

## Wiser than an Owl

Now Playing: The Quest for Hidden Treasure – Part II

Proverbs 1:1-6

### Introduction

Someone sent me a list of things called, “The Perks of Getting Older”. Since I am, and maybe some of you are too, I thought I would read them. The perks of getting older include:

- In a hostage situation, you are likely to be released first.
- People call at 9 PM and ask apologetically, “Did I wake you?”
- You no longer think of speed limits as a challenge. (We’ll see about that!)
- Your investment in health insurance all these years is finally paying off.
- There is nothing left to learn the hard way.
- You can sing along with the elevator music – you know all the words.
- Your supply of brain cells is finally down to a manageable size.
- (Here is a good one!) Your secrets are safe with your friends because they can’t remember them either.

It is one thing to get older – it is another thing to grow wiser.

I have read that the book of Psalms tell us how to get along with God. The book of Proverbs tells us how to get along with people. The book of Psalms helps us know how to worship, while the book of Proverbs helps us know how to walk.

This categorization is far too simplistic, but there is a kernel of truth in it.

While the book of Psalms can be easily read in church, the book of Proverbs can be read with one eye on the text and one eye on the daily news. A sentence or two from the book of Proverbs in the middle of a quick lunch break on the job can shape the rest of our day. It is an inspired collection of God’s wisdom that can help us navigate life in the fast lane. In fact, I can safely promise that if you read just a few Proverbs every day, you will more than likely see a demonstration of these truths come to life during the day.

Derek Kidner wrote in his commentary, “The book of Proverbs [does not really] take you to church. It calls across to you in the street about some everyday matter, or points things out at home. Its function in Scripture is to put godliness into working clothes.”<sup>i</sup>

Warren Wiersbe wrote, “Proverbs is a book that tells you how to become skillful in the lost art of making a life.”<sup>ii</sup>

This book is filled with the hidden treasures of wisdom – and it is available for any treasure hunter who cares to dig beneath the surface.

### What is a Proverb?

What exactly is a proverb?

It comes from the root word “mashal,” which basically means, in its verb form, “to represent or even to guide or rule”.<sup>iii</sup>

There is no doubt that the book of Proverbs contains rules or principles which can generally represent the best way to live – and to give guidance to life.<sup>iv</sup>

The English word “proverb” tracks back to the Latin word “proverbium,” which is a compound word – “pro” meaning “on behalf of” and “verba” meaning “words”. Put the two together and we have a proverb – a short statement on behalf of many words.<sup>v</sup>

The truth is that proverbs have been one of the key ways to teach great truths simply and quickly. We will find them in any culture and in every generation.

We are familiar with a number of them in our own land. For example:

- Look before you leap.
- Nothing ventured, nothing gained.
- A stitch in time saves nine. (I have no idea what this means.)
- (Here is a somewhat longer one that I have often thought of before making a hasty decision.) Better to be standing on shore wishing you were sailing than sailing wishing you were on shore.

Mark Twain provided a proverb that President Harry Truman liked so much that he had it framed and hung in the Oval Office. It was this saying: “Always do what is right – this will gratify some and astonish the rest.”<sup>vi</sup>

A short saying or proverb that I put to memory recently is this: “You are most likely to hang yourself on the loose threads of life.”

Another one that is worth remembering, which says a lot in a very short space of time, is: “Your silence may be misinterpreted, but it can never be misquoted.”

These are just a few words that say a lot.

So, a proverb is a small statement with great significance. It stands in the place of a longer speech, yet delivers the deep lessons of truth.

None are more important than the truths in the book of Proverbs, simply because they are the inspired record of the Spirit of God. Whether we know what “a stitch in time saves nine” means or not, might not matter, but these do. God, the giver of wisdom and in fact, the personification of wisdom, made this list a part of divine revelation to guide your life and mine.

Throughout this treasure hunt, Solomon is going to give weighty words to all sorts of issues. He is going to reveal wisdom regarding our hearts, our minds, our tongues, and our spirits. He is going to talk about and delve into:

- what we should not be, but are;
- what we should be, but often are not;
- our world of relationships – family members, parents, children, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and even enemies.

Solomon is going to tell the truth about temptation, lust, greed, gossip, hatred, and disappointment. He is going to talk about finances and freedom. Rebellion and relationships will be covered a few words at a time.

Rarely are we given a written purpose statement from a book of the Bible.

