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Wisdom Literature (Part 1)



Wisdom Literature - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg explores the wisdom literature of the Bible, emphasizing the importance of godly behavior and understanding the will of the Lord. Through the study of Proverbs and Psalms, Gregg highlights principles that guide Christians to prioritize pleasing God and doing his will above all else. He also discusses the value of seeking wisdom from God rather than relying on one's own intelligence or understanding.

Transcript

We're going to do something a little different. We're going to start a series. Since we only meet once a month, it's hard to do a series on anything because it's so hard to remember.

How many of you remember what we talked about last month? I don't. Okay. Some of you, yeah.

I've talked about a lot of things since then in other places, so I don't remember exactly. I think I can figure it out, but that's the point. When it's a month apart, it's hard to have continuity.

So, you know, teaching through a book of the Bible isn't really that advantageous because the books of the Bible actually have flow and it's hard when you break it up into monthly pieces. But there is one book of the Bible that we could study through and, you know, it's so it doesn't have flow and that is the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs doesn't have a plot.

It doesn't have an outline. I mean, it kind of does have an outline, but it's so vague that you don't have to follow its outline in order to benefit from it. It's obviously a group of sayings for the most part, usually a single verse per saying, sometimes a couple or three verses in a row or even a little more in a few cases, but it's a book of, as the name implies, Proverbs.

I remember when I was in, when I was a sophomore in high school, my speech teacher was a retired, either retired or defrocked, I never really learned, pastor. And he was now

a high school teacher. And he knew I was Christian.

He liked that. In fact, I think he, I was kind of a teacher's pet because I think he saw in me at age 13 or 14, whatever I was, himself when he was younger, you know, he knew I was going in the ministry and stuff like that. So he kind of liked me.

And besides, I was the best in the class anyway, but so probably had something to do with it. Does Proverbs ever deal with humility? Several months, several months from now, we'll get into the humility part. We haven't studied that part yet.

But you know, I remember my teacher once said something, he said, you can't make a silk purse from a sow's ear. And he looked over and he says, you know where that's from? And I says, no, I don't. He said, that's from the book of Proverbs.

I thought, well, that's really, I always like that saying, I knew the saying, but I thought, well, that's a cool saying. I like that kind of saying. It's like, you know, poor Richard's almanac is full of those kind of things, too.

I like those kinds of books. Little witticisms and so forth that actually are pregnant with meaning that can apply to numerous situations. That's what Proverbs are.

Well, that made me really interested in reading the Proverbs. I'd never read through the book of Proverbs at that time. So I thought, I like that.

I'm going to read through it and find that. I guess I didn't know how to use a concordance yet. But truth is, I didn't find it.

It's not in Proverbs. He was wrong. It's actually a saying from the 1500s that a clergyman came up with and something he wrote.

But it's typical of what a proverb would be like. It's a statement that distills a concept that is true. There might be exceptions to it.

It's not necessarily universally true, but it is true to many situations that you could say it about. And sort of like where there's smoke, there's fire. I mean, that's kind of a saying that it has lots of applications to usually if there's some rumors about some politician or something that he's denying them.

Where there's smoke, there's fire. Usually means the rumors are coming from somewhere. You know, it's just like smoke isn't just coming out without fire.

Anyway, I love Proverbs, not just the book of Proverbs, but Proverbs as a genre. And so did the Hebrews. The Hebrews loved Proverbs.

And we find Jesus using certain Proverbs in his teaching, as well as his parables and other things he used, different figures of speech. But I find that the book of Proverbs and

other what's called wisdom literature of the Jews is among the most misunderstood genres in scripture, because you'll find people saying, well, train up a child in the way that he should go. And when he's old, he will not depart from it.

And then you'll see a family, a godly family that raised three, four kids. Maybe three of them are serving God, but the fourth one isn't. And you say, wait a minute, wasn't he raised the same way the others were? I mean, weren't all these four kids raised up in the way they should go? What's the difference? And yet three of them serve God, one doesn't.

And people take Proverbs like that as a promise from God. I raised up, God said, not depart. That's not what Proverbs are.

They're not promises. They are distilled wisdom. They're based more on observation and generalities.

But they are, they are wisdom literature. And I want to talk about what wisdom literature is and about Proverbs in particular. But I want to also point out that wisdom is not, as some people think, kind of less spiritual than other kinds of stuff in the Bible.

When we think of a spiritual person, or a godly person, we probably think somebody who makes righteous, godly choices that are not morally wrong. Which is, of course, true. Godly people do choose to make morally right actions.

