

Proverbs: Skillful Living - An invitation to Wisdom

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[0 : 00] Today we do indeed begin a new sermon series in the book of Proverbs and so if you have a copy of God's word with you, I welcome you to open that to the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs is found in the middle of the Old Testament.

And it is this book of wisdom. And the book of Proverbs is going to be a difficult book to read and study and walk through verse by verse as we would in many other books of the Bible.

Because the topics jump around a lot and so one verse you may be talking about work and work ethic and then another one you may be talking about truthfulness and another one may be talking about wisdom applied to in the area of relationships and so because it jumps around a lot it would be very difficult to coherently preach through this book if we were to do it verse by verse.

There are some sections that it would be advantageous and we may get to those. But as a result because of the nature of how we're going to teach this book you have in your bookmark a copy of the, there's 12 categories that I've been aided by other scholars who say these are the subject matters.

This is what wisdom applied in the book of Proverbs may look like by subject or by attribute that we're going to look like. So it's going to presume upon you and I'm going to presume that you and I are reading the book of Proverbs.

[1 : 35] So today I woke up this morning and read the 11th proverb chapter 11. So then I too gain familiarity along with you as we look at this.

So let me just please begin to read and it is this book that is filled as we have used this word often of wisdom. And so if you have that copy of scripture with you Proverbs chapter one verse one. Our section of scripture today is just going to be through chapter one one through seven and this is one of those sections and in this section.

Solomon writes out the purpose for which he wrote these proverbs to us. Why did this the collection of proverbs put together in this book of the Bible that we have what purpose is there. And so first of all we're going to look at who the author is Solomon the verse one reads the proverbs of Solomon the son of David the son the king of Israel. The Proverbs of Solomon how did Solomon come to write these many scholars believe that he wrote three books.

[2 : 50] We have we have three books the Bible that are written by Solomon the song of Solomon proverbs and ecclesiasties and many scholars believe that he wrote them in that order that when he was a young man he wrote song of Solomon.

When he was in his middle years he wrote perhaps the book of Proverbs and then in his later years he wrote the book of ecclesiasties when all his vanity.

And how did Solomon become so wise how did he do this well God appeared to him or told in in second Chronicles and in first Kings that and the Lord came to Solomon and asked him what whatever you ask of me I'll give you and Solomon responded.

Give me wisdom and knowledge that I may lead this people who would lead this great people of yours Israel Lord give me this wisdom and knowledge that I might lead your people Israel unto you. And the Lord found that request pleasing and that he didn't ask for wealth or honor or great might and power. And so the Lord grants him this this this request and he is endowed with this incredible wisdom of the Lord.

[4 : 03] And so we read in first Kings 4 29 it says God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure and the breadth of his mind was like the sand on the seashore.

And Solomon's reputation for wisdom spread throughout all the Near East. In fact the Queen of Sheba comes to visit him just to see his wisdom.

We're told in first Kings 4 32 that he wrote over 3000 proverbs over the course of his life of which some of them are contained in this book of proverbs that we're going to read.

All of this is some historical background and some understanding. So we have some context to read who is this author this Solomon person this this king of Israel that once lived and how did he obtain such wisdom that is endowed by God it's God's wisdom that is given to him.

And we come to this word wisdom that is contained in this book and so what is wisdom the word the Hebrew word for wisdom is Hukma and it is used of craftsmen of a of a sailor of a counselor.

[5 : 11] Of a counselor of a soldier all of these individuals in the Old Testament had Hukma had wisdom or it in that sense it's used that they were skilled yet a skilled counselor a skilled soldier a skilled sailor a skilled craftsman.

So when it's used in the ethical sense this word it it's skilled at living and so what is wisdom it's the skill at which we live.

And so that's why the sermon series title is called skillful living that's what wisdom is. We also then come to the first word in the in the verse one of what is a proverb says these are the proverbs of Solomon the son of David the king of Israel what is a proverb.

In every language there are maxims and adages and sayings that are concise that are given in a memorable manner. Some of our English proverbs we may say our haste makes waste or a stitch in time saves nine.