In the New Testament, the apostle John gave us a rare purpose statement, as you may remember, when he wrote in John 20:30-31,

*Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;*

*but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*

In other words, the gospel of John was not the total record of Christ’s life and ministry and miracles, but it was enough for the reader to know that Jesus was no ordinary man – in fact, He was the Messiah.

The book of Proverbs is not the sum and substance of wisdom either, but it is sufficient to allow the reader to walk in wisdom.

Solomon, in fact, clearly delivers his purpose statement for this Old Testament book of the Bible. He also leaves no question as to why these Proverbs were collected.

Turn to Proverbs 1:1.

*The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:*

## **What is the Purpose of Proverbs?**

What is the purpose of the proverbs, Solomon?

The purpose is to discover seven treasures. Let us look at these.

- 1. First and foremost, there is the overarching treasure of wisdom, as Solomon writes in Proverbs 1:2a.**

*To know wisdom . . .*

In other words, “I have given you these proverbs to deliver to you and develop in you wisdom.”

The Hebrew word for “wisdom” is “chokmah,” which is the ability to make the right decision, for the right reason, at the right time.

Wisdom sets the human apart from any other created being. The intellect and reasoning of human beings has long been a source of debate in the world as to their source.

Where did wisdom come from?

The Celtic religions believed their goddess Cerridwen created wisdom. The Romans believed it came from Minerva. The Hindus pointed to their goddess of wisdom known as Saraswati.

The Greeks believed that wisdom came from the offspring of Zeus. Evidently, according to their belief, Zeus had heard a prophecy that his wife was going to give birth to a girl who would become the lord of heaven. So he swallowed his pregnant wife whole. However, when it was time for the child to be delivered, Zeus got a terrible headache and through an opening in his head, Athena, his daughter stepped out. Because she came from his head, she became the goddess of wisdom. Athens would be named after her. They built the Parthenon in her honor. She was represented by an owl as her sacred bird. It gave rise to the superstition that lasts to this day that the owl is a wise bird . . . we talk about being as wise as an owl.<sup>vii</sup>

Another word related to the owl, in fact, was adopted by the Greeks and is used to this day. A group of owls is not referred to as a flock, as with other birds, but as a parliament. Parliament referred to the gathering of wise owls. So today, we use the word parliament to refer to what we can only hope is a gathering of wise people.<sup>viii</sup>

We know that wisdom comes from God. It is first and foremost who He is. He is the all-wise God.

Jude 1:25 says (KJV paraphrased),

***He is the only wise God . . .***

James writes,

***. . . if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all . . . (James 1:5)***

Paul wrote to the Colossians and said effectively,

***I am praying for you that you will be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and understanding (Colossians 1:9)***

God communicates wisdom through the indwelling presence of the Living Word and the enriching presence of the written word.

David writes,

***The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. (Psalm 19:7)***

He goes on in Psalm 19:8 to write,

***The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.***

The written word of God imparts the ability to make the right decision, at the right time, for the right reason.

Paul reminded Timothy when he wrote,

***. . . you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you . . . wisdom – not only for salvation, but to equip you for every area of life. (II Timothy 3:15-17 paraphrased)***

In other words, wisdom is developed as a result of hearing and obeying the scripture. A wise person is not necessarily the smartest person in the church, but is the most submissive person to the scriptures.

This is the point of Solomon, “I’m delivering truths to you so that you will have wisdom.”

- 2. Secondly, Solomon says that another treasure for the seeker of truth is not only wisdom, but, as he writes in Proverbs 1:2a, *To know wisdom and instruction . . .***

This word “instruction” carries the idea of a parent’s instruction or discipline, which then builds character.

One Jewish commentator pointed out that the word used in this verse for “instruction,” or “moosar,” refers to gaining knowledge based not only on hearing the truth, but on learning from the mistakes of others. Solomon is saying that by reading this book, we can learn from the fruits of other’s experiences.<sup>ix</sup>

Have you ever learned anything from other people’s mistakes? I remember my three brothers and I learned a lot of things from their mistakes. I taught them a few lessons too.

I remember being convinced that a person could jump off the back side of our garage roof, which sloped down to about ten feet above the grassy backyard, without getting hurt if they held an umbrella in their hand. Evidently I had watched *Mary Poppins* one too many times. I was convinced that the umbrella would allow someone to float down without any problems. But, I was not totally sure of my hypothesis, so I convinced my younger brother that it would work. He happily went ahead with it.

As soon as he jumped, however, the umbrella swooshed inside out and he hit the ground.

I was able to learn from that experience.

Solomon is going to show us not just good decisions, but bad ones so that we can learn from others as we watch them.