That's in their conscience to do. But there's more than one way that the behavior of a godly person can be distinguished from that of an ungodly person. One of them is in the moral rectitude or lack thereof in their behavior.

Another is in the wisdom or the foolishness of the behavior. Now, when we think of moral rectitude, we are thinking of specifically kind of religious categories. But when we think of wisdom, we might be thinking of like secular categories.

Wisdom, it's what the philosophers, you know, philosophers concern themselves with wisdom. And there's a lot of wisdom expressed by non-Christians and non-Jews outside the Bible. Wisdom is actually not the sole possession of godly people.

However, there's a kind of wisdom that the Bible says is. Remember in James chapter 3, it talks about how if anyone thinks he's wise, you know, he's got to make sure he's got godly wisdom and not worldly wisdom. There's a certain wisdom, he said, that is earthly and sensual and devilish, which leads to envy and strife and so forth.

And then James talks about that the wisdom, which is from above, is first peaceable and pure, or purer than peaceable, you know, easily treated and gentle and those things. Obviously, those are spiritual characteristics. A wise person who's godly wise is going to be manifesting certain character and demeanor and patterns of behavior, some of which

might be found even among non-Christians, but they will have to be found among anyone who's truly a Christian who's wise.

A person who is a Christian and doesn't do those things is simply not wise, and that's not okay. It's not okay to be not wise. Proverbs talks about the fool as if he's the most despicable category of persons, but you have to realize he's not just talking about people who have a low IQ or don't have much education.

He says the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. He said the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. So in Solomon's mind, and in the mind of the Jewish sages, wisdom has got to be connected to and growing out of somebody's reverence for God.

And wisdom in general, let me just give you a generic definition of wisdom, and this is true of any wisdom, though when it grows out of the fear of God, it colors it a certain way, obviously, but wisdom in general is simply the ability to discern the most desirable outcomes and to recognize which choices and actions will be most conducive to reaching those outcomes. Therefore, someone might have financial wisdom. They're trying to make some money.

Well, then they're going to make wise financial choices. Some people want to be rich, but they make foolish financial choices, and they don't get rich. The idea is a wise person has a goal in mind and not only wishes he could get there, but he's got a plan.

He can see the route, the most likely route to there. Now, see, the future is unknown, so you can't guarantee you'll get rich no matter how wise you are. Obviously, in Proverbs, there's a lot of places about the diligent will be made rich and the sluggard will come to poverty.

That's generally true. A sluggard might win the lottery, though, but because he's a fool, he'll probably lose it anyway and becomes poor again. But the point is there have been many fools who inherited fortunes and lived wealthy, and they were lazy.

Lazy people sometimes are rich. There have also been very hardworking people in third-world countries who never get rich. So when Proverbs says something like the diligent hand will bear rule, the man who's diligent will become wealthy, the sluggard will come to poverty, that's generally true.

That's a wise statement. If you're giving counsel to your son, which is what Solomon's doing in Proverbs, and you say, son, you want to be prosperous? You want to be successful? Let me give you some advice here. Work hard.

Don't waste. Make wise decisions. The wisdom, once you've decided what the outcome you want is, in this illustration, prosperity, you have to say, okay, well, what can I do right now and in the next years of my life that will tend toward that goal? Because lots of people, when they're teenagers or in college, decide they want to become wealthy, but

when they're 50 or 60, they're just as poor as before, or maybe really poor.

Why? It has a lot to do with decisions. Now, it also has some things to do with, we could just say providence or secular fate. I mean, let's face it, you could be a hardworking person, but a depression could come and wipe out all your investments, which were wise investments, but they got wiped out anyway.

I mean, wisdom is not a guarantee of success. Wisdom is basically the course that one would take that is most likely to reach whatever the desired outcome is. Do you desire to lose weight? I can give you some advice about that.

It would have to do with diet, it would have to do with exercise, and those people who want to lose weight and choose a course of diet and exercise that's conducive to that generally do lose weight. I mean, they might have some kind of strange glanular problem that prevents that, but in general, certain choices you make now and actions you take now will reach goals you want. But if you want to lose weight and you pay no attention to what you eat or whether you exercise or not, that's not wise.

I mean, that's not a course that a wise person would take that tends toward the goal you want. So the idea here is that wisdom is that which identifies a desirable outcome and can see the course of action that will most likely bring about that outcome. Do you want your kids to be godly when raised them up in the right way in the fear of the Lord? Raise them up in a godly way.

That's your best chance of having godly kids. They still have free will, they may not go the way you taught them, but you'd be a fool if you want godly children to raise them any other way than that. In other words, wisdom is doing what you'd be a fool not to do if you want certain results.

