsel

All these go deeper than the mind - they are issues of character  
And as we look at this list we realize that these are traits of character that  
are not attained by taking a pill or listening to a tape  
These things are hard won - they take work and reflection  
Proverbs is for the thoughtful and diligent  
They will do no good for the one who reads them hurriedly  
They demand meditation

The pace of life today leaves little time for us to meditate or reflect on anything  
Besides that, we've been programmed to believe that we can have virtually  
anything instantly  
TV tells us several times each night that monumental problems can be  
discovered, analyzed, and solved in 30 to 60 minutes  
Gourmet meals can be cooked in 6 minutes on high or 11 minutes on medium,  
if you want a flakier crust  
As a result of this "demand for the instant" - we see little true wisdom manifest in  
the world around us  
In fact, with the current state of affairs in Washington, what we see is folly  
galore!

Wisdom has depth. If we would obtain it, we must take the time to go deep.

## **V. 7**

This is the motto of the proverbs

Just a minute ago I said that Proverbs is godliness with work clothes on  
But notice where all wisdom begins - note carefully the bottom line of all  
knowledge and understanding - it is the Fear of God!  
But what does it mean to "Fear the Lord?"  
Our word "fear" carries the negative connotation of terror - of shrinking away  
from something  
The "fear" enjoined here means to adopt the posture of reverent submission  
It means to take our rightful place as creatures before our Creator  
There is no *terror* in this kind of fear, only *awe*!  
The awe of being in the presence of something much greater than yourself

When Solomon says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, he  
means that the starting place for all wisdom is to acknowledge and honor God  
as God  
If we do not START there, we will end up in the wrong place and all our  
conclusions along the way will be faulty

Compare an atheist astrophysicist and a Christian bricklayer

The astrophysicist can tell you about the structure of the universe

The bricklayer can tell you about the Structerer of the universe

The astrophysicist can tell you about the composition of this or that star

The bricklayer can tell you about the character of the Star-Maker

The astrophysicist can chart the path of the planets

The bricklayer can chart the path of the Creator's work in the lives of those  
who live on those planets

Should the universe begin to come apart, the astrophysicist can give you a  
mathematical formula describing it's decay, but fat lot of good that will do  
you

The bricklayer can tell you how to find refuge from it's destruction in the  
sheltering arms of God

So tell me - which knowledge is higher?

In the light of eternity, which is more practical and helpful?

Who, in light of their ends, is wiser - the astrophysicist or the bricklayer?

While the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, fools despise wisdom  
and instruction

In the book of Proverbs, the foolish are a category of people

They are variously called foolish, wicked, slothful, perverse, and so on

They merit these titles because of their hearts, not their heads

They have set themselves to oppose God - which is patently absurd, but  
they do it none the less

Notice what Solomon says here, they *despise* wisdom!

Why - because all genuine wisdom is a reflection of the truth and reality of  
God - and they hate God!

Friends, this may sound harsh, but please recognize that I am not saying this - the  
Bible says this

Those who reject God don't have an intellectual problem, they have a heart  
problem, a moral problem

Their moral corruption is revealed by their rejection of God

If you're here tonight and you are one who doesn't believe in God and think the  
reason you don't is because of a lack of proof, understand that that *really*  
isn't the problem

The problem is your heart - it rejects the idea of God because if it were to  
accept the existence of God then it would demand a change in your  
priorities and values

And you simply don't want to go there

### **Vs. 8-9**

The first and best place to learn wisdom is at home, from our parents

And wisdom, once learned and lived is like a beautiful crown or necklace that adds ornamentation to one's soul

We've probably all known people who were pleasant on the eyes but hard on the ears

As well as those who weren't too exciting to look at, but once you got to know them they became genuinely attractive because of their personality

I've often wondered over the years why you will see some gorgeous gal with some really dumpy or dowdy guy

The answer is simple - women are generally less excited and moved by appearance

They tend to be more interested in character

So once they get to know a guy, if he's together, they are more likely to stick with him regardless of how he looks

These verses remind us that as parents we need to be diligent in nurturing the character of our children as well as taking care of their physical needs

In ancient China, the people desired security from the barbaric hordes to the north; so they built the Great Wall of China.