**3. Thirdly, Solomon continues to deliver another treasure for the wisdom seeker in Proverbs 1:2b,**

*. . . to discern the sayings of understanding,*

To discern is a verb which describes an ability to distinguish between opposites – good from evil; right from wrong; honor from dishonor.

This is discernment activated by the Living Word, through the indwelling written word, submitted to and lived out.

**4. Solomon adds a fourth treasure as he writes in Proverbs 1:3a,**

*to receive instruction in wise behavior . . .*

What does this wise behavior look like? Solomon tells us, in Proverbs 1:3b,

*. . . righteousness, justice and equity;*

If there was ever a lack of wise behavior, it is in our generation. The older generation that should have been passing along the wisdom of God has abandoned its post.

The younger generation is now, one author wrote, living on the moral edge. Every day in America:

- 1,000 unwed teenage girls become mothers;
- 1,106 teenage girls have abortions;
- 4,219 teenagers contract a sexually transmitted disease;
- 1,000 teens begin drinking alcohol;
- 500 teens take their first drugs;
- 2,200 teens drop out of school;
- 6 teens commit suicide.<sup>x</sup>

One author wrote, “The government says the solution is better education and job opportunities for graduates; activists say we need to eradicate oppression and injustice; others say we need more police, punishment, prisons, and social programs.”<sup>xi</sup>

These are dealing only with the symptoms. These are better Kleenexes for life-threatening pneumonia.

What we will discover in Proverbs is that the answer is the radical infusion of wisdom from the

scriptures – which is then demonstrated in wise behavior.

**5. Solomon adds a fifth jewel for the treasure hunter, as he writes in Proverbs 1:4a that Proverbs have been delivered to us,**

*to give prudence to the naïve [simple] . . .*

The word “prudence” can be translated with the nuance of shrewdness – critical thinking.

Why? Because the naïve are gullible – they will believe anything.

Throughout Proverbs, the naïve are warned to think. In Proverbs 27:12, Solomon writes,

*A prudent man sees evil and hides himself, the naïve proceed and pay the penalty.*

The word “naïve” means “unsuspecting”. Frankly, some people are so gullible that they believe everything they are told – and pay the penalty.

One Jewish commentator, whose work I am reading, said that this word “naïve” refers to someone who is not thinking.<sup>xii</sup>

I have had an article in my files for quite some time that perfectly illustrates this. Richard Dimbleby of the BBC (British Broadcasting Company) News was famous for pulling April fools jokes on the BBC radio on April first. He normally covered all the royal ceremonial events and was a symbol of trust in the eyes of British viewers. One year, he did a current affairs program in which he showed a film of a spaghetti harvest in Switzerland. The film showed trees dripping with long ribbons of white spaghetti, while Dimbleby voiced over, “Spaghetti cultivation here in Switzerland is not, of course, carried out on anything like the scale of the Italian industry. Many of you, I am sure, will have seen pictures of the vast spaghetti plantations in the Po Valley.” Swiss villagers were shown carrying great baskets of harvested pasta to be dried in the sun. Workers were seen trimming the spaghetti out of the trees. He concluded the show by saying, “For those who love this dish, there is nothing like homegrown spaghetti.” The switchboards lit up with callers asking how they could begin to grow spaghetti in their own gardens. The BBC answer, “Place a sprig of spaghetti in a jar of tomato sauce and hope for the best.”

Another year, Patrick Moore, a British astronomer, had everyone fooled. He told BBC listeners that in the morning, the planet Pluto would pass directly behind Jupiter, producing a slight gravitational pull on Earth that would make everyone feel lighter. He urged listeners to jump at precisely 9:47 AM. By 9:48, the switchboards were blazing

with delighted callers saying that they had experienced the floating sensation when they jumped. One woman said her entire coffee group of eleven women floated around the room. I wonder if it was coffee they were drinking! Another man complained that he had hit his head on the ceiling.<sup>xiii</sup>

Leave it to someone to file a lawsuit.

**6. Sixthly, Solomon goes on to deliver another hidden treasure found in Proverbs 1:4b,**

*. . . to give to the youth knowledge and discretion,*

You might say, “Well, that rules me out – I’m aging, remember?”

The word “youth” is actually used in scripture to refer to an infant (Exodus 2:6), a seventeen-year-old (Genesis 37:2), and a nearly middle-aged man (Genesis 41:12).

Youth seems to refer to anyone on the threshold of maturity. And that fits us all, who are not just growing old, but growing up.<sup>xiv</sup>

This is exactly what Solomon describes in Proverbs 1:5.