Now, the difference between godly wisdom and worldly wisdom would be very much along the lines of what are the desirable outcomes? Because a secular man probably is looking to be healthy and wealthy and famous and popular and powerful. I mean, those are the goals of the secular person. I'm not saying that Christians don't have any of those goals or don't see value in any of those things.

I'm simply saying that a secular man has higher goals than that. Whereas a Christian might say, well, the highest goal would be that I get to my deathbed and look back without any regrets before God, that I can face God on the day of death and know I did what pleased Him. You know, pleasing God is the main goal.

I may be poor and that's okay. I might even not be healthy and that's okay too. I might be obscure and in the world's eyes, unsuccessful.

But if that pleases God, that's good. I mean, a wise person knows that pleasing God, because the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, that pleasing God is far more

important than any other earthly goal. So wisdom is the same, but the goals are different for worldly and godly people.

Godly people have God in their value system of deciding what do I really want my outcome to be. Subordinate to that outcome, for example, as a godly person, I'm saying I really want in every way to please God and I want to reach the end of my life and stand before God and say, well done, good and faithful servant. If that's my goal in life, then that's going to govern everything else I do.

Under the rubric of that goal, I might say, and I also think it'd be good for me to have a family and provide well for my family and not go broke and have recently been helped steward my body well so I can serve God better and so forth. And then, of course, then you're going to pursue the same kind of wisdom a secular person would in toward those goals, because it's good wisdom. Wisdom is good.

Wisdom simply means this is the smart way to pursue those goals. So our overall object as Christians, of course, is to please God and to hopefully promote God's kingdom, but that can be done lots of ways and in the course of doing that, most of us would prefer to have some money rather than none because money is useful, but it's a stewardship. We'd like to have our health.

We'd like to have, you know, whatever success God would have us to have because, you know, recognition in the world can give us maybe a platform to reach more people for Christ, whatever. What I'm saying is there's many of the things that a worldly person would seek, which a godly person would seek too, but subordinately. These would be the highest goals for the worldly person because they know nothing higher to seek than wealth and long life and prosperity and that, but the believer has something higher he's more concerned about and that is his highest wisdom is to make that his goal and to do what will reach that goal, what pleases God most, but under that rubric, under that umbrella, there's a lot of choices made about daily life and about short-range goals and ways and means and so forth of serving God, in which case the same wisdom that a man of the world would use makes sense.

You know, Jesus told that parable. It's a perplexing parable about the unjust steward in Luke 16, and the steward was being fired from his job and so he wanted to make provision for his long-term security. He said, I'm too old to dig holes and I don't want to beg.

I know what I'll do, and he used his last few days of opportunity as an employee to make the kinds of deals with his master's clients that would ingratiate him to them. He gave them some bargains and stuff and so they liked him and his goal was to do that so that when he's kicked out of his employment, these people will feel they owe him a favor and they'll take him in. So he sees that his present circumstances are ending soon, but he's still got the rest of his life to be concerned about, so he uses the opportunities shrewdly

in order to make provision for his long-term goals.

Now, of course, the parallel for us is that we realize our opportunities are limited too. We're going to die someday, and then we're going to be interested in our long-term, that is eternal, you know, home, and so we should use the opportunities we have in life to secure that long-term goal. And after he tells that parable, Jesus says, for the children of this age are more wise in the things of the world than are the children of light.

Jesus said that in Luke 16, 8. Now, in the New King James, they're more shrewd but shrewdness has sort of a taint to it. It sounds almost like a little devious, but and that was a little devious what that guy did, but shrewdness really just means you've got some wisdom. You know how to work things in the nature of reality to reach a goal that is a desirable goal to you.

That's what wisdom is. Secular people can have wisdom in their field. Godly people should have wisdom too, though Jesus said that godly people have less of that kind of wisdom than the children of the world.

He didn't say whether that's good or bad. Some people say, well, what he's saying is we should be as shrewd as the lost are only toward better goals, but we're not. We're a bunch of dummies and don't pay attention to cause and effect relationships of things, but or he could be saying it's a good thing.

It's a normal thing. Of course, they're going to be more concerned about those things than we are. We've got other objectives than just to be rich, but I'm not going to work with that terrible today.

The main thing I want to talk about is what wisdom is because the Bible indicates that wisdom is one of the means by which we obtain guidance from God. It's one of the divine means of letting us know what we should do. Christians are often concerned, you know, how do I know the will of God? How do I hear the voice of God? How do I make decisions in the will of God? I want to do the will of God, but how do I know what's this way or that way is right? Well, obviously, there's a number of possibilities.

