

The Book of Proverbs (Route 66)

All right, let's turn in our Bibles, this morning, to the Book of Proverbs... This is a GREAT—VERY PRACTICAL—BOOK of the Bible... [I'll forewarn you: This is **ANOTHER STUDY** where I use a lot of QUOTES, this morning]...

Proverbs belongs to a SECTION of scripture known as the 'wisdom literature.' – The OTHER books in this section include: Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon...

FOR A DEFINITION... ONE ARTICLE WRITES: "*Wisdom literature is a category... in many cultures in the time of the Old Testament, dealing with the way the world 'works.' It can deal with big philosophical problems, or the smaller things that [can] be addressed with common sense.*"

And, we are INSERTING the Book of Proverbs HERE, this morning... because—just as we looked at PSALMS alongside the life of David... we at SOLOMON last Sunday...

And, you'll remember: we focused on **FOUR MAIN THINGS** from Solomon's life... His WEALTH... his BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE... his EVENTUAL FOLLY...

But, PERHAPS—more than ANY OTHER THING—what Solomon was KNOWN for was WISDOM...

1st Kings Chapter 4 says: "**God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding...**" We're told: "**men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth... came to hear the wisdom of Solomon.**" – Chapter 10, Verse 28 says: "**all the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom...**"

We're ALSO told that "**his songs were one thousand and five,**" and that "**He spoke three thousand proverbs...**" – And, we KNOW that Solomon wrote MUCH of the Book of Proverbs because... he TELLS us...

- Chapter 1, Verse 1, says: "**The proverbs of Solomon the son of David...**"
- Chapter 10, Verse 1, says: "**The proverbs of Solomon...**"
- Chapter 25, Verse 1, says: "**These also are proverbs of Solomon...**"

Now, Solomon was not the ONLY AUTHOR... Derek Kidner writes: "*Two [other authors] are named: Agur and Lemuel... [still] others are mentioned collectively as 'Wise Men', and at least one section of the book... remains anonymous.*"

For instance; Chapter 30 begins: "**The words of Agur the son of Jakeh...**" – We read: "**This man declared... to Ithiel and Ucal...**" – Now, this is the ONLY PLACE in the Bible that this man is mentioned...

Adam Clarke writes: “*I believe Agur, Jakeh, Ithiel, and Ucal, [are] names of persons who DID exist, but OF whom we know nothing [except] what is here mentioned. Agur seems to have been a public teacher, and Ithiel and Ucal to have been his scholars.*”

It **IS** interesting how—in Proverbs 30, Verse 4—this ‘Agur’ writes: “**Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth?**” – And then, he asks: “**What is His name, and what is His Son’s name, if you know?**”

David Guzik writes... this OBSCURE AGUR: “*knew there was something special about the Son of God. We don’t know to what extent he prophetically anticipated the Messiah... but [he] knew that God had a Son, and [that His] Son had a name.*” – That’s interesting...

Now, Chapter 31 introduces: “**The words of King Lemuel, the utterance which his mother taught him...**” – Once again, we don’t know WHO this ‘King Lemuel’ was... He’s not mentioned among the KINGS of JUDAH or ISRAEL...

A lot of OLDER commentators think this was a ‘**PEN** Name’ for SOLOMON himself... the name ‘*Lemuel*’ means ‘*belonging to God.*’ – And God **HAD** SAID of Solomon that: “**I will be his Father, and he shall be My son...**”

So, some have speculated that the REASON Solomon USED this ‘Pen Name,’ and did not mention his mother ‘Bathsheba’ BY NAME is because of her HISTORY with David...

Still, David Guzik thinks: “[King Lemuel] was probably a pagan king who put his trust in Yahweh... and through the fear of the LORD learned wisdom.”