And so these are English proverbs and every language has them you can go to China you can go to India every culture every language has these little proverbs and maxims.

[6 : 34] But I want to share with you one that is in Scripture these little pithy words and so we turn to proverbs 11:22 it'll be on the screen behind me and it just says that like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.

And so this proverb it there's this the humor of this proverb is obvious and it's the ultimate beauty in the beast passage. But but what is a proverb often it's a pithy statement that communicates a truth about life by means of comparison.

It's a pithy statement that communicates a truth about life by means of comparison so this is what a proverb is this is an example of one. And so what is this proverb telling us by means of communication the thing that we find is that beauty is in the most inappropriate place.

Why is beauty this gold ring this thing of value found in a pig's snout and why is beauty found in a woman apart from discretion that's appalling.

And that's the point. And so a proverb causes the reader to slow down and find the means of comparison that contains in that parable.

[7 : 59] So so the means of comparison is found in the proverb. So in a sense they're like little micro parables. Proverbs are deliberately in an enigmatic they're shrouded a little bit in mystery and it teases the reader to slow down and cause the reader to use some reflection.

That's why I encourage you not to necessarily read the book of Proverbs in one sitting. You're welcome to do that you would benefit from it greatly. However, you will probably not take the time to reflect on the truths and the comparisons that are found there in and the skill at living that these Proverbs are trying to teach.

And so regarding this proverb, it's supposed to cause us to ask the question, do I place high value on physical beauty without the character that should accompany it?

Do I ignore that which is beautiful like discernment? Do I diminish the value of possessing good character over physical beauty? Is beauty in my life found where it should not be? In a sense, apart from me beauty is found? I sure hope not.

And that's the point of the proverb. So there's another caution I have and this one may be found in Proverbs 22 verse 6. And the Proverbs, I want to just give us some understanding before we get into what Solomon is saying, but Proverbs are not intended to be precise statements that can be taken as promises or as an absolute.

[9 : 40] For example, train up a child in a way he should go and even when he is old, he will not depart from it. Proverbs are not necessarily promises. And so these are statements that are generally, it's a general principle of truth that generally applied will generally come true.

But they're not necessarily supposed to be taken as a promise. Are there children that were trained up in the way that they should go and perhaps died apart from it? Yes, but that should not happen. That's not the general tenor of what could happen. And so they're not necessarily promises, but

they are generally true.

They're Proverbs, they're not promises. Next, from verses two through verse six in the opening of Proverbs, Solomon, the author is going to tell us why he wrote these, what these Proverbs are for. And so if you will, you could say it this way, this collection of Proverbs were given in order to, verse two, to know wisdom and to know instruction and to understand the words of insight.

I want to take those one at a time to know wisdom is the first purpose. We already talked about what wisdom is, it's the skilled at living it. The whole purpose of the book of Proverbs is so that you might be skilled at living.

[11:18] In a way that pleases the Lord, Daniel Estes says that this is the way it's the ability to make wise choices and to live successfully according to the moral standards of God and live in covenant community.

So wisdom should produce two things, a lasting value to the Lord and a lasting value to the community that you live. Second, we see that the purpose for these Proverbs is to know wisdom and to know understanding or to know instruction, which is an expression of wisdom.

It's a teaching and an exhortation and a warning. So for example, in Proverbs 7, 22, it says, all at once, it's speaking of an adulterous woman who's wooing the young man.

And it says this in that section of Proverbs 7, 22, it says, and all at once he follows her speaking of that young man who was caught by the adulterous.

It says, as an ox goes to the slaughter and as a deer is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver as the bird rushes into a snare.

[12:33] And this is what it says. So here's the instruction. It concludes with an instruction and it says, and he does not know that it will cost him his life. What will immorality and what will being caught in adultery cause a person? It may just cost you your life.

And if Wendy and I have someone in our life that has, that that immorality has cost them a great portion of their life.

