

Proverbs

The Call of Wisdom

Lesson #1 for January 3, 2015

Scriptures: Proverbs 1-3; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4; Genesis 1:1; Exodus 19:16; 20:20.

1. Welcome to our study of the book of Proverbs. Read 1 Kings 4:32. Apparently, Solomon originated or collected more than 3000 proverbs and 1000 songs. The book of Proverbs contains only a few hundred of those proverbs. Does that mean that the other proverbs which Solomon collected and which are not recorded in the book of Proverbs were not inspired? Wouldn't some of the statements in Job or in the Psalms qualify as proverbs? What about the golden rule recorded in Matthew 7:12? Isn't that a proverb?

The book of Proverbs gives clear evidence of multiple authorship, as does the book of Psalms. This is because both of these Old Testament books are collections of writings. **Solomon** is believed to have written a tribute to wisdom (Prov. 1:1-9:18), his first collections of sayings (Prov. 10:1-22:16) and his second collection of sayings, which would have been inserted during the time of King **Hezekiah** (Prov. 25:1-29:27). It is suggested that Prov. 22:17-24:34 consists of proverbs that Solomon collected from additional wisdom literature. Finally, Proverbs 30:1-33 is introduced by **Agur, son of Jakeh** and Proverbs 31:1-31 is introduced by **King Lemuel** [and are the words of his mother].—Everett, G. H. (2011). *The Book of Proverbs* (p. 15). [Content in brackets is added.] (Is that the only part of Scripture written by a woman?)

2. It seems clear from Proverbs 25:1 that the final edit of the book of Proverbs was completed during the reign of Hezekiah between 729 and 686 B.C. Solomon himself reigned from 970 to 930 B.C. His proverbs were almost certainly written or collected during the early part of that reign. Proverbs is primarily a book of practical wisdom.

Many people think that what's written in the Bible has mostly to do with getting people into heaven—getting right with God, saving their eternal souls. It does have to do with that, of course, but not mostly. It is equally concerned with living on this earth—living well, living in robust sanity. In our Scriptures, heaven is not the primary concern, to which earth is a tagalong afterthought. “On earth as it is in heaven” is Jesus’ prayer. “Wisdom” is the biblical term for this on-earth-as-it-is-in-heaven everyday living. Wisdom is the art of living skillfully in whatever actual conditions we find ourselves. It has virtually nothing to do with information as such, with knowledge as such. A college degree is no certification of wisdom—nor is it primarily concerned with keeping us out of moral mud puddles, although it does have a profound moral effect upon us. Wisdom has to do with becoming skillful in honoring our parents and raising our children, handling our money and conducting our sexual lives, going to work and exercising leadership, using words well and treating friends kindly, eating and drinking healthily, cultivating emotions within ourselves and attitudes toward others that make for peace. Threaded through all these items is the insistence that the way we think of and respond to God is the most practical thing we do. In matters of everyday practicality, nothing, absolutely nothing, takes precedence over God.

Proverbs concentrates on these concerns more than any other book in the Bible. Attention to the here and now is everywhere present in the stories and legislation, the prayers and the sermons, that are spread over the thousands of pages of the Bible. Proverbs distills it all into riveting images and aphorisms that keep us

connected in holy obedience to the ordinary. (*The Message* - Introduction to Proverbs)

3. Some of the proverbs of Solomon near the end of his book seem to be related to an Egyptian work, *Wisdom of Amenemophis* (written down c. 1000 B.C. but already then ancient). Scholars are divided about whether Amenemophis may have borrowed from Solomon or if Solomon borrowed from Amenemophis. Was it a mistake for God to give Solomon all that wisdom? Was God in any way responsible for the mistakes Solomon made later in his life?
4. Does all of this raise questions in your mind about the inspiration of Proverbs? Is our definition of *inspiration* broad enough to include Proverbs? Apparently, the New Testament authors thought so. There are five passages from Proverbs that are quoted or used in the New Testament: (1) Proverbs 3:11-12 is quoted in Hebrews 12:5-6. (2) Proverbs 3:34 is quoted in James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5. (3) Proverbs 11:31 is quoted in 1 Peter 4:18. (4) Proverbs 25:21-22 is quoted in Romans 12:20. (5) Proverbs 26:11 is quoted in 2 Peter 2:22.
5. First Kings 3:5-14 tells the story of Solomon when he was a young man, praying for wisdom. How did God give him wisdom? Is it possible for God to give a wisdom implant?
6. From the time of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, true wisdom has been all about making right choices. Eve, and later Adam, chose to eat the fruit from the tree and gain the knowledge that Satan wanted them to have—the knowledge of evil. And all the rest of us have followed that pattern. (See Romans 5.) Did Adam and Eve have knowledge but little wisdom?