Duane Garrett offers this: “*With a minor punctuation change... one [could] translate Proverbs 31:1 as, ‘The sayings of Lemuel, king of Massa.*” – And, “*Massa may have been a north Arabian tribe (mentioned in Genesis 25, 1 Chronicles 1) and that several Aramaisms appear in the text.*”

In fact—ON THAT NOTE... We remember that—even though Solomon was KNOWN for being WISE—the Bible **DOES** mention OTHER WISE MEN of his day...

1st Kings 4... Verse 30 and 31 say: “**Solomon’s wisdom EXCELLED the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt... He was wiser than all men—than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the surrounding nations.**”

And it DOES SEEM that PORTIONS of PROVERBS might have actually been **BORROWED** from **OTHER WISDOM BOOKS** of **OTHER CULTURES...**

One author writes: “*The ‘wisdom’ genre was widespread throughout the ancient Near East, and reading Proverbs alongside... examples recovered from Egypt and Mesopotamia reveals the common ground shared by international wisdom.*”

David Guzik adds: “*Proverbs is... unique in its connection with... secular literature of its time. Neighboring kingdoms had their own collections of wisdom literature, and in some places, there are significant similarities [between] these writings.*”

Allen P. Ross agrees: “*There are... SECTIONS of Proverbs... that seem to be **borrowed** from The Teaching of Amenemope, an ancient Egyptian writing. There is debate as to who borrowed [from] whom, but most scholars believe Amenemope is earlier.*”

Derek Kidner adds: “*If Proverbs is the borrower here, the borrowing is not slavish... but free and creative.*” – He says: “[Just as] Egyptian jewels—at the Exodus—were re-set to their advantage by Israelite workmen and put to finer use.”

As for the DATE of this Book, it’s virtually IMPOSSIBLE to know WHEN the Book of Proverbs was written—or, should I say **COMPILED** into its finished form... For instance...

Chapter 25, Verse 1, says: “**These... are [the] proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied...**” – Now, SOLOMON reigned from 971–931 B.C... But, Hezekiah didn’t reign until 715 B.C... So, that’s quite a bit of difference...

One author writes: “[*There is] much that speaks in favor of dating the materials in Proverbs to the Solomonic era.*” – However; “*The present **FORM** of the book [must be] from a later time... but probably no later than Hezekiah.*”

The CONTENTS of Proverbs is VERY DIFFERENT from OTHER Books of the Bible... This is more of an **ANTHOLOGY**... Almost like an ALMANAC...

It’s not presenting HISTORY, or DOCTRINE, or LAW, or PROPHECY... It’s more of a **COLLECTION** of NEAT, ENCAPSULATED bursts to be taken INDIVIDUALLY...

[Which—by the way—makes Proverbs a REALLY GREAT BOOK to start with if you’re wondering how to get into DAILY BIBLE READING... PROVERBS is fairly easily digestible!]...

JB Phillips said: “*Proverbs are wonderful... at being what they are: proverbs... By design, [they] lay-out pointed observations, meant to be memorized and pondered, not always intended to be applied ‘across the board,’ or in every situation.*”

David Guzik calls them: “...a collection of practical life wisdom given mostly in short, memorable statements... without much context or organization by topic.” – He writes: “[They] should not be regarded as “laws” or even universal...”

Another author adds: “Roughly half the book is [devoted] to ‘sayings’ [of this type] ...” – It is: “A book for everyone... a reliable guide for... living wisely... in God’s world.”

Now, that’s NOT to say that the Book is WITHOUT STRUCTURE... Proverbs—**BASICALLY**—has THREE MAIN PARTS...

Chapters 1—9 contain TEN SPEECHES from a FATHER to a SON... [PERFECT for a Father’s Day!]... about virtue, integrity, and generosity, “all of which lead to success and peace,” one author writes. – There are 4 poems here, where wisdom is personified as a woman... **Chapters 10—29 are a collection of SAYINGS ABOUT LIFE...** “Here,” one author writes: “are hundreds of... sayings that apply... to [just about] every topic: family, work, community, friendship, sex, marriage, money, anger, forgiveness, alcohol, debt. They are short and easy to memorize. This section... is meant to be like a reference... to which you [can] return time and time again for the rest of your life.”

