

The Wisdom of the Proverbs  
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**Larry Kroon:** When you study through the Old Testament story like we have these past months there's great wisdom to be gained, insights and truth that will help us sort out how best to live in this world that has rebelled against God's grace as we wait for the coming of God's king, Jesus. That wisdom is not always highlighted for us. It's not always put right there in a packaged form in the story for us to walk away with. And so what the Bible does to help us get a grip on that wisdom is in portions of scripture you'll find that it is encapsulated into little proverbs, short statements, statements that get your attention. They're not very long, and they kinda challenge your thinking a little bit, sometimes like a little riddle. But when you grasp them, and when you look at them and kind of absorb them they give you a very immediate way to begin to apply the wisdom that we can pick up in these stories, and the wonder of what God is doing in His great workings of grace.

And what I wanted to do today is I asked John Doak, one of our staff members, to take our congregation into what is one of my favorite passages of scripture. And whenever I am lost in a fog I go to the book of Proverbs to just make things very clear and concrete as to what I ought to be doin' next. And so John, who's up here wearing a bright orange shirt, will be doing that. And I know you'll look and say, 'Where's the bright orange shirt?' John is color-blind and he thinks it's an orange shirt, and I've found best with John to just kinda go along with him. Ok? So John will be taking us through into the book of Proverbs. The reason I wanted John is he, on our staff, is a retired Master Sergeant. And he spent his entire career helping young eighteen-year-old men get a grip on wisdom. And my understanding from the other military men on our staff is it is very difficult to do that in the Army. You can do it in the Marines, and the Navy, and the Air Force, but getting young men to grip wisdom in the Army is very difficult. And so we have found that John has come to appreciate Proverbs. They have had a profound impact on his life and his ministry to other people. And so with that, John, take us into Proverbs.

**John Doak:** Thank you, Larry, I think. Go Army!

The primary writer of the book of Proverbs is Solomon, so I'd like to introduce you a little bit to Solomon. King Solomon was wise, really wise. In fact, many of you are familiar with the time when God, early in his kingship, offered him...asked him what he wanted. And he asked for wisdom. Many of you are familiar with that story, and God gave him wisdom. As we look in 1 Kings 4 we get a glimpse of how great that wisdom was. It says

*Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment, and breadth of mind like the sand that is on the seashore. And Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol, and his fame was known in all the surrounding nations.*

Do you have any idea who these guys are? Frankly, neither do I. But I do know that Ethan and Heman were most likely a writer of at least two of our Psalms. Without doubt, this was a collection of wise men of the day, and people of the day would have recognized these men as wise men. And Solomon's wisdom surpassed it all. If it was today, it would be like us putting up the names Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Abraham Lincoln, Larry Kroon, Mark Doner. The wise men of the day are surpassed by the wisdom of Solomon. That's what the writer is trying to get across. In fact, centuries went by and there was only one man that it was ever said, "One greater than Solomon is here," and that was Jesus Christ, of course. So other than Jesus Christ we're talking about the wisest man that ever walked the earth.

We get another glimpse when it says that

*He spoke of trees from the cedar that is in Lebanon, even to the hyssop that grows on the wall. He spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish. And men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who heard of his wisdom.*

His wisdom had gone out into the world, and people were traveling to Israel just to hear Solomon speak, it was so amazing. Remember just a few verses before it said that his wisdom was as the expanse...as the breadth of the sands on the sea...immeasurable wisdom God gave Solomon.

And Solomon shared that wisdom with us when he wrote the book of Proverbs. Now, there are other writers of wisdom in scripture, but primarily Solomon is our wisdom writer. We're gonna look at his proverbs today.