And that's the instruction that Proverbs is written to instruct, to warn, to admonish. The third thing it does, this book of Proverbs was written to understand the words of insight.

And that is to discern between art alternatives. You remember that Solomon was presented a case to ladies, to mothers who came to him and he was to adjudicate this dispute between these two women.

And both of them claimed that the baby was theirs. So this mom said the child was theirs, this mom said the child was theirs. And so Solomon just says, okay, we'll take the child, cut it in two and give half of the child to both mothers.

[13:47] And one mother rushes and says, don't give the child. It's okay, I relinquish from my rights the child. Give the child to the other mother. And Solomon discerns because he has the understanding of insight to be able to make a distinction.

And he wisely said, give the child, don't cut the child in two. Give the child to the one who didn't want to cause the child harm. That must be the mother.

And that's what wisdom does. And that's what this book of Proverbs is to do, is to help us get to the true essence of an issue, whatever it is.

That's one of the purposes. In verse three, we continue reading, and the purposes just keep flooding in, to receive instruction in wise dealings, in righteousness, justice, and equity.

That is to receive instruction in wise dealings. My brother in high school, he was a junior in high school and he had the permission to drive.

[14:57] He had a driver's license. I was a freshman and could not drive. And so we lived in a small town and there's not much to do, and we were invited to go hang out with other students from the high school that were going to go out and meet down by the creek.

And so my brother and I asked our parents if we could go and they gave us permission, but they warned us, hey, if there's drinking, just come home. My brother, the girl who invited my brother, liked my brother, wanted my brother there. I'm just the third wheel in this story, by the way.

And so my brother asked this question of the gal. It says, ma'am, is there going to be alcohol present? And she said, no. So we head out that night and we go to this party that's down by the creek and my brother and I, upon arrival, we split up.

He goes to the upperclassmen and I go find third wheel people. And we were only there, perhaps, maybe a minute and a half and my brother finds me and he says, let's go, Scott.

And I had barely greeted everybody by that time. But he was serious and he was like, let's go. And I asked him why?

[16:16] And he says, there's alcohol present. And I wanted to be at the party. I wanted to be there, not because I wanted to drink, but I just wanted to be there.

But I asked John, what's the problem? There's alcohol. So I was like, John, neither of us are going to drink. What's the big deal? And he said, Scott, how hard would it be to clear our names?

He said, we signed a waiver on the basketball team that we would not drink. We signed, we would dishonor our coach, we would dishonor the school, we would dishonor our parents.

And if not keeping our word, and besides that, we're underage. And besides that, if we don't keep our word and how hard it would be to clear our names, we dishonor the Lord.

And my brother is telling me this as we're leaving. And I appreciate just his prudent behavior that he demonstrated because that Monday school must have found out that there was a party because a lot of us were called into offices and asked, were you at that party?

[17:29] I remembered the coach calling me in and saying, tell me, you're dealings at the party. You were named. You were seen there. So I told him what happened. And he said, Scott, you have a wise brother.

I'm glad you listened to your brother. And he said, you still have a position on the team and you're not going to be suspended from school. And he said, there's others who can, who substantiate your story about what occurred that night and your presence and absence there.

And then he just on his way out would say, can I just give you another piece of wisdom, Scott? And he said, I said, sure. And he said, I wouldn't go to any more parties. And this is my coach.

My parents also gave similar advice. But this is what wisdom does. And this is what the purpose of this book is, is to guide you in wisdom, in prudence.

And then in verse four, it gives us the audience to give prudence to the simple knowledge and discretion to the you. Prudence to the simple.

[18:51] And notice the word youth here. And I do want to call all who are from sixth grade up. The target audience of this book is written from those who are in their youth from six on up into your early twenties.

This would be the youth category. And I do want to encourage you to listen in those years in particular and parents, these applies to all of us. But I want you to know that Solomon is writing to those who have not quite become set.

And they're still formative. And you can still learn these ways of wisdom. And he says, my intended audience are to the simple. There's something for you who are simple and for the youth.

The youth were on the cusp of adulthood. And there is teaching the youth prudence is what one of the purposes is.

