

PROVERBS – Lesson 1

Introduction

By Beverly McKey

I. WHY STUDY PROVERBS?

- A. Since God made mankind in His own image, He endowed us with the ability to be taught wisdom principles and to grow in our knowledge and understanding of wisdom.
1. Adam and Eve were created with wisdom and the ability to increase in wisdom when God placed them in the Garden of Eden. **Gen. 1:28-31**
 - a. They were created with the ability to communicate:
 - 1) Adam spoke to God when Eve was presented to him. **Gen. 2:23**
 - 2) Eve spoke to the serpent when he approached her. **Gen. 2:2**
 - b. We know they were capable of understanding God's commands since Eve corrected the serpent when he asked her whether God had forbidden them to eat from ANY of the trees in the garden.
Gen. 3:1
 2. Adam was given the responsibility to tend the garden before Eve was created. **Genesis 2:15** – ^{v15} *Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.*
 3. While they understood God's commandments, they were given the freedom to choose whether they would comply or not.
 4. Adam and Eve acted foolishly when they disregarded the wisdom God gave them and listened to the lies of Satan.
- B. Solomon was another example that confirms that possessing a knowledge of what is wise does not guarantee wise action.
1. Solomon was given wisdom from God that surpassed anyone who lived before him or after him. **I Kings 3:12**
 2. Yet, like Adam and Eve, Solomon disregarded the knowledge of what is wise and behaved very foolishly in his personal life.
- C. The wisdom Adam and Eve sought from eating the forbidden fruit was unattainable; they would never be like God as the serpent said.
1. Only God is wise in the ultimate, unlimited sense.
 - a. **Jude 25** – *"To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen."*
 - b. **I Timothy 1:17** – *"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen"*
 - c. Mankind has the ability to possess wisdom in increasing measure because God gave it to him.
 2. It is up to us to develop wisdom by increasing our knowledge of God's word and applying it to things we observe and situations we experience.

- a. **Proverbs 1:5** – “*A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel,*”
- b. **Proverbs 2:6** – “*For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding,*”
- c. **Proverbs 6:6-8** – “⁶ *Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise,* ⁷ *which, having no captain, overseer or ruler,* ⁸ *provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest.*”

II. GOD HAS GIVEN US THE TOOLS NECESSARY FOR LEARNING IN THREE AREAS:

- A. First - We have the ability to know God and in wisdom serve Him with fear (reverence, awe). **Proverbs 9:10** – “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*”
 1. Having this ability does not guarantee that we will serve Him at all.
 - a. **Proverbs 1:7** – “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*”
 - b. **Romans 1:18-21** – “¹⁸ *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,* ¹⁹ *because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.* ²⁰ *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,* ²¹ *because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*”
- B. Second – God gives us the wisdom we need to treat others in the best way possible.
 1. **Proverbs 3:3** – “*Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man.*”
 2. **Proverbs 17:17** – “*A friend loves at all times...*”
 3. Treating others well is also an often repeated theme in the New Testament as well: **Philippians 2:3-4** – “³ *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.* ⁴ *Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*”
 4. The Proverbs are a reflection of the first and second great commandments – to love God with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. *Mark 12:29-31*
 5. Proverbs is a revelation from God given to Solomon for our instruction and encouragement on how to keep God first in our lives.

6. Proverbs also informs us how to deal with the good and evil found in others.
- C. Third – God has given us the wisdom we need to live in well in our physical environment.
1. Solomon possessed great wisdom in this area:
 - a. **I Kings 4:33** – *“Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. Also he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish.”*
 - b. Solomon explained to Israel that they had an obligation to be good stewards of the bounty the earth provided for survival. **Proverbs 27:23-27**
 - c. This principle of “good stewardship” with the earth’s bounty is still our obligation today. The following are passages that deal with how we should respect the earth:
 - 1) **Genesis 1:26** – man is given dominion over all the living things on earth.
 - 2) **Genesis 2:15** – Adam was told to tend and keep the garden.
 - 3) **Leviticus 25:1-55** – Rules are given for planting fields for six years, then letting the land rest in the seventh year. Farmers now know that this allows the land to replenish the nutrients required for growing bountiful crops.
 - 4) **Numbers 35-33-34** – *“You shall NOT pollute the land in which you live.”*
 - 5) Deuteronomy 22:6 – Rules for protecting a female bird that is sitting on a nest of eggs or young birds.
 - 6) **Jeremiah 2:7** – While the earth was created to provide its bounty for mankind, man’s carelessness can defile it. *“I brought you into a bountiful country, to eat its fruit and its goodness. But when you entered, you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination.”*
 - 7) The righteous must have regard for the beasts you own and treat them well. **Proverbs 12:10** – *“A righteous man regards the life of his animal, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.”*
 - 8) The earth will gradually wear out, *“like a garment”*. **Isaiah 51:6** – *“Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, the earth will grow old like a garment, and those who dwell in it will die in like manner; but My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not be abolished.”*
 - 9) This assures us that the earth will not end prematurely in a worldwide catastrophe. It will continue until God brings forth the end of time when the entire earth will be destroyed by fire.