And the book of Proverbs begins with an intro from the wise king that says that

*These are the proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel.*

And then he tells us why we should read them, why we should study them, why we should put them to memory. We do this

*To know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive instruction in wise behavior, righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the naïve, to the youth knowledge and discretion.*

He continues

*A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel.*

The proverbs are for everybody, young and old, fool to wise. It's for everybody to gain, and he gives us two of those. Then he gives us a goal. When you're reading the Proverbs your goal is

*...to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles.*

And just in case we might miss the point of the book, Solomon puts his thesis statement right up front. It's the first proverb that we get the riddle through, and it's the key verse from my perspective. It says that

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

We're given a choice. We're given a choice between beginning knowledge by fearing the LORD, or being a fool and despising wisdom and instruction. Now, I'm not here to call you a fool. That's your choice. You get to make the choice of whether or not you're going to begin with knowledge and fear of the LORD, or you're going to despise wisdom and instruction.

Now the layout of the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs has always intrigued me. This idea is not original with me, but I like the way it fits the book. Solomon, being a wise man, is speaking to his son. And he wants his son to hear instruction, and he wants his son to hear teaching. But again, remember he's a wise man. He knows who he's talking to, so he couches it in a very interesting way. He introduces his son to two women. Now, I've got two sons. One's twenty and one's thirteen. And there comes a time in every young man's life where they start getting interested in girls. You start noticing that they start taking showers more than once a month. You start noticing that they care about their hair. You start noticing that they complain to Mom that their clothes aren't 'cool'. Ok? It just happens.

I'll give you an illustration from when I was young. My parents had nine kids. First they had five girls in a row, then they had four boys in a row. And on one occasion my father was taking the four of us boys on a fishing trip. And we were heading north on a country road. And on the side of the road we passed two young ladies, each riding a horse. And we drove past them, and when they got in the rear-view mirror my father said, "Alright, boys, what color were the horses?" Well, my oldest brother spoke up first and he said, "What horses?" The next oldest brother, he chimes in and he says, "I know. It was a blond and a brunette." And I was younger; I was able to correctly identify the color of the horses. And my father says, "Whoa, John! You didn't notice the girls?" And my younger brother said, "What girls?"

It happens in every young man's life...they start to notice girls. Solomon knew this. Remember, he was a wise man. He knew that his son would become interested in a woman. And he wants to give him a choice. So the first nine chapters of the book he describes two women, two very enticing women that Solomon wants to introduce to his son. The first woman is called Wisdom...beautiful woman. Solomon is encouraging his son to pursue her. And he says, and he gives us a list...well, you find the list throughout the book. He says, 'When you pursue Wisdom you will gain blessing, long life, pleasant ways; when you go after Wisdom you will have peace, happiness, security. If Wisdom is what you pursue, Son, you will have no fear, you will gain confidence, you will be guarded, you will be exalted. You go after Wisdom, you'll even be crowned and you will gain health.' And this is not a complete list.

The first nine chapters develops this, and you can see the benefits of wisdom throughout the proverbs as you go through.

Yet there's another woman that Solomon wants to introduce to his son, also a beautiful woman. Wisdom calls in the streets. This woman is said to be lurking. She hangs out at the corners. Solomon does not want his son to pursue her. Her name is Folly. And he says, 'Son, if you go after Folly you'll get death, destruction, stumbling. If Folly is what you're chasing after you will have fear, sleeplessness, loss of vigor. If Folly is the woman that you want to become interested in you'll have bitterness, poverty, strife; hunger will be yours; disgrace. And if this is what you want to chase after, you'll end up in utter ruin.' And the list is not complete. Solomon is encouraging his son. He's saying, 'Hey, I know you're going to be interested in a woman. That's ok. Wisdom is what I want you to pursue. Avoid the Folly.'