And then, in Chapters 30—31, we have TWO LARGE POEMS, the LAST being an ACROSTIC describing the Woman Who Fears the Lord... (a very FAMOUS passage of scripture)...

One author writes: “*Proverbs opens with a father to a son about LISTENING to Lady Wisdom... and it ENDS with offering the words from a mother to a son about a woman who lives wisely.*” – Very appropriate...

Now, IN Verses 1 through 6 of Chapter 1, Solomon **TELLS** us the PURPOSE of this Book... he says: “**The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction... To perceive the words of understanding... To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity... To give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion...**” – Verse 5 says: “**A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, to understand a proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles.**”

So, the PURPOSE of this BOOK is to KNOW WISDOM... to GAIN KNOWLEDGE and UNDERSTANDING...

The words “wise” and “wisdom” appear over 100 times in this Book... the idea of “understanding” is written about 53 times... “Knowledge” is mentioned 41 times...

Now, the Hebrew word for ‘*wisdom*’—*hākmā*—means MORE than just “*mental activity*.” – It refers to “*practical knowledge...*” – It might be BETTER understood with the word “*skill*,” or “*applied knowledge*.”

This is why the ARTISTS and the CRAFTSMAN who worked on the tabernacle were to have *hākmā*... Why the MEN of Israel were to be “*skilled*” in warfare... (same word)...

Warren Wiersbe has a GREAT QUOTE... He says: “*We live in the ‘information age,’ but we certainly aren’t living in an ‘age of wisdom.’ Many people who are wizards with their computers seem to be amateurs when it comes to making a success... of their lives.*”

Jame Montgomery Boice said: “*It’s [safe-to-say]... that most people today are not that interested in getting wisdom. They are interested in making money and in having a good time. Some are interested in knowing something, [or] in getting an education. [Just about] everyone wants to be well liked. But... The pursuit of wisdom is not a popular idea.*”

And yet, the PURPOSE OF PROVERBS is TRULY to EQUIP US... to “*develop a set of practical skills for living... in God’s world.*” – This is the PURPOSE of the WORD OF GOD, AND it is the MISSION of the Church!

The PURPOSE of the church is not to ENTERTAIN PEOPLE... or to send you out the door felling INSPIRED... It’s to TEACH the Word of God, to MAKE DISCIPLES...

And, if we will COME to the Word of God with OPEN HEARTS and MINDS, and RECEIVE ITS TEACHINGS... we will see justice, judgment, equity, and peace flowing from our lives.

Notice the EMPHASIS on certain things in the opening Verses: “**To perceive the words of understanding... To receive the instruction of wisdom... [to] hear and increase learning... [to] attain wise counsel...**” – These words imply LEARNING and TRAINING...

James 1:21 tells us to: “**Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save [our] souls.**” – Jesus spoke of RECEIVING the Word of God “**with a noble and good heart, keep[ing] it and bear[ing] fruit with patience.**”

James 1:5 says: “**If any[one] lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach...**”

John Trapp said: “*And herein... the poorest idiot being a sound Christian, [can] go beyond the profoundest clerks that are not sanctified... he has his own heart instead of a commentary to help him to understand the most needful points of... Scripture.*”

John the Apostle said... “**the anointing which [we] have received from Him abides in [us], and [we have no] need that anyone teach [us]... [for] the same anointing teaches [us] concerning all things...**”

In other word, the Holy Spirit LIVES INSIDE OF us... And He's the SAME SPIRIT Who WROTE the Word of God, and He will GUIDE US in our UNDERSTANDING of the Word...

IF we will COME to it OPENLY... as STUDENTS and LEARNERS, with hearts READY for INSTRUCTION...

I think it was Billy Graham who said: “*One of the great sins of the modern church is [just] LISTENING to Bible studies.*” – You know, we can be like the PEOPLE of Ezekiel's day...