2 Peter 3:10 – *“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”*

D. There is a fourth type of wisdom mentioned in the Bible, but it is NOT from God.

1. **James 3:14-16** – ¹⁴ *But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.* ¹⁵ *This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.* ¹⁶ *For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.”*
2. **Verses 17-18** describes wisdom from God in opposite terms: ¹⁷ *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.* ¹⁸ *Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”*
3. Studying the Proverbs and other passages on wisdom will help us to discern between godly wisdom and earthly wisdom.

III. WISDOM IS NOT ONLY VALUABLE, IT IS ONE OF THE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL LIVING

A. One of the goals of most parents is to pass some of the wisdom they have attained down to their children in the hope of helping them live successfully.

1. Solomon wrote that he received words of wisdom from his father, David, which he passed along to his sons.
 - a. **Proverbs 4:1-8** – *“Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, and give attention to know understanding; ² for I give you good doctrine: do not forsake my law. ³ When I was my father’s son, tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, ⁴ He also taught me, and said to me: ‘Let your heart retain my words; Keep my commands, and live. ⁵ Get wisdom! Get understanding! *Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. ⁶ Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; love her, and she will keep you. ⁷ Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. and in all your getting, get understanding. ⁸ Exalt her, and she will promote you; she will bring you honor, when you embrace her.”**
 - b. In teaching his son, David was observing the commandments which God had given to the children of Israel through Moses:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 – ⁴ *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!* ⁵ *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.* ⁶ *“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and 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. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and*

they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

- c. This kind of teaching is not done in mere conversation, but in lifestyle. The teaching took place:
 - 1) When they were sitting in their house
 - 2) When they lie down and when they rise up (all day)
 - 3) Scriptures were to be bound on their hand and as frontlets between your eyes. (small leather boxes containing important scriptures were tied to the left hand and on the center of the forehead as a constant reminder of their commitment to God).
 - 4) Scriptures were to be written on the doorposts of their house and on their gates so that they were reminded of God as they left their home and again as they returned to their home.
 - 5) Perhaps more of our children would remain faithful if we let God's word permeate every part of our daily lives.
2. Since Solomon's father taught him that "*Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom.*", *we should not be surprised when God offered to give Solomon anything he wanted, Solomon asked for wisdom."*

1 Kings 3:9

- a. The fact that Solomon asked for wisdom was evidence that he had already attained wisdom to a higher degree than most.
 - b. God was so pleased with his request that He said: **1 Kings 3:12** – "*Behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you.*"
 - c. God also rewarded Solomon above all that he requested by also granting him "riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. **Vs. 13**
 - d. God also made a promise to Solomon: "**IF** you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days."
- B. While Solomon's wealth was greater than any other king, he often spoke of wisdom as more valuable than gold or silver.
1. **Proverbs 3:13-15** – "*Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; ¹⁴ For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. ¹⁵ She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her.*"
 2. **Proverbs 8:10-11** – "*Receive my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; ¹¹ For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her.*"
 3. **Proverbs 16:16** – "*How much better to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.*"

- C. Wisdom is so valuable that we should be willing to sacrifice everything in order to possess it.
1. Wisdom is not simply the by-product of a long life or the accumulation of knowledge; it must be sought after.
 2. Solomon gave this advice to his own son: **Proverbs 2:1-6** – *“My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, ²so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; ³ yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, ⁴ if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; ⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. ⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding;”*
 3. We might compare this advice to the parable Jesus taught in *Matthew 13:45-46* – *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶ who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”*
 4. The thing that makes this wisdom worth searching for is its source, which is revealed in verse 6 – *“For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding;”*