It was so high they knew no one could climb over it and so thick that nothing could break it down.

They settled back to enjoy their security.

During the first hundred years of the wall's existence, China was invaded three times.

Not once did the barbarians break down the wall or climb over the top.

Each time they bribed a gatekeeper and then marched right through the gates.

The Chinese were so busy relying upon the walls of stone that they forgot to teach integrity to their children

A look at the history of the world reveals that great civilizations rarely fall in conquest from enemies without - they usually end by corruption from within

If we're honest we have to admit that this is what is taking place in our nation today

The best way to preserve the Republic is to cultivate a good character in the next generation

But let's face it, children are often less than enthusiastic about accepting the wisdom of their elders

Teenagers especially think they're parents are brain dead

When really young, mom and dad seem like geniuses - they know how to do and fix just about anything

But when kids get to be about 11, mom and dad start to seem pretty dense and uncool

By the time they are 16, the old folks are just out of touch with reality

But a strange thing happens when they turn into young adults - mom and dad start turning in to real people again

By the time they turn 25, they realize mom and dad *are* geniuses!

Mark Twain wrote, " When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years."

## **Vs. 10-19**

How many of us parents find our first instructions to our children to be something like, "Don't leave the front yard! You can play to the end of the sidewalk in front of our house but now farther. And never, ever cross the street."

In effect, that is what Solomon is doing here

He warns his son against falling in casually with those whose behavior is corrupt

Right off the bat, we have a sober warning about the power of *peer pressure*

Prov 12:26 says . . .

**The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray.**

1 Cor 15:33 reads . . .

**Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."**

One of the hardest yet most important lessons we can teach our children is to be selective about who they hang out with and make their friend

Our desire for love and acceptance is so strong, that early in life, it's easy for kids to just start hanging out with whoever shows any attention

The best way to protect our children is to give them so much love and assurance at home that their sense of being compelled to seek out love and acceptance in the world is weakened

We need to give them a healthy sense of self in the safety of our homes so that they can exercise some wisdom and restraint in the selection of their friends

But notice that Solomon is not afraid to warn his son that the world is a dangerous and evil place

Sin abounds, and it's tricky

We do not do our children any favors by shielding them from the sin that exists in the world

Sure we need to exercise wisdom and discretion in knowing what to expose them to at any given age - but we must deal realistically with the fact that we live in a fallen and corrupt world and deal with that in our parenting

Solomon here describes a group of guys who are conspiring to get wealth through dishonest means

At first, their plan is appealing, but as they go forward, it leads to turmoil and harm

Like the Niagara river - at first it is a peaceful stream, but eventually it turns into a raging flood that falls hundreds of feet - so is sin

At first it is appealing, enticing - but eventually it leads to destruction

And often times, those who have ridden it's early flow get caught in it and cannot escape

V. 19 is very enlightening . . .

**So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; It takes away the life of its owners.**

In 1 Timothy 6:9 & 10, Paul wrote . . .

**9 Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.**

**10 The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.**

There are an endless number of get rich quick schemes out there that play to man's desire to get wealth

There always has been, and always will be

We need to be on guard against our own greed that would push us into some agreement or contract that really will only further entangle us in debt

Any opportunity that sounds too good to be true - probably is!

### **Vs. 20-33**

Wisdom is now personified and makes her appeal

Contrary to the mystery religions out of the east, wisdom is not hidden

She cries aloud in the streets and invites all to obtain her

But the reason people reject her is because, v. 29, they hated her and did not chose the fear of the Lord

Once again we see that sinner do not have a head problem, they have a heart problem

Now, the question people often ask is why wisdom is personified here as a woman

Solomon is simply contrasting the enticing appeal of the sinners in vs. 10-19 with the appeal of wisdom as a beautiful woman in vs. 20-33

If I might be so bold to paraphrase Solomon's words, "Hey son, listen to wisdom - she's a total babe!"