In the Old Testament, the kings of Israel had three ways because they were kings of Israel. They were obligated to lead the country according to God's will. There were three ways they could be informed about God's will.

One was, of course, the law, the written word of God. They were supposed to keep the law that Moses had had, and we have, of course, the written scriptures too. That's one of the most accessible ways for us to know the will of God about at least larger issues, not maybe every little decision we make, but the kings had the word of God as we do.

They also had prophets. The prophets would come and give a word from God, an oracle from God. We have the Holy Spirit too, and we even have spiritual fellowship where

people can speak by the Spirit to us, a counsel that is from God.

I mean, if you're in a charismatic type fellowship, as I have been many for much of my life, it's not unthinkable that people come and say, I have a word from the Lord for you. I have a prophecy for you. Now, of course, a lot of those, a lot of people imagine that they have prophetic words, and they really don't, but they mean it.

They're sincere, but that's why the Bible says we have to judge prophecies, but not to despise them. Paul said, do not despise prophecies in 1 Thessalonians 5. Do not despise them. That means don't disregard them.

Don't devalue prophecies. Don't despise prophecies, he says, but you've got to test all things and hold fast to that which is good. You've got to test prophecies, but the kings of Israel got the mind of God about whether we go to battle or not, usually from prophets coming.

So we got the written scriptures to give us guidance. We got the Holy Spirit's voice spoken either to us directly or from other people who speak by the Spirit, but then there's this third thing. The kings of Israel also had the wise men, the counselors.

It's interesting, Solomon was the wisest man of all time, but he had counselors too. We know that because when he died and his son Rehoboam took over and wanted counsel, he listened to the counselors who had counseled his father, Solomon, and then he listened to the younger counselors and he made a foolish decision, listened to the fools instead of the wise, but it's interesting that even Solomon had counselors, and Solomon says in the Proverbs, you know, with much counsel, you know, make more, he says, in the abundance of counselors, there's safety. A counselor is somebody who's not a prophet.

They don't have a word from the Lord in that sense, supernaturally revealed, and of course, they're not just reading the scripture to you either. Now, people who do read the scripture to you, they should be helping you in some ways that way to know the will of God. If somebody is a prophet and tells you something prophetic, well, that should let you know too, but also there's people who just are smart, and I don't mean they're smart at math or smart at memorizing facts.

They're wise. They can see through a situation and say, well, this is what's at stake here, and here's where problem areas lie that you can avoid. Go that way.

This is the wise way to go. Now, it's not really a word from God in the sense that God is saying, thus saith the Lord, go that way, but it's wisdom is divine guidance in a sense. Paul said in Ephesians 5, 17, Ephesians 5, 17, Paul said, be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

Notice that contrast. You're either understanding what the will of the Lord is or you're

unwise, which would mean that wisdom would be understanding of the will of God, and certainly Proverbs is written as if wisdom is the very voice of God. Sometimes the very voice of Christ, it appears.

Wisdom is sometimes personified and speaks in chapter one and in chapter eight, and you'd think it was Jesus talking because wisdom, although personified as a woman, is speaking almost like God, the voice of God, but Solomon makes it very clear that he believes that the wise person is the one who's going to be living a life pleasing to God because God wants you to. That's why God gave us brains that he didn't give to other creatures. He intends for us to use them, and therefore it's not unspiritual to make decisions based on wisdom alone as long as it's not a wisdom that's seeking goals that are ungodly.

If I don't have a word in scripture about what choice I need to make and I don't have a prophet come to me or a dream or a vision or an angel come and tell me, well then what do I got left? Well, I just got wisdom. Okay, what would be a smart move here? Let me think this through. You know, when Absalom rebelled against David and David and his loyalists fled from Jerusalem, Absalom was trying to decide what the best course to take to destroy David and to eliminate his opposition would be, and he had two counselors.

One was Ahithophel. Ahithophel was one of David's counselors, and Ahithophel was a wise man, but his reputation, it says, was they say, to inquire of Ahithophel is like to inquire of an oracle of God. That was his reputation, to inquire of Ahithophel is like inquiring of the oracle of God.

Oracle of God is a prophet. In other words, he wasn't a prophet. He didn't get revelations from God like prophets do, but his counsel was essentially as good because he was just that wise.

He was just smart, and he could give good counsel, and it was about as good as hearing from a prophet from him. Now, unfortunately, Ahithophel at this point had turned against David and decided he knew what side of the butter was on, that Absalom was the new king, so he's going to decide with Absalom, and so his wisdom was now in the service of Absalom, and Absalom said, what shall I do? Shall I pursue David? And Ahithophel says, yeah, send all your armies right now because he's disoriented. He's in flight.