IV. WISDOM IS PERSONIFIED AS A WOMAN PLEADING FOR PEOPLE TO LISTEN TO HER.

- A. In the depiction of wisdom as a woman, she is not hard to find.
1. She stands conspicuously in open places where many people pass, calling out to all who pass by:
 - a. **Proverbs 1:20-21** – *“Wisdom calls aloud outside; She raises her voice in the open squares. ²¹ She cries out in the chief concourses, at the openings of the gates in the city She speaks her words:”*
 - b. **Proverbs 8:1-6** – *“Does not wisdom cry out, and understanding lift up her voice? ² She takes her stand on the top of the high hill, beside the way, where the paths meet. ³ She cries out by the gates, at the entry of the city, at the entrance of the doors: ⁴ ‘To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. ⁵ O you simple ones, understand prudence, and you fools, be of an understanding heart. ⁶ Listen, for I will speak of excellent things, and from the opening of my lips will come right things;”*
 2. However, Wisdom is not alone in these busy places. Another woman is also depicted whose name is Folly (or the foolish woman).
 - a. In the very same locations where the voice of Wisdom cries out, Folly will be there too, competing for the souls of those who pass by.
 - b. **Proverbs 9:13-18** – *“A foolish woman is clamorous; She is simple, and knows nothing. ¹⁴ For she sits at the door of her house, on a seat by the highest places of the city, ¹⁵ to call to those who pass by, who go straight on their way: ¹⁶ “Whoever is simple, let him turn in*

here"; and as for him who lacks understanding, she says to him,
¹⁷ "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant."
¹⁸ But he does not know that the dead are there, That her guests are
 in the depths of hell."

3. Since the Garden of Eden, there has been a battle for the mind of man.
 - a. Wisdom says one thing and Folly says another.
 - b. We must decide which voice we will listen to and obey.
 - c. Folly has a talent for making wrong things look so right.
4. Wisdom has to shout her message to attract the attention of the "simple" who seem to gravitate toward "Folly" automatically.
 - a. **Proverbs 8:5-11** – "O you simple ones, understand prudence, and you fools, be of an understanding heart. ⁶ Listen, for I will speak of excellent things, and from the opening of my lips will come right things; ⁷ For my mouth will speak truth; Wickedness is an abomination to my lips. ⁸ All the words of my mouth are with righteousness; Nothing crooked or perverse is in them. ⁹ They are all plain to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge."
 - b. Wisdom pleads with the simple ones to examine her character in order to confirm her superiority over Folly.
Proverbs 8:12-17 – "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge and discretion. ¹³ The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate. ¹⁴ Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, I have strength. ¹⁵ By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice. ¹⁶ By me princes rule, and nobles, all the judges of the earth. ¹⁷ I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me."

B. It is inconceivable that God could exist without possessing wisdom, and since God is eternal, it is evident that wisdom has existed as long as God has existed.

1. Wisdom existed before the world was created.
 - a. **Proverbs 3:19-20** – "The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; By understanding He established the heavens; ²⁰ by His knowledge the depths were broken up, and clouds drop down the dew."
 - b. **Proverbs 8:22-31** – "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old. ²³ I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth. ²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding with water. ²⁵ Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth; ²⁶ while as yet He had not made the earth or the fields, or the primal dust of the world. ²⁷ When He prepared the heavens, I was there, when He drew a circle on the face of the deep, ²⁸ when He established the clouds

above, when He strengthened the fountains of the deep, ²⁹ When He assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters would not transgress His command, when He marked out the foundations of the earth, ³⁰ then I was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, ³¹ rejoicing in His inhabited world, and my delight was with the sons of men."

2. Wisdom is eternal because it is an inherent part of the nature of God.
3. Foolishness, on the other hand, has not always existed, and was not instrumental in the creation of the world.
4. Satan introduced foolishness into this world, and it will live with him throughout all eternity.

