

January 3, 2016

Pursue Wisdom in 2016

Proverbs 1:1-7

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

**2** Their purpose is to teach people wisdom and discipline, to help them understand the insights of the wise.

**3** Their purpose is to teach people to live disciplined and successful lives, to help them do what is right, just, and fair.

**4** These proverbs will give insight to the simple, knowledge and discernment to the young.

**5** Let the wise listen to these proverbs and become even wiser. Let those with understanding receive guidance

**6** by exploring the meaning in these proverbs and parables, the words of the wise and their riddles.

**7** Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

Prior to Advent we were preaching through the Old Testament. In our journey through the books of the Old Testament we've completed through the book of Psalms. So today we'll be in Proverbs. Someone has said that:

"The Proverbs are highly compressed, carefully chosen words of wisdom that have been skillfully crafted to stick in our minds so that our behavior changes."

A proverb has been called a "short sentence founded upon long experience." That's wisdom from experience! That's what the Proverbs of the Bible are – observations from experience put in carefully chosen words to help us remember them. Proverbs are easy to say and hard to forget.

We have our own proverbs that we have learned over the years. Let's try a little test. I'll say the first half of a proverb and you speak out the ending of the proverb:

A dog is a man's...best friend.

Don't cry over...spilled milk.

Don't judge a book...by its cover.

Sticks and stones may break my bones...but words will never hurt me.

Don't count your chickens...before they hatch.

Many hands...make light work.

People in glass houses...shouldn't throw stones.

The early bird...catches the worm.

(Well, the early bird may catch the worm, but the second mouse...gets the cheese.)

A first grade teacher did a similar test. She gave the class the first half of some well known proverbs and asked them to fill in the rest. Here are some of the responses she got:

Strike while the ...bug is close  
Never underestimate the power of ...termites  
Don't bite the hand that... looks dirty  
You can't teach an old dog new... math  
If you lie down with dogs, you'll ... stink in the morning  
An idle mind is ...the best way to relax  
A penny saved is ... not much  
There are none so blind as... Stevie Wonder  
When the blind lead the blind... get out of the way  
Better late than... pregnant

Have you ever noticed that many Country and Western songs are proverb-like. Here are a few song titles – I'm not making these up. These are actual song titles:

"How Can I Miss You If You Won't Go Away?"  
"I Would Have Wrote You a Letter, But I Couldn't Spell...Yuck!"  
"I Bought the Shoes That Just Walked Out on Me."  
"I Liked You Better Before I Knew You So Well."  
"I've Got Tears in My Ears from Lying on My Back While I Cry Over You."

What is the Purpose of the Proverbs?  
Our text itself tells us the Purpose of the Proverbs:

Proverbs 1:2-5

Their purpose is to teach people wisdom and discipline,  
to help them understand the insights of the wise.

Their purpose is to teach people to live disciplined and successful lives,  
to help them do what is right, just, and fair.

These proverbs will give insight to the simple,  
knowledge and discernment to the young.

Let the wise listen to these proverbs and become even wiser.  
Let those with understanding receive guidance...

To teach wisdom, discipline, understanding , knowledge, discernment and guidance.

One of the things I've done and would recommend to you is to read a proverb a day. There are 31 chapters in the book of Proverbs and there are 31 days in January so if you start today you can read a proverb a day in January... a good way to start of the New Year. And each month you can continue the practice. It will teach wisdom.

What is "Wisdom"?

What exactly is "wisdom"? The dictionary defines "wisdom" as the ability to discern what

is true or right. So our English word "wisdom" has both moral implications--discerning what's right--and intellectual implications--discerning what's true.

The Hebrew word translated "wisdom" in the Bible is a bit more interesting than our English word. The Hebrew word translated "wisdom" (hochma) usually refers to some kind of skill or ability. It was originally used to describe the work of weavers who weave the elaborate garments of Aaron, the high priest. Since the high priest and his clothing typified the ultimate high priest, Jesus Christ, it was imperative that the weavers follow God's exact specifications for the priests' garments.