He doesn't have any hiding places yet. They're on the move. Chase him down.

You can wipe him out before he gets to a place of safety, and you'll win this tonight, and Ahithophel was probably right, but there was another man posing as a loyalist to Absalom, but was really loyal to David. In fact, he was called Hushai. He was called David's friend, but he also was a wise man, and Absalom said to Hushai, well, what do you think about Ahithophel's counsel? And Hushai said, well, you know your father, he's like a bear robbed of his whelps.

He's a fighter. He's dangerous. If you send out people with a half-baked attack, he's going to turn him like a wolverine on you and tear you up like a wolverine tears up a wolf pack.

That's not the illustration he gave us, that kind of thing. He's angry. He's mad.

He's got the best soldiers with him. I think you better, Hushai said, instead of doing that, don't pursue him now. Gather all the troops from all of Israel together first tomorrow, and get them organized, and then go out, and you'll have a superior force against him.

Now, Hushai said that because he knew that he was helping David by doing that, because David was not like a bear robbed of his whelps. He wasn't angry. He was weeping.

He was ready to give up. He was going to just surrender it to Absalom, but Hushai was there to save David. Now, what's interesting is David had prayed, oh God, confound the wisdom of Ahithophel before Absalom, and that's what God did, because Absalom said, the counsel of Hushai is better.

So he didn't pursue David, and Ahithophel, when he saw that his counsel was not taken, he went home, he got his things, and already hanged himself. Now, why did he hang himself? Because he was wise. He knew that following Hushai's counsel was going to go badly for Absalom, and when David would come back victorious, Ahithophel would be hanged as a traitor anyway.

So he said, well, instead of dying in disgrace as a traitor, I'm going to take my own life. But see, this is how kings would take counsel, and these different counselors would have a, I think this is a wiser course. This will get successful.

No, this will. And both of them sounded like they had a good case. But who's wiser? Well, not always obvious.

But obviously, wise people can have differences of opinion, but when you have the true course of wisdom, I believe you have found what God intends for you to do. Now, I realize that sometimes people say, but following Jesus looks foolish to the world, and therefore doing the wise thing might be the carnal thing. Well, yeah, I mean, obviously, if it's worldly wisdom devoid of God's wisdom, we all know that famous quote from Jim Elliot, when people said, you're foolish to go down those Ecuadorian jungles.

Those Indians, they killed the last missionaries, they'll kill you. You're giving it all up. You're giving up the promising life of ministry.

It'd be foolish to go down there. And you know what he said. He said, he is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to lose what he cannot lose.

Now, that's looked like foolishness to the world, and even to a lot of Christians. But actually, it was well informed. Jesus said, whoever loses his life from my ship shall find it.

Whoever gains his life shall lose it. So I mean, essentially, godly wisdom can definitely look different than worldly wisdom, because it has greater ultimate concerns. If your ultimate concern is to survive as long as you can, then it was foolish to go down there, because that ended his life when he was in his 20s.

And by the way, to the secular man, and to Christians who think like secular people, living as long as you can is about the best you can hope for. But to the Christian, we don't have the same goals. It's not our goal to live to be as old as possible.

It's not our goal to be as safe as possible, or as comfortable or as healthy as possible. Our goal is to fulfill the will of God, even if that requires suffering and early death. So we have a different goal, and that our wisdom aims at a different object, of course.

So our choices will be different than the world's in many ways, but not in all ways. Because some of the things that the world seeks are things that Christians can reasonably seek, again, subservient to, subordinate to our goals of pleasing God and doing his will. His will is not that we'd be foolish, although the things he does want us to do may look foolish to the world at times.

But wisdom is a form of divine revelation. It's even connected to the Word of God. In Jeremiah 8 and verse 9, it is talking about the counselors and the leaders of Israel, and it says, they have forsaken the Word of the Lord.

What wisdom is in them? Rhetorically, they have no wisdom. They've forsaken the Word of the Lord. What wisdom is in them? New King James says, what wisdom do they have? And it implies none.

When a society forsakes the counsel of God in the Scripture, it's amazing how stupid they can become very quickly. Surprisingly so. I mean, we who grew up in a society that knew the Bible somewhat, that was built considerably on biblical principles, and where even the non-Christians kind of revered the Bible because it was the good book, you know.

I remember one of my Christian friends in the Jesus movement, Tim Ortel, actually told me that before he was a Christian, he would sometimes see Billy Graham on television or something like that and say, whenever Billy Graham would say, the Bible says, he says, well, that just cut me to the heart. The Bible. He knew that was the Word of God.