Man lost all because he chose to listen to the deceiver rather than to Him who is Truth, who alone has understanding. By the mingling of evil with good, his mind had become confused.—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 25.

7. The book of Proverbs is all about parents giving an excellent education to their children. Proverbs 1-3 illustrate this method of education.
8. Read Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10. What does it mean to say that “to have wisdom, you must first have reverence for the Lord”? The more traditional translations talk about “the fear of the Lord.” What is that fear? Should we be scared to death of God? First John 4:18 tells us that love casts out all fear. How should we relate that passage to *the fear of the Lord* which is mentioned frequently in Proverbs? In these contexts, *fear* means reverence or awe.
9. Read Exodus 19:16 and 20:18-20 in one of the more traditional translations. Fear, reverence, or awe of God should characterize every Christian who has an acute consciousness of God’s personal presence at all times and everywhere. Should we be afraid of God? Or, just in awe? Practicing the presence of God was made famous by Brother Lawrence, a lay brother in a Carmelite monastery in Paris who lived from approximately 1614 until 1691. His book, *Practicing the Presence of God* is still popular in some circles.
10. What would it mean to us on a day-by-day basis to practice the presence of God? If we were constantly aware of God as being right with us, how would it affect our day-by-day activities? When we are tempted to sin, would it matter to think of God as right beside us? Surely, God’s wisdom incorporated into our thinking would help to protect us from falling into evil.
11. Why do you think the Bible seems to use the word *fear* to describe anxiety and terror as well as respect and worship? Is there a complete spectrum from terror to reverence? Of all the books of the Bible, Proverbs talks more about *the fear of the Lord* than any other book.
12. The idea that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and especially wisdom is repeated several times in Scripture. (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10)
13. Read Proverbs 3:7, *NIV, NASB*; Compare Job 1:1; 28:28. What is the most practical way to fear the Lord and shun evil? How does regular prayer, Bible study, and witnessing to others about God’s goodness help us in this process? Have you ever tried to live an entire day practicing the

presence of God? What would happen if we did that more and more?

14. God, our Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, and Friend is in His very essence, love. (1 John 4:8,16) To know Him is to love Him. That does not preclude the fact that we live in awe and reverence of Him. The better we know Him, the more awe, reverence, and love we should have for Him.
15. But, how do we learn that kind of awe and reverence for God? It is the work of parents to transmit this teaching to their children.

In His wisdom the Lord has decreed that the family shall be the greatest of all educational agencies. It is in the home that the education of the child is to begin. Here is his first school. Here, with his parents as instructors, he is to learn the lessons that are to guide him throughout life. . . . The educational influences of the home are a decided power for good or for evil. . . . If the child is not instructed aright here, Satan will educate him through agencies of his choosing.—Ellen G. White, *Pacific Union Recorder*, August 18, 1910, par. 1; *Counsels to Parents and Teachers* 107.1; *The Adventist Home* 182.2.

A well-ordered Christian household is a powerful argument in favor of the reality of the Christian religion—an argument that the infidel cannot gainsay. All can see that there is an influence at work in the family that affects the children, and that the God of Abraham is with them. If the homes of professed Christians had a right religious mold, they would exert a mighty influence for good. They would indeed be the “light of the world.” [Matthew 5:16] The God of heaven speaks to every faithful parent in the words addressed to Abraham: “I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him.” [Genesis 18:19]—*Patriarchs and Prophets* 144.3; *AH* 36.2; *CE* 222.1; *MYP* 325.3. [Content in brackets is added.]