C. The voice of Wisdom warns of the danger of following after Folly.

1. **Proverbs 1:22-32** – *"How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge. ²³ Turn at my rebuke; surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you. ²⁴ Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, ²⁵ because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke, ²⁶ I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, ²⁷ When your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. ²⁸ Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. ²⁹ Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, ³⁰ They would have none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke. ³¹ Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies. ³² For the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; ³³ but whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil."*
2. Wisdom warns the foolish that even though they have the "freedom" to reject her council, they will pay the price for doing so.
3. The time to listen to wisdom is NOW, since tomorrow may be too late.
4. One cannot despise the ways of wisdom in this life and expect to live with the Almighty Jehovah in eternity.

D. The voice of Wisdom also proclaims the advantages of following after her.

1. The Wisdom found in God's word offers us quantity of life – Wisdom helps us discern between safety and danger, which helps the wise avoid obvious dangers.
 - a. **Proverbs 1:33** – *"But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil."*
 - b. **Proverbs 2:7-8** – *"He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; ⁸ He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints."*

- c. **Proverbs 3:1-2** – “*My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; ² for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you.*”
- d. **Proverbs 9:11-12** – “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. ¹¹ For by me your days will be multiplied, and years of life will be added to you.*”
- e. Wisdom is not intended to be a guarantee that the righteous will never die young. However, in general, righteousness and wisdom preserve life while foolishness and wickedness hasten death.
- 1) Millions have died young because of their foolish lifestyle.
 - 2) Millions more have died because they ignored God’s wisdom concerning the avoidance of alcohol, drugs and excessive living.
2. The Wisdom found in God’s word offers us quality of life - Consider the blessings offered to those who find wisdom.
- a. **Proverbs 3:13-18** – “*Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; ¹⁴ for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. ¹⁵ She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. ¹⁶ Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor. ¹⁷ Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. ¹⁸ She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her.”*
- 1) Pleasantness and peace are the fruit of applying the wisdom of God in our lives. **Vs. 17**
 - 2) Notice that it is not just finding wisdom that produces this happiness, it is the ability to retain wisdom throughout life. **Vs. 18**
- b. The Wisdom found in God’s word gives us confidence to face the unknowns in life that are bound to come.
- Proverbs 3:21-26** – “*Keep sound wisdom and discretion; ²² so they will be life to your soul and grace to your neck. ²³ Then you will walk safely in your way, and your foot will not stumble. ²⁴ When you lie down, you will not be afraid; yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet. ²⁵ Do not be afraid of sudden terror, nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes; ²⁶ for the LORD will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught.”*
- c. The Wisdom found in God’s word will bring quality of life to our homes:
- 1) Marriages founded upon the wisdom of God’s word that is shared by both partners, are destined to succeed.
 - 2) Statistics prove that marriages based on worldly values are highly likely to fail.

- 3) When children are taught the same principles of God's word and wisdom, the family units are immeasurably stronger than their worldly counterparts.
3. The Wisdom found in God's word will bring eternal life.
- The ultimate advantage of following God's wisdom is that it will lead us to the joys of eternal life.
 - Wisdom has always been near God and those who follow wisdom will also be near God.
 - We must live by the wisdom of God's word: **Proverbs 8:32-36**
"Now therefore, listen to me, my children, for blessed are those who keep my ways. ³³ Hear instruction and be wise, and do not disdain it. ³⁴ Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. ³⁵ For whoever finds me finds life, and obtains favor from the LORD; ³⁶ but he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; all those who hate me love death."

V. CONCLUSION:

- Many today have mistakenly considered the book of Proverbs as a human compilation of folklore.
 - On the contrary, it is the revelation of God's wisdom concerning man's relationship with God, with his family, with his neighbor, with his government, in his work ethic, with his co-workers and with his finances.
 - The very epitome of wisdom was Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of the Father, who came to reveal God to mankind and to "*seek and save the lost*" **Luke 19:10**
 - The message Jesus Christ gave the world is perfect wisdom, It is:
 - The only guide for mankind regarding salvation, morality, ethics and love.
 - God expects to reign in every aspect of the lives of His children and the wisdom of His word gives us every tool we need to achieve this.
- While thousands of years have passed since Solomon penned the majority of the book of Proverbs, it remains fresh and relevant even in these modern times.
 - Its it filled with guidance for every facet of our lives.
 - Its moral lessons are never outdated.
 - It will be our goal to apply its teaching to ourselves individually in an effort to grow in wisdom and maturity in our faith.