What a book, because then he develops that and it's given to us throughout the whole book...the difference between choosing wisdom versus folly. He couches it in another way. He says

*How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; for its profit is better than the profit of silver, and its gain than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire compares with her. Son, pursue wisdom.*

Now he compares wisdom to going after gold, silver, and precious jewels. And I was reminded of my first...well, when I came back up here in 2003 we went...took the family and went up into Hatcher's Pass. I'm sure many of you've been up to Hatcher's Pass and Independence Mine. Anybody ever taken the tour? We had some guests with us, so we paid for the tour. We went on the tour, and they showed us the dorms where the miners lived. They showed us the cookhouse; they showed us the place where they refined the gold. They even took us into a mine shaft and let us see all that. And it was a really neat tour; learned a lot about Independence Mine. And then the tour guide was telling us that there was a...this pile of rocks on the side of the hill. It's correctly called the tailings pile. And I was listening to her; she said they chip through the rock, they look for gold, and if they don't find it they pitch the tailings down the hill. And the whole side of this hill was covered with piles of rock. And she said that we were welcome to go up in there and look for gold if we want to when the tour was over. And she said that in the past she has had people that were on the tour that have gone up in the tailings pile and found gold. Now, I don't know if they just wanted us to rearrange their rock pile or whatever, but it was enticing. And when the tour was over my son said, "Dad, can we get up in there and look for gold?" I said, "Yeah, let's go!" So we went up into the tailings pile, and we're flippin' over rocks...you never know. They might have missed something. And we're looking... It's fun looking for gold! I was talking to a gentleman earlier today who has a river running through his property, and he can't wait to get out there with a gold pan. He says, "You know what the problem is? You find one little bit, you're hooked. You start goin' for it." But that's ok. It's fun.

But we're not talking about a tailings pile here in the book of Proverbs. We're talking about the mother load! There is so much gold here to be had, and it's in nuggets! It's in pieces that you find. I have a tradition that when I'm going to preach something I like to read through it at least a half dozen times. That's hard to do with the book of Proverbs, to read through it, because you stop, you go, "Oh, that's good!" And that's what you're supposed to do. Stop and you riddle through that verse, see what it's saying...or that proverb.

I highly recommend, and it's one of my goals today is to encourage you to take the book of Proverbs and to read through it. Now there's a traditional way of doing it. I like it, and I've talked to many people who have done this in the past and will do it again. This is the month of February. We all know February's got 28 days this year. Next Sunday's the 28<sup>th</sup>. On the first of March is Monday next week; March has 31 days. Proverbs has 31 book...chapters. You can do a chapter a day, and that's a good way of doing it. Some of you have already done that. I would encourage you to do it again. Read through Proverbs, a chapter a day. Do it with your family; do it with your spouse; do it with yourself, or at work, or whatever you need to do. But take a look at this book, and take a chapter a day. You'll enjoy it.

I have changed the way I used to read Proverbs. I can show you in an old Bible that I have where all my favorites are underlined. And I recently...when I came here I got a new Bible, and I don't have any underlinings in Proverbs now. And there's a reason for that. I'll just share with you my thinking. Is when I'm reading through Proverbs I like to see what's there each and every time. And if I underline my favorite I'm going to stop at that. My eyes are going to go to that, and I might miss something. So I leave it all not underlined so I can read through and it's fresh each time. Do it however you want, but I would highly recommend that when you do find a proverb that just is like, 'Oh, this is good!' write it down on a 3" x 5" card; stick it in your pocket; carry it with you. Because these are not just proverbs to be read. These are proverbs to be lived. Take it with you. Put it to memory. And then you can give

the 3" x 5" card to somebody else because that proverb will be in your heart and in your mind, and you'll start to be able to live it. You'll be...I don't know if you'll be surprised at how often those proverbs will come back in your daily life. Remember, Solomon was a wise man, and wisdom is for daily living.

I'm going to take you through some proverbs. These are the ones I've picked out. There's no way I could read all thirty-one chapters for you in thirty minutes. There's only thirty minutes, thirty-one chapters, couldn't do it. This one, very common, and in fact many of you have already selected this as your life verse. That's not surprising. I find myself quoting this proverb to myself and to my family often. It says

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your path straight.*

That's good stuff. I'm gonna read you some more, give you some more options to look at here. Proverbs of Solomon.