You know, he wasn't a Christian himself, but like most non-Christians, he knew, oh, that's the Bible. You know, that's the good book. That's the Word of God.

And that was interesting to me because the Bible, that always affected me that way too,

but I was a Christian in those years. But even our society used to revere the Bible. And in the last 30 years, I'd say, they've done everything they can to banish the voice of scripture from the conscience of our society, to make it invisible, to drive it.

Just as you may know, last week, Congress passed a law codifying gay marriage as a legitimate marriage, which means nationally, no state can refuse to recognize a gay marriage. Until recently, it was, if a state allowed gay marriage, a gay couple could get married there. Then if they went to another state that didn't allow it, they didn't have to recognize it.

They didn't have to have the benefits of a wedded couple if the state they were in didn't. Now, federally, everyone has to recognize it. This law didn't leave any protections at all for bakers and photographers and florists and so forth that don't want to participate in gay weddings.

Although I don't know that the law said they have to, but it didn't protect those who will say, I don't recognize this as marriage. And, you know, that was a totally unnecessary law, of course. I mean, and even if I were a gay man, I'd be saying that was a totally unnecessary law, because gays don't need marriage.

They already have all the rights that married people have before we called what they have marriage. But now, but our society doesn't know what marriage is. Where was there ever a society on the planet, pagan or otherwise, that didn't know what marriage was? Where was there ever a tribal people in the jungles, or pagan Greeks or Romans, or Australian aboriginals? Where was there ever a society where a five-year-old child didn't know what a marriage was? But now, as of last week, we live in a society that does not know what marriage is.

And as you know, there's some serious questions about what a woman is. There's not an accepted definition anymore. Now, there's nothing more fundamental to human society than knowing what a woman and a man are, and knowing what a marriage is.

Those are the first two things God created as the first human society, and our society is doing everything it can to dismantle that knowledge. And once they've forsaken the word of order, what wisdom is left in them? I And Richard Dawkins has made this point many times. He said, you don't have to be a, don't believe in God to be a good person.

We can be good atheists. And that's something that the modern atheists have been saying. They just want to make it very clear.

We can be good too. We can be moral. Yeah, but they can't tell you why you should be moral.

That's the problem. You can be moral if you happen to be raised in a Christian society that taught you morals. But your atheism would never produce those morals, would

never inform morals.

As long as you've got residual morals left over from a society that used to know something about God and the word of God, yeah, you can say, okay, I'm not going to go with religious stuff, but I still think it's wrong to commit adultery. I still think it's wrong to murder. I still think it's wrong to steal.

Yeah, but get far enough from that society that knew the Bible, and you no longer can think of any reasons for there to be such a thing as human rights, rights to property, rights to your wife, rights to your life. These are things that are established by the law of God in scripture. And once a society has forgotten that, there's no depth of foolishness to which it cannot fall.

And ours is currently plummeting. Now, by the way, there's many churches that are going with it. They call themselves progressive.

There's pastors that are deconstructing, they call it, their faith, their progressive churches. And they are basically saying, you know, do we really have to believe Jesus rose from the dead? Do we really have to believe that God is really against gay sex? Come on. What about these transgender people? Doesn't God love them too? And of course he does, but that's irrelevant to the question of right and wrong.

It's that once you begin to say, I don't know that we'll follow the scripture anymore. Let's just use our enlightened values. Well, what are they rooted in? What are they tethered to? How are they going to remain enlightened rather than benighted? That's the question.

And we can see, and we will be seeing from now on, our society plunging into the depths of folly, such as we, 10, 20 years ago, would never have dreamed people in Western civilization would ever be foolish enough to do. But it's already happening, obviously. I mean, you can already make a list as long as you're arm of decisions, people having opinions, people have, what, why don't you turn your brain on before you speak? Because you obviously have no wisdom in what you're saying.

But it's like Jeremiah said, they've rejected the word of the Lord. What wisdom is in them? The answer is none. None.

Maybe human wisdom, but human wisdom that's not tethered to God's wisdom is of no value. Now, Jesus, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, gave this story that we all learned in Sunday school, if we went, about, you know, he that hears these sayings of mine and does them, he's like a wise man who built his house upon a rock. And the rains came and the floods rose, and the house stood firm because it was built on rock.

But he that hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. And when the rains came and the floods rose, his house fell, and

it was a great was the fall of it. Now, notice what he's saying.

If you're listening to my words and doing them, you're the wise person. That's a wise thing to do. He didn't say it's a righteous thing to do, although it is.

It is that. But more than that, it's the wise thing to do. And it wouldn't be a fool to do others.