And have shrewdness with regard to the to avoid pitfalls in their life and as to direction. And in verse five, we find another audience, though it's not just for the youth or to for the simple.

[20:12] But in verse five, it says, and let the wise hear an increase in learning that the one who understands may obtain guidance.

There's this call to the wise. So if you are here and you think, well, I am already wise. Well, you're to increase also in your learning to give ear to the speaker's words externally.

What is it to learn to increase in learning to not only hear words, but to obey them inwardly and to have this active response that fervently desires to learn and to change.

And there is a cost to becoming wise in verse five. If you look at the word last, my it's the second to the last word in verse five for my translation, it says to obtain guidance.

That word obtain is translated will acquire in the new American standard translation will acquire.

And I like that translation because it does have a it's a it's a commercial term, a term of purchase and a term of trade.

[21:26] That there's this cost to obtaining this guidance or this wisdom. So wisdom is costly. One cannot remain on the easy path.

Solomon is instructing us. It may cost you your friendships. It may cost you the sweat of your brow by working hard. It may cost you some of your freedoms.

And this costliness is to be searched out. Look with me in chapter two, Proverbs chapter two. We're just going to read the first five verses real fast.

My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, make your ear attentive to wisdom and climb your heart to understanding. Yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding.

If you seek it like silver and search for it like hidden treasures. Then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find knowledge of God.

[22 : 27] But do you see how costly that is to seek for it as silver to search for it as hidden treasure? I don't know the last time you've watched a show or something on an expedition to go find hidden treasure.

That is not cheap. And they prepare for that for months, if not years to go on that expedition. And that's what Solomon is saying is, it's going to be costly to search it out, but it's well worth it. It's well worth it. The search is worth it. Seek for it like silver for hidden treasure. Wisdom is not found with a superficial glance.

Wisdom is not found by a half-hearted effort. We look and search and make every effort until we find what is most important to us. And the promise is that if one seeks for God's wisdom, he will find it.

His life will be rewarded by it. And for God's wisdom, the finders are only the seekers.

[23 : 37] And there's guidance in the bottom of... There's guidance. In verse 6, we see that...

Then you will... Verse 5, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find knowledge for God. For the Lord gives wisdom from his mouth and knowledge and understanding.

Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm like, that is not right. That was chapter 2. That is also very good. But we're in chapter 1.

In verse 5, it says the latter part of verse 5, and the one who understands obtains guidance. And then that guidance is further articulated, what kind of guidance it's talking about in verse 6.

Guidance to understand a proverb. So that costly guidance that will cost you something is to understand a proverb and a saying.

[24 : 49] And thirdly, the words of the wise and their riddles. Guidance specifically to understand proverbs. These are those memorable sayings about life by means of comparison.

The little micro parables, these little enigmatic sayings that use satire and sarcasm sometimes. And there's guidance in wisdom to understand.

The Lord will give you this for those who are willing to go through that costly search. And then what I love is this section concludes with what I call the motto of the book of proverbs.

Two times in the book of proverbs is this motto repeated with one slight variation. It says the fear of the Lord, verse 7, is the beginning of knowledge.

Later in chapter 9 it will say the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And fools despise wisdom and instruction. But this is the motto, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

[25 : 57] The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And this is the way Solomon concludes. He gives you the purposes he writes, and then he gives you his motto.

This concise form of central teaching that is found throughout the book of proverbs. Let's first talk about the fear of the Lord. What is it?

It's not so much terror or dread of the Lord, but this reverence for the Lord or this reverential awe of the Lord that is expressed in the totality of a person's motives, choices and actions, speech and thought.

This reverence, this high esteem, high regard, great respect, this acclaim for the Lord that is worthy of praise, that that reverence is displayed in motives, actions, speech and thoughts.

Pastor Eric and I were together at some ministry event, and it had been some time that we had spent multiple days with them, and Eric said a statement that I was feeling, but he put words to it.