Exodus 28:3

Instruct all the skilled craftsmen whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom. Have them make garments for Aaron that will distinguish him as a priest set apart for my service.

The weavers' ability to follow God's design for making the garments was labeled "wisdom." From that point on, the Israelites equated wisdom with a skill for living, and wisdom has since been defined as "the skill to live life according to God's plan." The wise person is one who patterns his finances, his goals, his relationships, and every aspect of his life according to the specifications revealed in God's Word. And Proverbs deal with all those issues: finances, relationships- marriage, parenting etc.

So the Hebrew word distinguishes wisdom from knowledge, because a person can have a mind full of facts, yet lack authentic wisdom. Wisdom is what we need to fulfill God's purpose for our life. God has a design for each of us. We need wisdom to fulfill that design.

How do we apply the wisdom of Proverbs?

It's important to understand how to apply the wise sayings from Proverbs to our lives. The sayings we find in the book of Proverbs are generalizations about what's true most of the time. They're guidelines for wise living, not rigid, absolute promises. These sayings tell us what usually works in most circumstances. But the proverbs don't work in every, single circumstance.

So we shouldn't read Proverbs as if these wise sayings are absolute promises or laws. For example, one proverb tells us, "A gentle answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1). That's true most times, but it's not always true, it's true in more circumstances than it's not true. So it makes sense to give a gentle answer when someone's really mad, but this proverb is not a guarantee that a gentle answer will always defuse anger.

Let me give you another example: One of the proverbs tells us, "The years of the wicked will be short" (Proverbs 10:27). That's true more often than not, but it's not true in every single case.

So proverbs are observations about how life works in most cases. This is very important to understand, especially when it comes to verses about parenting and marriage. But, Proverbs are wise sayings that are relevant to many different situations.

### How Does One Pursue Wisdom?

How does one acquire wisdom. The place to begin is the fear of the Lord. Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord.

### Proverbs 1:7 (NIV)

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

In this verse, the words, "knowledge," "wisdom" and "discipline" are all being used to describe the same thing. Most Bible teachers view this verse as the motto or theme of the entire book of Proverbs. Every wise saying we find in Proverbs goes back to this foundational principle.

Getting wisdom begins with the fear of God, and so getting wisdom begins with receiving Christ that you might know God.

### 1 Corinthians 1:24-25

Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

The fear of the Lord has two sides: One side is to hate evil, to hate sin, and to avoid sin at all cost. The other side is delight in doing God's will.

### Psalms 112:1

How joyful are those who fear the LORD and delight in obeying his commands.

To fear God means to view God with deep and healthy respect as shown in one's hatred of evil, and love for what God wants.

One of the best words to describe the fear of the Lord is reverence. Reverence is a response to a revelation of God. When God reveals Himself, I believe the only appropriate response is reverence. And with it goes submissiveness. A submissive attitude toward God is an expression of the fear of the Lord in our lives. To fear God is to desire to live in harmony with His righteous standards and to honor Him in all that you do. It is an awareness that you are in the presence of a holy, just, and almighty God and that He will hold you accountable for your motives, thoughts, words, and actions.

Let me give you another requirement for receiving wisdom - You must passionately pursue it. Look at ...

### Proverbs 4:7-8 (THE MESSAGE by Eugene H. Peterson)

Above all and before all, do this: Get Wisdom!

Write this at the top of your list: Get Understanding!

Throw your arms around her — believe me, you won't regret it; never let her go — she'll make your life glorious.

Notice the commands "get wisdom," "Write it at the top of your list," "get understanding,"

"esteem wisdom," "embrace wisdom," and "never let her go." The pursuit of wisdom is one of the most important things in life we can do. It's more important than making a lot of money. If we honor wisdom, wisdom will lift us up. If we embrace wisdom, wisdom will bring true satisfaction to our lives.