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Vs. 1-9**

As I mentioned before, gaining wisdom requires diligence and application

Note carefully the words of effort in vs. 1-4

Receive

Treasure

Incline

Apply

Cry out

Lift up

Seek

Search

The one who does these things in the pursuit of wisdom will be amply rewarded by God

### **Vs. 10-22**

Besides yielding discretion and a keen sense of understanding, wisdom will protect us from evil, even the kind of evil that is extremely appealing and enticing - like sexual sin!

Remember that Solomon is giving this counsel to his son - who is most likely in his early teenage years when sexual desire and attraction is running at it's hottest

Solomon repeatedly spoke of sin in terms of sexual immorality and adultery - something with which he was intimately aware of, seeing as to how he had 700 wives and 300 concubines!

I wonder if this son didn't say under his breath, "Well Dad, you oughta' know. Why don't you practice what you preach!"

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Vs. 1-4**

In the days before battery operated watches, people had to wind their watches daily - some of us remember that!

The mainspring was the mechanism that kept the watch running, and by winding it, you enabled the watch to keep time

The heart is our mainspring

And Solomon here says that we are to wind it with mercy and truth

Mercy translates a rich Hebrew word that means tender and loyal loving-kindness

Truth refers to integrity of character

What makes someone a quality person is not the balance of their checkbook or the clothes they wear

It's what flows from their life - what springs out of their heart

And in the end, the only thing that matters is how we relate to God = Truth, and how we treat one another = Mercy

### **Vs. 5-6**

These verses introduce a short section on our relationship to God

And they begin with an exhortation to trust in the Lord

That means to cling to Him with our whole being - to forsake self-reliance

We are to do this with our whole heart - in everything we are to make Him the goal of our being and doing

As we do this, He will take charge of the order and direction of our lives

### **Vs. 7-8**

If we put ourselves in the proper relationship to God, then we will find ourselves if the proper relationship to God's world and plan

We'll "fit-in" and life will work more effectively than if we were opposing God and His plan

The result will be health in every realm



### **Vs. 9-10**

This is a clear cut and straight forward call to stewardship

We are to both give to the Lord of our stuff, and we are to take care of what He has given

As we see ourselves more as *stewards* rather than *owners*, and then use what the Lord has delegated to us for His glory, God will increase our capacity and supply

But in the realm of material possessions it appears that the Lord calls for our faithfulness before He blesses with more

### **Vs. 11-12**

Let's face it, there are adjustments that need to be made in all our lives if we are to walk more faithfully and closely with Jesus

And apart from the Lord's correction, we might not ever see some of these things

The loving father does not hesitate to correct his child when he sees that child headed down the wrong path

Love demands correction - it demands a firm hand occasionally be applied to the seat of instruction

In His love, God will correct us, He will discipline us

### **Vs. 13-18**

The rewards of wisdom

### **Vs. 19-26**

Wisdom was instrumental in the creation of the earth

If we would live successfully, then we need to get to the root of things and understand how all of life is undergirded by the wisdom principles God used to frame the universe

### **Vs. 27-28**

This is just good simple, neighborly advice

Don't delay doing good - especially when it is easily in your power to do so

Listen - one of the most important lessons we can learn as believers is to be prompt in obeying the Lord!

We must be ready and prompt to do good - because to delay doing good is to cultivate a reluctance toward it, and it isn't long from there to moral laziness and carelessness

Procrastination is one of satan's most effective tools

### **Vs. 29-30**

Be neighborly!