[27 : 20] And he said this, there just seems to be a lack of reverence for the Lord in this group. And what is so terrible about that is we were with a bunch of Christians.

What's worse is we were with a bunch of vocational ministers. And there was this lack of reverence. And you say, well Scott, how do you know that?

Because it comes out in our speech, in our actions, in our thoughts and our motives. And there was a number of things that we had observed for some time having spent multiple days, and there just seemed to be this lack of reverence.

And that was disruptive for Eric, and it was disruptive for me. You can tell when someone has a reverence for the Lord and when they do not.

I appreciate how D.A. Hubbard says this about reverence. It's this humble stance before God. It radiates from our adoration and devotion to our everyday conduct that sees each moment as the Lord's time.

[28 : 30] Each relationship as the Lord's opportunity. Each duty as the Lord's command. And each blessing as the Lord's gift. It is a new way of looking at life and sees what it is meant to be when viewed from God's perspective.

Do you view each moment of your day as the Lord's time? Do you have this reverence for the Lord? Each moment is the Lord's. Each relationship is God's opportunity.

Each duty is the Lord's command. And each blessing is the Lord's gift. It gives us a taste of perhaps of what reverence might look like.

And then let's, so that's this fear of the Lord. I'm trying to articulate what this fear of the Lord is. This reverence for the Lord. And then it says the beginning of knowledge or the beginning of wisdom.

Let's talk about the word beginning. Usain Bolt is this amazing Olympic athlete sprinter. He's won eight gold medals.

[29 : 40] He set the world record for the hundred meter dash and then he did it again beating his own time a year later. And all sprinters and they all run a race and they begin a race in a way is specifically the hundred meter dash by crouching down in some starting blocks, hands on the line and they wait for the of the gun and then they're off.

And here's what I have never yet seen in a race like that. I have never seen Usain Bolt or any other sprinter for that matter start the race and then go back and touch this starting blocks and then keep going a little further and go away and then go back to the starting blocks and touch it again.

Why the race has begun. And so in our English vernacular, the word begin means once you've commenced, you don't return to it. You've begun.

Go. You've. And that's how we think of the word begin. But that is not how you should think of this word begin here in this text.

What it refers to is it's communicating this fundamental principle of wisdom. So for example, what is the fundamental principle of reading?

[30 : 56] It's the alphabet. You return to the alphabet every day of your life. Every time you read the stop sign, you read the word stop. And you return to your alphabet to understand, to articulate and to read.

You come to a new word you've never read before. You're going to sound it out. Why? How can you do that? Because you've returned to the alphabet. The fundamental principle of reading is the alphabet. The fundamental.

Thing you need to read music or notes on a page. The thing that you do to the fundamental principle to do any physics equation or mathematics is you return to the numbers.

Zero through ten. Sure, you can add numbers, zeros to that and get bigger numbers and commas, whatever you need. But that's about all I know about math.

Some of you are saying, your pockets of ignorance are quite large.

[32 : 06] But this is how we think of it. It's the fundamental principle of wisdom. What is it? The fear of the Lord.

The reverential awe of who God is that affects every aspect of your life. That reverential awe is the beginning of wisdom.

And it's not something that you owe. I once, when I was eight years old, had this reverential awe and I've departed now because that's the beginning of wisdom. And I've left it behind.

No. It's the fundamental principle that you need to have wisdom is this reverential awe.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, the beginning of this wisdom. And that word beginning is this fundamental principle that you return to every second of every day in order to have wisdom.

[33 : 08] It is the requirement. And so in contrast to that, look at fools.

If that's what wise is and that's what wisdom is and that's what wise people do, well, what about the alternative? Well, the fools despise wisdom and instruction.

And since we know what the fundamental principle of wisdom is, what do they despise? This reverential awe of the Lord. That's what they despise. So in contrast, the foolish people despise the fear of the Lord and the wisdom that can teach them.

They refuse to accept the teaching and instruction and consequently are unable to distinguish between right and wrong. And their folly is fundamental. Their folly is not, sorry, fundamentally an intellectual deficiency. But it is instead their inability and or their unwillingness to conform their lives to the Lord's moral order.