Now how do we passionately pursue this kind of wisdom? Well we start by boldly asking God for wisdom. In the New Testament we learn that if we lack in wisdom, we should ask God for it, and he'll give it to us if we ask him in faith.

James 1:5

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.

So we start our pursuit by admitting that we lack wisdom and asking God for it. Often we lack wisdom because we're not humble enough to ask God for it.

We can also pursue wisdom by reading the Bible ...but that's not all you must also applying it. The "path of the righteous" is a common theme in Proverbs. This phrase pictures life as being like a journey with lots of different roads we can take. The "path of the righteous" isn't righteous because of character of the people who choose this path. The "path of the righteous" is righteous because it's consistent with God's righteous character, so walking this righteous path makes a person righteous, rather than the person making the path righteous.

In contrast "the path of the wicked" is a place of utter darkness. Like the path of the righteous, this path isn't wicked because of the kind of people who choose it, but its wicked because it's inconsistent with the righteous character of God. This is the path I lived before Christ. I lived in rebellion towards God and refused to acknowledge God's ways. Often, you don't realize the darkness on this path because it's the only path you've ever walked. Yet as you walk this dark path you wonder why you keep stumbling and falling. You wonder why life doesn't work for you, why your relationships keep falling apart, why circumstances never seem to go your way. You chalk it up to bad luck, when in reality it's because you're living against the grain of God's world, you've chosen the hard path, the path of wickedness.

God's word serves us like a compass when you're out in the middle of a forest lost not knowing where to go. A moral code provides us with a direction, a sense of what's right and what's wrong, of what's good and what's evil. You see, when we live by an accurate moral code, we live with what God has set, and life works for us. When we live by an inaccurate moral code, we live against what God has set for His creation. An inaccurate moral code is like a broken compass, and we end up getting even more and more lost.

Let me give you the final requirement for acquiring wisdom: To live wisely, we need to build a life plan that is consistent with God's plan. Look at Proverbs 19:21  
You can make many plans, but the LORD 's purpose will prevail.

This wise saying presents a contrast between the many intentions, goals and aspirations that characterize the human heart with the single plan of God. The implication of this proverb is that we ought to try to make our plans consistent with God's plan.

A wise person aligns his or her life to God's purpose. To do otherwise would be foolish since he or she knows that God's purpose would prevail and would be what is meaningful in the end.

When you think about success in your life, what kind of picture comes to your mind? Do you picture success as owning your own home, having successful kids who finish college, having an important job and making lots of money? Nothing's wrong with any of these things in and of themselves, but none of these things ask, "What is God's plan in my world and how can my life plan fit with God's plan?"

God's plan for the world is to share the good news of his love as it's revealed through Jesus Christ. It's to show people that God is real through words and actions that reflect the good news of Jesus Christ. God's plan is being part of a church community where we're truly seeking and living in Christlikeness, where we're learning and giving, where we're serving and sharing with others. It's helping our children not just be successful, but become passionate followers of Jesus who are equipped to live life in a culture that's often hostile to their faith. It's alleviating human suffering in our culture by embodying Christ's tenderness and compassion. It's speaking out against evil and hatred where we see it. It's helping people understand the truths of God found in the Bible.

To live wisely, we need to redefine what we mean by success. We need to abandon our quest for self-fulfillment, and abandon ourselves to Christ fulfillment. We need to find out how God has uniquely wired us and how this uniqueness can be used by God to help other people. We need to break out of our consumer mentality that we bring to church with us, and begin viewing ourselves as followers of Jesus, men and women who passionately pursue Jesus and God's purposes in our lives. We need to build a life plan that's consistent with God's plan.

#### Conclusion

Today God is inviting us to pursue wisdom. We begin this pursuit by entering a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Once that relationship is established, it's a journey that calls you to passionately pursue wisdom, to embrace an accurate moral code and to build a life plan consistent with God's plan.