If you've heard what Jesus said, and you say, yeah, but I'll do it or not, as I feel pleased. Well, then you're a fool. You're just building your house on sand.

We see this very commonly in our society and in the church. It's most shocking when it's in the church, when people get divorces and didn't have any biblical grounds. I mean, that sermon that Jesus said, wise men will pay heed to said, if a man divorces his wife for any cause other than fornication, marries another, he commits adultery.

There are many Christians, including Christian counselors and pastors that will say, you know, this is a hard marriage for you. Maybe she just, maybe she just get out. You know, that person isn't respecting you.

You know, that person is damaging your self-esteem. They are emotionally abusing you or something like that. None of which is grounds for divorce, but they don't know that because they don't consult Jesus about that.

And they're fools. They're building a house, but they don't have Jesus words as a foundation. And it's so they've got nothing.

And there are storms. Jesus indicated rains, calm storms, all the houses get tested. Every house is going to face storms and the storms will decide whether you are a fool or not.

Because if you're wise, obviously what would wisdom tell you? There's going to be storms. I'm going to be in my house. I want it to be a structure that holds up in the storms for shelter.

So what am I going to do about that? How am I going to arrange that? Well, I've got this sand here. I can build my house on, or there's some rock over there. Maybe I should build on that.

Obviously, the wise person knows what the result he wants is. And that is that his house not fall down when it's tested by hurricanes. And so he makes a choice to build on the rock.

Now for us, that's building on what Jesus said to do. Jesus' teachings becomes the foundation of wisdom. And so this is how we see wisdom is tied to knowing God's will.

Because God didn't want any fools in his family. He wants his kids to be smart. And so

even when we don't have a direct word from the Lord, we still have to use wisdom to say, well, what choice is going to make to bring about goals that are consistent with what I know God has said in his word? You know, I know what he wants, in a sense, but he hasn't laid out a three-step plan to get there.

I have to work out. I'll pray for his guidance, and hopefully he'll help me work out the steps to get to there. Remember, Jesus said in Luke chapter 21 to his disciples, they're going to be brought before councils and Sanhedrins and kings and so forth to bear testimony for him.

And he said, when they're going to bring you up, don't think in advance what you're going to say. He said for, how did he word it? Let me just, he said it differently in Matthew, but in Luke 21, I want to give you the way he said here. In verse 15, he said, that's 22, but 22, 15.

He said, therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate before I know what you'll answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. This is almost verbally identical to what the same author Luke said about Stephen in Acts chapter six. People would argue that Stephen said that he had the spirit of wisdom.

He said they could not resist the wisdom with which he spoke. Jesus said, I will give you, I will give you that wisdom. And he actually says, you know, I believe it was in, I believe it was in Matthew where he says, it will not be you that speak, but the spirit of your father in you who speaks.

So that he gives wisdom. James said in James 1, 5, if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all liberally and does not scold, and it'll be given to him. Now that means of course, that wisdom is a gift from God.

And of course, people have some measure of wisdom, even if they don't know God, but you can ask God for more wisdom. And you can ask him what the smart thing to do would be. And he'll give you wisdom.

It's like a form of divine guidance to have wisdom. Now, having said all that, I'm going to give you a brief introduction to Proverbs. There are five pages of notes here.

Trust me, I'm not, I didn't intend to get past the first point. Okay. That's, we've got future months to cover the rest.

I figured it will be, we want to milk the Proverbs for all we can get out of them. And so we're not going to go fast. The truth is I made these notes when I was teaching my school and we're going through the whole Bible.

And these are the notes I gave to our students for Proverbs. And we talked through them

rather quickly, but here we are not because we have limited time here. We don't have limits on our time.

And therefore I can take a little bit each time and we can really milk them and get what we need from them. What is good to get from them. But Proverbs are, as I said, wisdom.

And there's a whole genre of Hebrew literature in the Bible called wisdom literature. The books of wisdom literature in the Bible are Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, Job. Job is wisdom literature.

As you recall, although there's a few, a couple chapters of storyline, you know, there's like 40 chapters of philosophers arguing back and forth about their religious philosophy. It's, it's part of wisdom literature. Job is part of wisdom literature.

So is Proverbs. So some of the Psalms are, most of the Psalms are not, but some of the Psalms are. Ecclesiastes is, one might say that Song of Solomon has some of that.

And there's a little bit of wisdom literature here and there in the Prophets too, but the main wisdom books are Proverbs, Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Now these are examples. There was more wisdom literature books in the Apocrypha that was written after the Old Testament canon was closed.

And before Jesus came, there was a book of Ecclesiasticus, which was called the Wisdom of Sirach. And it was just like, if you read it, it's like reading the book of Proverbs. It's just not written by Solomon.