*When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable. But he who restrains his lips is wise.*

*The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered.*

You'll notice that Solomon touches on almost every aspect of life. He talks about marriage. He talks about interpersonal relationships. He talks about friendships. He talks about finances. He talks about discipline. He talks about work. He talks about laziness. He talks about industriousness. He talks about...he was wise. He covers everything in this book. You just gotta find it. These are nuggets of gold that we look for.

*A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his words, and the deeds of a man's hands will return to him.*

I need to take a pause here and explain something. On...when I develop slides for a sermon I'm very careful to always make sure that you get the reference, so you can see where we are in scripture. That's courteous. I didn't do that this time—these are my nuggets of gold. Go find your own! This was intentional...I'm not giving you the reference. What I want you to do is see a proverb and say, "Oh, that's really good. Where is that?" It's between chapter 1 and chapter 31. Go find it! It's in there. You'll be surprised...no, you won't be surprised. When you go looking for that proverb you will run into many others that are applicable to your life. So sue me if you want to; you're not gonna get any references. You're gonna get some proverbs. If you like some, quickly memorize it or go look for it.

Let's keep goin'. Discipline...

*He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently.*

This is one of my favorites. If you are a owner of a tractor or a bulldozer, or a front end loader, you'll appreciate this. I recommend that you put it on a poster and hang it in your shop. It says

*Where no oxen are the manger is clean. But much revenue comes by the strength of an ox.*

Isn't that kinda fun? Just lets you know that there's pluses and minuses to everything. You own an 'ox', you got some work to do. You've gotta change the oil, you've gotta do the maintenance on the front end, you've gotta break track occasionally. But you gain from that. These are things we can live by.

This is a common one. Many of us know this; many of us heard this proverb from our parents. I know I did.

*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

*Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and turmoil with it.*

*Better is a dish of vegetables where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it.*

I guess if you don't like cleaning the stall you can eat the ox, but these are designed to make you think, to stop and say, "I wonder what's being said here. What can I learn from this?"

*All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the LORD weighs the motives.*

Some of these get right to the heart, right where we live, and say, 'How am I to live?' Solomon was being intentional when he did these.

*Commit your works to the LORD and your plan will be established.*

What a foundational proverb. If there's one that you can give your children and say, 'Hey, this is one you gotta memorize,' wow.

The LORD has a sense of humor. The other...Thursday night we have an application group in our house, and one of my friends is in the application group. And he was telling me that he lives on a driveway that's like this [makes a steep slant motion]. It's a sheet of ice right now. My driveway, which he walks over to get to my house, is a sheet of ice. And he's telling me, "You know, down at the Knik River at the man-made lake there's really soft sand right now. You can go get gravel and sand." He says, "That's what I'm doing for my driveway." Great idea. So Friday my wife was off shopping. I thought, "Here's my opportunity, I'll get some points." I grabbed four 5-gallon buckets, threw 'em in the trunk of my car, ran down to the Knik River, and shoveled up some sand and gravel in there. And I came back and I park in my shelter. And I'm thinking, "Ha, I've got this figured out. I'm gonna look really good. My wife's gonna come home, she's gonna have a nice gravel path to walk in when she parks her car." And I was quite proud of myself. Took two steps out onto the ice... Yep, crashed. I'm standing there with a bucket of sand and I'm slipping on the ice. As I hit the ground I'm thinking, "LORD, pride does go before a fall." It's like, "Ok, You have a sense of humor. You can drive these things home." This one is a very common proverb. You've probably heard this one outside the walls of a church. Many people you work with know this proverb. It's probably one of the most quoted proverbs out there. And many people have no clue that they're even speaking scripture. You get to know the proverbs, when one of your coworkers quotes a proverb and they think they're quoting Shakespeare you can say, "Did you know that that's in the Bible? That's a proverb of Solomon."

Here's another one of my favorites.