OF whom, the Lord said: “**As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses... they speak to one another... saying to [their] brother, ‘Come and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.’”**

And “**So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words...**” – God says: “[for] Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song... of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument...”

“*You SOUND good, Ezekiel!*” is what the Lord is saying. — “**BUT,**” He says... “**they hear your words, [and] they do not do them... for with their mouth... they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain.**”

This is the LORD... telling Ezekiel about the TENDENCY of people in his day to want to HEAR the Word of God... for the ENTERTAINMENT VALUE... Paul told Timothy:

“**The time will come when [people will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap-up for themselves teachers... and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.**” – Oh! Stories!

So, what does Paul tell Timothy to DO? – Does he say: “*Timothy, you better find a way to COMPETE with that mentality.*” – “*You're gonna have to figure-out a CREATIVE WAY to REACH PEOPLE.*”

No, Paul tells Timothy... “*People aren't going to WANT to hear the Word of God... They're not going to want to ENDURE sound doctrine... And so, what I want YOU to do, Timothy, is:*

‘**Preach the word! [To] Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.**”

Can I just say... I sometimes INCUR a lot of criticism for “*taking the Bible too seriously.*” – For “*expecting to maintain a reverent atmosphere when it comes to the study of God’s Word.*”

Can I just tell you... PUT ME IN THE CAMP of guys who take the Bible UBER-SERIOUSLY... ‘Cause there’s ALL KINDS of places out there—churches—where [we] can go and get [our] ears tickled, if that’s what you want...

But churches teaching DOCTRINE? – And actually EXPECTING that people RESPECT the Word of God, and STUDY the Word of God, and PREACH the Word of God? – They’re a DYING BREED...

THIS Word will SAVE us... and RESTORE us... and HEAL us, and GIVE WISDOM and DIRECTION, and SUPERNATURAL INSIGHT in God’s PLANS for our lives...

If we will come to it HUMBLY... EXPECTANTLY... OPENLY... WILLINGLY... REVERENTIALLY... and RECEIVE it with a GOOD and NOBLE HEART... This is the PURPOSE of PROVERBS:

“**To KNOW wisdom and instruction... To PERCIEVE the words of understanding.**” – And —if THAT’S THE PURPOSE—Solomon THEN tells us the SOURCE... In Chapter 1, Verse 7, he says— “**The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge...**”

This idea of “**The fear of the Lord**” is mentioned about **15 TIMES** in Proverbs... AND we see the SAME IDEA expressed in Job 28, Psalm 111, Ecclesiastes Chapter 12...

Bruce Waltke said: “*What the alphabet is to reading, notes to... music, and numerals to mathematics, the fear of the LORD is to attaining the revealed knowledge of this book.*”

Now, the “**fear of the Lord**” is not a “*cowering, traumatized fear.*” – “*It is the proper reverence that the creature owes the Creator... the redeemed, the Redeemer. It is the proper respect & honor of God.*” – Here’s a BUNCH of OTHER quotes:

- Derek Kidner calls it: “*A worshipping submission to the God of the covenant.*”
- Charles Bridges: “*that affectionate reverence by which the child of God bends himself... to his Father’s law.*”
- Adam Clarke: “*That religious reverence which every intelligent being owes his Creator.*”
- Allan P. Ross: “[The] reverential submission to the Lord’s will, characterizing a true worshiper.”

David Guzik writes: “*Wisdom cannot advance further until this... is established. If true wisdom can be... gained by human effort, energy, & ingenuity... then the fear of the LORD is not essential... But if it ONLY comes from God’s revelation, then right relationship with Him is key.*”

And—from here-on-out—Proverbs becomes a **LIBRARY**... of WAYS to WALK in WISDOM... to not be LED ASTRAY from WISDOM, to PRESERVE WISDOM, and KEEP WISDOM...

I think it's INTERESTING—and INSIGHTFUL—that the very first “CONTEXT” of where the PASSING of WISDOM... is in the **PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP**... [Again, this is PERFECT for FATHER'S DAY]...