[34 : 13] They refuse to revere the Lord. I want to conclude now with an invitation. Every day, every one of us is extended invitations.

Some are trivial. Others have weighty significance. Every invitation extended, it calls to us to decide whether we are to accept it or not.

And that decision sets forth in motion a set of consequences. Let me give you some examples. If you were to accept an invitation to dinner, you may experience an evening of enriching conversations and the enjoyment of a newfound friendship.

If you say yes to an invitation to a sporting event, you may witness a thrilling game. If you say yes to the proposal of marriage, it may lead to decades of growing in love.

But in contrast, succumbing to the temptation to cheat on an examination can lead to a pattern of deceitfulness that results in bigger and bigger betrayals of trust.

[35 : 28] Yielding to the enticement of lust and laziness can produce a pattern of sin and slothfulness. Following one's own heart in a relationship rather than listening to God's word can direct a person into a lifestyle or a marriage that is truly heartbreaking and painful.

The question is not whether you will receive invitations in life, but what will you do with the invitations that you will be inevitably given? The invitation in these opening verses in the Book of Proverbs challenge us to take God's wisdom seriously because it will lead to a pattern of life that is pleasing to the Lord.

If we do not heed these teachings found in the Book of Proverbs and in the total corpus of God's word, or the total embodiment of God's word, we are in effect choosing a future that will be profoundly disappointing.

I had the privilege of serving as a college pastor for 15 years and there were some great joys. One of the greatest joys that I have is investing in students and seeing them internalize the commitment to the Lord's path of wisdom.

I've had the opportunity to visit them when they return to Spokane or I travel and I head out of town and I go visit them wherever they may be and to see that they have chosen the good life and to follow the Lord's path that wisdom provides is so enjoyable when I get to see them again and to hear about their life.

[37 : 10] They have chosen to listen to God and follow his ways and the choices have led them into this abundant life that God has desired for them. However, in contrast, it is one of my greatest heartbreaks to visit a former student who has chosen a path of folly or foolishness.

Even though they have heard the same Bible lessons, even though they have heard the same sermons, they have heard the same warnings, they have observed the same examples, they have failed to make an intentional commitment to live in the fear of the Lord.

Because of their poor decisions, they have tasted the bitter end that folly leads and I am profoundly saddened when I see this occur each and every time because what they have experienced is so much less than what the Lord desires for them.

Their foolish choices have led to disastrous consequences in their lives. The Book of Proverbs then teaches us we must choose a path to follow, the path we choose will make all the difference. Because the choices produce character, what we choose today determines who we will become tomorrow. In choosing the path to follow for good or for bad, we are choosing the future that we will find.

[38 : 36] This choice to follow the path of wisdom or folly, no one can make for you, not your parents, not your spouse, no friend, no one.

The decision is personal and you are responsible for it. Proverbs opens for us this invitation, we must choose whether to accept it or to decline it, to choose a path that leads to skill in living, that is wise, that is pleasing to the Lord, or to not.

And I pray that we would heed this invitation and accept it and say, Lord, I desire to possess this reverential awe, this reverence for you, this fear of the Lord, that will begin, that is this fundamental principle to having wisdom, and I accept your invitation, help me to heed and have and enjoy this reverential awe, and who you are, may I live into it.

So would you please accept this invitation and your life will bear the consequences of which decision you make. Let's pray. Father, thank you so much for this day.

Thank you for this invitation to wisdom. I pray that as a church, we would not necessarily pursue wisdom, but we would pursue you, and this fear of the Lord be upon us, that there would be this reverence for you, that we would wake up every morning with this acknowledgement that you are present, and we want to be pleasing to you in every moment of every day.

[40 : 39] What the alphabet is to reading, so too is the fear of the Lord to wisdom, and we heed that, we recognize that, and we desire to know you more.

We love you. Thank you for this day. Now may the words on our lips be pleasing to you as we sing that which is true about you.

I love you, Lord. Amen.