*A gray head is a crown of glory.*

Amen? A couple of you should say amen. I can see that.

*A gray head is a crown of glory. It is found in the way of righteousness.*

For all you hunters out there...

*Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs rather than a fool in his folly.*

Now there's a thinker for you, isn't it? Who would want to meet a bear robbed of her cubs? It's crazy! And yet, Solomon is saying better off there than meeting a fool in his folly.

*Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise. When he closes his lips he is considered prudent.*

I think this is a good time for a moment of silence. [waits a moment] I used this proverb the other day. I was invited to a meeting with Larry and another gentleman. And before I went to the meeting I was thinking, "I'm out of my class here. These are two smart guys and I gotta go to this meeting." And I took this proverb with me. I thought, "If I come into the meeting and just keep my mouth shut they might think I'm wise." So I did that. I didn't speak until I was invited to speak. It can help you in life.

*He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.*

Alright, guys, way to go! That was a safe thing to do.

*Bread obtained by falsehood is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel.*

I gotta admit...that one there, when I came across it I couldn't not put it in because my wife is gonna be in the service. So...

*The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe.*

Isn't this good? Isn't this something... This is a proverb, think about it, that if you put to memory now...if you put this proverb to memory now, when will you need it the most? When you need a strong tower. Ok? These are things that become part of your life that are worth having. This isn't just some sayings of a man. These are the sayings of the wisest man that ever lived besides Jesus. And he gives us direction and hope in these proverbs.

This one I ran into thirty years ago, and I've always liked it. It says,

*For the lack of wood the fire goes out. And when there is no whisperer, contention dies down.*

That's a thinker for you. I really enjoy this proverb. I like camping, I like building a fire, and I'll sit there and I'll watch a fire forever, even until it dies down. When you stop putting wood on it, it dies down. And when there is no whisperer, contention quiets down. Kind of a neat picture. The book of Proverbs is full of these.

*How much better is it to get wisdom than gold, and to get understanding, to be chosen, above silver.*

These were my selections of nuggets. I can't encourage you strong enough to go get your own. Get into the book of Proverbs. I'll remind you again...a week from tomorrow starts the month of March. March has thirty-one days. Proverbs has thirty-one chapters. Read a chapter a day. Get a 3" x 5" card. Write down your favorite proverbs. There's going to be some that just jump off the page, and say, "Wow, that one's for me." Put it to memory. Put the card in your pocket. Put it on your dashboard. Take it with you. Make that part of your life. Pursue that wisdom.

Interesting as you read the book of Proverbs...you will find at the very end there is a passage written by another gentleman, not Solomon. And at the end of his writing, the last half of chapter 31, you will find a description of a woman—a godly wife. And many of you know that passage, and it just goes into just great detail of how wonderful this wise woman is. And I know Solomon didn't read that, but I know that the book is arranged by the Spirit. It's just interesting to me that He takes nine chapters at the very front of the book and says, "Son, pursue wisdom. She's worth going after." And then, at the end of the book, he gives him a picture. Well, he doesn't, but the other writer gives a picture of what that wise woman is. And I can only encourage you to pursue wisdom in the book of Proverbs.

You can tell I'm kind of excited about this book. I've been spending some time in it. And every time I do, I get a renewed excitement. It's good stuff—wisdom. And when you do this, and when you get these proverbs in your head and in your heart, the LORD may give you an opportunity to share those. He may give you an opportunity to share those with family, with friends, or with coworkers. And that's partly one of the reasons why we sing a prayer at the end of every service here lately, the thousand days of witness that we're a third of the way through, is that we are asking God to give us confidence when we have the opportunity to speak His word. What better place to start than starting to get some good, wise sayings in your head and in your heart that you can share with people.

So if you would stand with me, we are going to close our service with this prayer, that God would give us in every circumstance confidence to speak His word.

[Congregation sings the prayer song.]

Go in God's grace and extend His grace. Amen.