In Verse 8, Solomon says: **“My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother...”**

MOMS... DADS... The most IMPORTANT thing we'll do is NOT help our kids choose a CAREER... or see them get the BEST COLLEGE EDUCATION... it's not even to MAKE THEM HAPPY, or BE THEIR FRIEND...

It is to IMPART TO THEM the WISDOM of GOD'S WORD... to make sure they KNOW GOD, and INSTILL WITHIN THEM a PROPER FEAR OF THE LORD...

I wonder how many parents (and, please don't misunderstand, I am NOT an EXPERT in this)... But, I DO WONDER how many Christian parents spend TOO MUCH TIME EMPHASIZING EARTHLY EDUCATION over HEAVENLY WISDOM...

The PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP is THE PRIMARY INSTITUTION that God has created for DISCIPLE-MAKING... It's not the CHURCH, or the CHILDREN'S MINISTRY, or the YOUTH MINISTRY... it is PARENT-to-CHILD... Which means:

MOMS & DADS... We have to **KNOW** THE WORD... And we have to **TEACH** the Word... “*Well, Kevin, I don't really know how to do family devotions.*” – Neither do I! That is why I'm FREED-UP when I read Deuteronomy Chapter 6... It says: **“These words which I command you today shall be in your heart.”** – AND... **“You shall teach them diligently to your children...”** – HOW? In a FORMAL FAMILY DEVOTION???

No, Scripture says: **“You shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”**

In other words, TALK TO YOUR KIDS about the Word of God... DECORATE YOUR HOUSE with the WORD OF GOD... But—again—it comes back to the very first thing listed: **“These words which I command you today shall be in your heart.”**

If the Word is NOT **IN** us, parents... we're not going to be able to TALK to our kids about the Word of God... Because, **“out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.”**

By the way... YOUNG-ER PEOPLE, please see, too... that “**the instruction of your father, and... the law of your mother**” “**will be [like] a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck.**” – It will make you BEAUTIFUL... ATTRACTIVE...

And, PLEASE NOTE, TO... the **VERY** FIRST THING MENTIONED in attaining wisdom is **NOT** keeping BAD COMPANY... Verse 10, says: “**My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.**” – Verse 15: “**...do not walk in the way with them, keep your foot from their path.**”

As COMPARED to ‘The Company of Wisdom,’ in Verse 20: “**Wisdom calls aloud outside; She raises her voice in the open squares... Turn at my rebuke,**” Verse 23, “[For] Surely I will pour... my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.”

Verse 33: “**Whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and... be secure, without fear of evil.**” -- And, this Book is FILLED with all kinds of JEWELS of WISDOM:

- Proverbs 4:23: “**Guard your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.**”
- “**Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways...**” (Proverbs 6:6)...
- “**Keep [God’s] commands and live, [His] law as the apple of your eye...**” (Proverbs 7:2)...
- “**In the multitude of counselors there is safety.**” (Proverbs 11:14)...
- “**Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall...**” (Proverbs 16:18)...
- “**Death and life are in the power of the tongue...**” (Proverbs 18:21)...
- “**Train up a child in the way he should go...**” (Prov. 22:6)...
- “**As a dog returns to his own vomit... a fool repeats his folly.**” (Proverbs 26:11)...
- “**Faithful are the wounds of a friend...**” (Proverbs 27:6)...
- “**Where there is no vision, the people perish...**” (Prov. 29:18)...

Of course, there is the very FAMOUS PASSAGE of ‘The Virtuous Woman’ in Chapter 31. – The LIST of PASSAGES that we have probably “HEARD” of from this Book just goes ON and ON...

ANOTHER very “famous” passage from this Book, that—in SOME ways [I think]—summarizes the whole thing—is found near the beginning, in Chapter 3, Verses 5 & 6... Let’s look there together...