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

That word, “acquire” means literally, “to grasp or to seize wise counsel”.

How desperately do we want wisdom? Those who have ready hands to seize wise counsel find the treasure of wisdom.

**7. Solomon adds one more treasure to his purpose statement for Proverbs, writing in Proverbs 1:6,**

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

In Solomon’s day, people loved riddles. I believe they love them today as well.

Sophocles, the Greek writer who lived five hundred years before the birth of Christ, wrote of the sphinx – a fallen angel shaped like a lioness with the wings of an eagle and the head of a woman. She asked history’s most famous riddle as people passed by to their peril. The riddle was, “What has one voice, yet is four footed in the morning, two footed at noon, and three footed in the evening?” If the person got it wrong, she killed them. This was quite a game show. One hero was able to answer it, however. It is a human being. At birth – in the morning – he crawls on all fours. Later in life, he stands on two feet. In

the evening of his life, he uses a crutch. The sphinx became so upset that the riddle was figured out, she threw herself off the mountain and that ended the game.

I believe Solomon is referring to the riddles of life. In other words, if we want to figure out the riddles that life will bring to us – some innocent and some far more serious – we need to understand the proverbs written herein.

James Dobson wrote an article that I filed away for later use. He told the story of a friend of his that was flying a small, single-engine airplane toward a country airport several years ago.

This friend was behind schedule and arrived after the sun had dropped behind the nearby mountains at the close of the day. By the time he had maneuvered into a position to land, the field was dark and hazy at best. He could not see clearly enough to risk a safe landing. He had no lights on his plane and there was no one on duty at the small local airport. He circled the runway for another attempt to land, but by then, the darkness had become even more impenetrable. He should have attempted a landing when he had the chance. Now it was too late.

For two hours, the man flew his plane around the clearing where he knew below was the small airport and grass runway. The darkness of the night had swallowed him up. He knew that if he did not land, he would face certain death when his fuel ran out. By now, however, he had no way to even determine where the landing strip was located. As greater and greater panic gripped him, a wonderful thing occurred.

A neighbor who lived near the airport had heard the continual droning of the man’s plane engine and realized his predicament. He hopped in his car and drove out to the grassy airstrip and raced back and forth a number of times. The pilot spotted him and watched as he drove up and down the airstrip several times to show the location and length of the runway.

This neighbor then drove to the far end of the runway and put on his high beams to cast just enough light for the pilot to safely land his plane.<sup>xv</sup>

The neighbor’s kindness served somewhat like the book of Proverbs. Here are the guidelines – stay within the boundary of this inspired light and these beams of divine revelation will guide not only to land safely, but to live wisely.

This is the purpose statement of Proverbs. Would you like to be wiser than some owl, as if an owl is wise?

## Observations

Let me give several observations before we wrap up our study today.

- A person is not considered wise because he knows everything, but because he longs to learn more.
- A person is not considered wise because he knows what to say, but because he knows how to listen.

- A person is not considered wise because he knows everything, but because he obeys what knows.

Do you want to be truly discerning, alert, shrewd?  
Do you want to do more than grow old – but to also grow wise?

Here it is – listen, learn, obey.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 12/2/2007 by Stephen Davey.

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- <sup>i</sup> Peter A. Stevenson, A Commentary on Proverbs (BJU Press, 2001), p. xi.  
<sup>ii</sup> Warren Wiersbe, Be Skillful: Proverbs (Chariot Victor, 1995), p. 7.  
<sup>iii</sup> John Phillips, Exploring Proverbs (Kregel Publications, 1995), p. 14.  
<sup>iv</sup> Stevenson, p. 3.  
<sup>v</sup> Wiersbe, p. 14.  
<sup>vi</sup> Ibid., p. 13.  
<sup>vii</sup> Richard L. Mayhue, Practicing Proverbs (Christian Focus, 2000), p. 41.  
<sup>viii</sup> <http://www.wikipedia.com/owl>.  
<sup>ix</sup> Derek Leman, Proverbial Wisdom & Common Sense (Lederer Books, 1999), p. 11.  
<sup>x</sup> Josh McDowell, Right From Wrong (Word Publishing, 1994), p. 6.  
<sup>xi</sup> Ibid., p. 10.  
<sup>xii</sup> Leman, p. 12.  
<sup>xiii</sup> American Way (Mar. 18, 1986), p. 10.  
<sup>xiv</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, The Book of Proverbs (Eerdmans, 2004), p. 178.  
<sup>xv</sup> Focus on the Family Magazine (Aug. 1987).