### **Vs. 31-35**

Because God differentiates between the godly and the ungodly, between the wise

and the foolish, between the good and the scornful, so ought we to  
The idea of toleration has been broadened in our day to mean acceptance of  
evil  
Certainly in our call to be merciful and neighborly, we are to be tolerant of  
other people's opinions and tastes on issues of little consequence  
But no where are we called to be tolerant of sin and error

It is with great pain that we hear that Hillary Clinton invited 100 Muslim leaders to  
the White House a couple weeks ago to celebrate the end of the Muslim Holy  
month of Ramadan  
Clinton invited Yasser Arafat to the Congressional prayer breakfast last  
Thursday!  
And when he left King Hussein's funeral this week, he was carrying a Koran  
What are we to say to such things?  
Shame! Wrong! Tragic! Terrible!  
These two profess to be believers in Jesus Christ - but their profession is  
denied by their conduct  
I do not criticize Clinton as President - I call Him to task for his rejection of  
Christ demonstrated in his defection to pragmatic humanism, immorality,  
and now Islam!

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Vs. 1-22**

Two ways are contrasted here - the way of wisdom, and the way of folly  
The way of wisdom is the way of life  
The way of folly is walked by the wicked and leads to corruption and loss  
Both ways are marked by their spreading influence  
Both ways seek to convert others  
The wise share their wisdom and by doing so bless others  
The wicked spread their sin and by doing so, curse others  
It is a complete fiction that we can live a private life  
Everything we do, whether public or private, effects others

### **Vs. 23-27**

We'll end with these verses tonight . . .  
Mouth, Eyes, Feet - these all speak of actions  
But notice where it all begins - with the heart  
Keep your heart with all diligence - why? Because out of it comes the  
issues of life  
Jesus said that it was out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth  
speaks  
The mouth is just the first fruit of our behavior, and as such, reveals what  
the direction and course of our lives is  
So we need to keep our hearts, we need to guard them with all diligence,  
because it is out of our hearts that our whole lives will flow

If our heart is not given completely to God, then it will eventually be given completely to something else

You see, the heart can only fix on one thing - that's the way it's made

Jesus said no one can serve to masters - only one

So we need to diligently check our hearts to see what occupies the first place

How can we keep our hearts on track?

By asking the Lord to create a clean heart in us - "Create in me a clean heart, grant to me a new start, keep me walking close to you."

And once clean, fill it with his word - Psalm 119:11 "Your word have I hidden in my heart that I might not sin against You."

Then, put away a lying mouth and lips that form perverse things

In other words, decide to not utter that which is displeasing to God!

Exercise care in what you allow your eyes to rest on and gaze at

The eyes are indeed the window to the soul and if you feed your inner person with sensuality, then you are setting yourself up for failure

Because we live in a fallen world, we cannot avoid being confronted with visual images that will tempt us to sin - but we do not have to feed temptation and lust by giving our eyes to such images

A young man once asked Martin Luther how he could keep from being tempted to lust

Luther said, "You cannot keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from nesting in your hair."

Do what the psalmist did, do not let your eyes rest on something that will only entice you to sin (101:3)

Decide ahead of time what you will do if you are confronted with a magazine, movie, advertisement, or whatever that would incite lust.

And then make sure you do not go somewhere you ought not be = ponder the path of your feet and don't go through the bar if you have a drinking problem

Don't wander through the lingerie department if you're stumbled by push up bras and G strings on mannequins

Don't pass through the bakery if you know the apricot strudel is going to call out your name

There is a progression here that we ought to take note of . . .

First of all, fix your heart on God alone

Then, make confession of your devotion with the words of your mouth

Then, fix your sight on your goal

And once you've done that, do not let yourself get sidetracked to the left or the right

When a farmer wants to plow his field with straight rows, he fixes his eye on a spot on the horizon and makes his way toward it

If he takes his eye off that spot and looks at something else, the furrow will bend and wander

It is only as he keeps his vision fixed that he can cut straight through the soil

and plant his crops  
Keep your eyes on the goal! Keep your vision fixed on Jesus and His return  
As you do, then your path will be straight and well ordered by Him and you  
will reap a mighty harvest of good