Solomon writes: “**Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.**”

Notice that we’re to trust in the Lord with ALL of our heart... Not MOST of it... just the part where we ‘THINK’ we need the Lord’s help... But, ALL OF IT...

He says “**lean NOT on your own understanding.**” – It doesn't say... “**Trust in the Lord AND use your own understanding...**” – It says “**Trust in the Lord and NOT your own understanding.**”

This is the OPPOSITE of the familiar phrase: ‘**The Lord helps those who help themselves.**’

Did you know: “*The belief this phrase occurs in the Bible, or is even one of the Ten Commandments, is common in the United States. According to a Barna poll: 53% of Americans agree with this statement strongly... A poll in the late '90s showed that 81% believe the concept is in the Bible... Despite not appearing in the Bible, the phrase topped a poll of the most widely known Bible verses. Barna sees this as evidence of Americans' growing unfamiliarity with the Bible and believes it suggests a spiritual self-reliance inconsistent with Christianity.*” – We need to **TRAIN UP OUR CHILDREN**, guys... to...

“Trust in the LORD with ALL your heart... DON'T LEAN on your own understanding... In ALL YOUR WAYS acknowledge Him...” – Not just with the ‘Christian stuff.’

But with the stuff you do on the WEEKENDS... The MOVIES you watch... the PEOPLE you hang out with... PLACES you go, WORDS you say, THOUGHTS you think... Do you **ACKNOWLEDGE** the Lord with ALL of those things?

Somebody might say, “*Kevin, I don't know what it MEANS to acknowledge the Lord.*” – Yeah, you do... If you've ever WALKED into a room and SEEN someone and SAID HELLO... you just ACKNOWLEDGED them...

On the OTHER hand, if you've ever **IGNORED** SOMEONE (as we ALL have)... that is NOT acknowledging them... You KNOW they're THERE... you just don't ACKNOWLEDGE them...

The Lord wants us to ACKNOWLEDGE Him... To ADMIT OUT LOUD that We KNOW He is there... INVOLVED in our LIVES... with a WILL for us...

This Verse says, “**He WILL direct your paths.**” – Not MIGHT, not COULD, not ‘WILL THINK ABOUT IT.’ – He **WILL** direct our paths...

People say all the time, “*Kevin, how do I KNOW God's will for my life... I just want to KNOW GOD'S WILL.*” – Well, this is it... Proverbs 3, 5 & 6...

“Trust in the LORD with ALL your heart,” – ALL of it... **“Lean NOT on your own understanding...”** – **“Acknowledge Him in EVERYTHING YOU DO...”** And the promise is: “**He WILL direct your path.**”

And, I once heard that the IDEA here is that God BENDS THE PATH beneath our feet as we walk... It ISN'T SO MUCH that He SHOWS us WHERE we're going... He LEADS us... He WANTS us to WALK IN STEP with Him... TRUSTING HIM whole-heartedly...

David Guzik writes: "*When we do [these] things, we can trust that God will direct our paths. We go forward in peace, believing that through His word, and the leading of the Spirit, the counsel of others, through godly common sense, life circumstances, God directs our path. We walk along our way of life and... see that we have been on the path God intended all along.*"

G. Campbell Morgan said: "*The measure in which I have trusted Jehovah and acknowledged Him, has been the measure of walking in the paths of... life.*"

Well... LIKE with Psalms, we have only just **SCRATCHED THE SURFACE**, this morning, of the riches contained in Proverbs...

But—again—I hope that we walk away with a better OVERALL UNDERSTANDING of WHAT this Book IS, HOW IT FITS in our Bibles, WHAT it's FOR, HOW we can USE it...

And—if nothing else—I hope this study encourages you to go, and start reading a Proverb a Day... You'll discover there is some AMAZING STUFF here...

All right, next up on Route 66, we've got SONG OF SOLOMON and the Book of ECCLESIASTES... Two more writings of Solomon...

So, read ahead, and join us for those... As '*Route 66*'—our Journey Through the Bible—continues!