16. To illustrate the true meaning of *love*, the most important thing that a father can do for his children is to love their mother. Time spent with our children will be of much greater value to them than anything we can do in our businesses or gifts we might give them or other things we might bestow upon them. Parents should fear less that their children are not doing what they tell them to do, and fear more that their children are watching them.
17. So, how can we teach our children to resist temptations that culture, society, friends, and even family might throw their way? Surely, no one in our modern world doubts that we are surrounded by evil. How can we keep our focus on Jesus?
18. Read Proverbs 1:11,18. These verses seem to portray wisdom as walking through the streets of the city, crying out for people to listen. Are we listening?
19. Read Proverbs 1:22-32. What happens to those who choose some other path instead of listening to the wisdom of God? People who turn aside from God’s path will get sick and die, and Proverbs tells us they will get what they deserve!
20. Many modern educators, scholars, and the media make fun of those who hold to religious beliefs. Christians are marked as simple and naïve. But, a careful look into the situation will show that those people have their own superstitions and crazy ideas.
21. Read Proverbs 1:33. What kind of security is God promising in this verse? Is this security for the present life? Or, only a promise of a secure future life? Or, both?
22. Read Proverbs 2:1-5. These verses suggest that the Lord gives us wisdom, but we have to search for it. Why is that? The passage suggests that there is a three-step process for receiving wisdom. The **first** is a passive stage of listening. We need to have our ears open to God’s words. **Secondly**, we need to be asking God to give us this wisdom. **Finally**, we must value it

as treasure and continue to search for more.

23. Read Proverbs 2:10-22. As we come to know God, is it true that we will know more clearly than ever the right path in which to walk? Will we develop a sense of rightness, justice, and fairness? Could we actually come to enjoy doing what is right? Could this wisdom imparted from God prevent us from doing what is wrong? Surely, if we could reach the place where we daily and hourly choose to do right because it is right, we are on our way to understanding the wisdom of God. (See *Christ's Object Lessons* 97 and *Desire of Ages* 668.3.)
24. What is one of the first things that happens when we are led astray and fall into evil? Read Proverbs 2:13,17. The first step in doing evil is turning away from God's guidance for our lives. No one can walk on the wrong path and the right path at the same time.
25. How many of us actually enjoy sinning? Why do we sin? Is it because we enjoy it for one reason or another? Is it possible for us to rationalize sin to the point where we no longer think it is sinful? What is Satan's role in that process?
26. Read Proverbs 3:7. One of the worst conditions that we as human beings can find ourselves in is the condition of pride and selfishness in which we feel that we are wise. Such a condition is almost hopeless. (Proverbs 26:12)
27. Read Proverbs 3:13-18. If we follow the path of God's wisdom and accept His guidance, we are promised riches, long life, honor, and the passage goes on to tell us that is better than gold, jewels, or silver. More than that, it is compared to the tree of life!
28. Read Proverbs 3:19-20. The Scriptures make it very clear that it is only the power of God that keeps everything in the universe working. (Psalm 36:9; Acts 17:24-25,28; *MB* 74.3; *Ed* 197.5) Shouldn't it be patently obvious that the God who created us, who loves us, and who wants us to return to live with Him forever understands what is best for us? He wrote the "owner's manual" which we should follow.
29. Proverbs 3:35 suggests that the wise shall inherit glory. Doesn't that suggest that God's wisdom involves understanding something of the great controversy?

The youth need to understand the deep truth underlying the Bible statement that with God "is the fountain of life." Psalm 36:9. Not only is He the originator of all, but He is the life of everything that lives. It is His life that we receive in the sunshine, in the pure, sweet air, in the food which builds up our bodies and sustains our strength. It is by His life that we exist, hour by hour, moment by moment. Except as perverted by sin, all His gifts tend to life, to health and joy.—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 197.5-198.0.

Many cherish the impression that devotion to God is detrimental to health and to cheerful happiness in the social relations of life. But those who walk in the path of wisdom and holiness find that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." [1 Timothy 4:8] They are alive to the enjoyment of life's real pleasures.—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1156.4. [Content in brackets is added.]

30. What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge? Have you ever met someone who seemed to be very knowledgeable but sometimes acted very foolishly? Wouldn't Solomon be a great example of such a person? How could someone who was blessed with so much wisdom make such a fool of himself? He certainly had plenty of knowledge. Why did God give it to him? Why did God give Samson all that strength?

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