It's written by some guy named Sirach. And so even a couple of the chapters in Proverbs aren't written by Solomon. The last two, chapter 30 is written by a guy named Agur, who is apparently a wise man, though he just claimed wisdom.

He said, I'm not wiser than anyone. I don't even have the knowledge of God. He's very humble.

But chapter 31, of course, is the prophecy of Solomon's mother about the virtuous woman. His mother, that's his mother's words. She had some wisdom too.

So wisdom literature is literature that is like Proverbs. It's full of aphorisms, short, wise sayings, usually pointing out causes and effects of things, because that's what wisdom is concerned with. The effect is the outcome.

The cause is the route I take to hopefully reach the outcome. What I do will cause that effect, will cause that outcome. That's what wisdom Proverbs are about, usually.

Now there's other kinds of Proverbs, but that's primarily what they're about. Now, there were other wise men and women in Israel, and we're now in our notes, under the wisdom of the ancient Israelites. Number A, early Eastern wits.

Now there were some witty people. There was a woman of Tekoa in 2 Samuel 14, that was said to be a wise woman. The people of the city took counsel from her.

The city of Abel, a city called Abel, in 2 Samuel 20, in verse 18, is said to be, the people used to say, let's go inquire at Abel. Apparently, the people in that city were just all a bunch of, you know, philosophically intelligent people. And so if you needed counsel, you'd go to Abel and talk to someone there.

There were some guys mentioned in 1 Kings 4.31, whom Solomon is compared favorably against. They weren't bad guys, they were smart guys, but it just says that he was smarter than them. Their names were Ethan, Keman, Kalko, and Darda.

And we don't have any samples of their wisdom given to us, but we know their names. Interesting that they are that obscure, and yet they're remembered in the Bible for their wisdom. But Solomon was said to be more wise than they, in 1 Kings 4.31. And then there's different places where you find samples of Jewish witticism.

Besides Proverbs, let me show you a few of these. And since you have them in notes, you can turn them if you want to. 1 Samuel, chapter 24.

Now this is where David spared Saul when Saul was in the cave. David could have killed him, and he didn't, though Saul was pursuing him to kill him. And when Saul had left the cave, and Saul was some distance away, David came out and revealed himself to Saul and shouted to him.

And he said in verse 12, let the Lord judge between you and me, and let the Lord avenge me on you, but my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, wickedness proceeds from the wicked. That's a smart saying, huh? Wickedness proceeds from the wicked.

Almost sounds like a tautology, like, you know, like being a man is not being a woman, you know, or something like that. It's that obvious. But actually, when you see a proverb, that's so obvious.

Who needs to say that? Look at it a little closer. A lot of times it means something a little deeper. Sometimes something is very simple, and yet it is stated in order to get you to think about it another way.

Wickedness proceeds from the wicked. What David is saying is, I didn't do a wicked thing, because I'm not wicked. You're doing wicked things.

What does that make you? You know, I mean, wickedness proceeds from wicked people. Well, who's being wicked here? You or me, Saul? I'm being good to you. I could have killed you.

I wouldn't. You're chasing me. I've never done a bad thing to you ever.

So wickedness is proceeding from the wicked here. Who's wicked? Not me. That's what he's saying.

But he uses that proverb, which apparently was familiar. Even Saul probably knew that proverb too, because David said it was a proverb that the ancients used. In 1 Kings chapter 20, when the king of Israel was threatened by the king of Syria, Ben-Hadad, Ben-Hadad said to him, the gods do so to me and much more also if enough dust is left of Samaria, that's the capital of Israel, for a handful for each of the people who follow me.

Now, what Ben-Hadad was saying is, I'm going to destroy your city. They hadn't even engaged in battle yet, but they were coming. I'm going to destroy your city so bad, you'll be reduced to so little dust that we left that the people won't have enough to put in their hands.

It's kind of a statement like Jesus saying, not one stone we left standing on another in the temple, which Jesus said. But the king of Israel answered and said, tell him, let not one who puts on his armor boast like one who takes it off. In other words, the battle has not been engaged yet.

You're not even in your armor yet. Now, when you take off your armor and the battle is over, then if you won, you can boast. It's a little hard.

It's like don't count your chickens before they hatch is really what, that's exactly the same problem. Don't let the man who's putting on his armor boast like the man who takes it off. Once you've seen the outcome, then you can boast if there's something to boast about when you're taking your armor off and the war is over.

But it's too early to be so confident here. So this is kind of a Jewish kind of a proverb. It's sort of like our proverb, don't count your chickens before they hatch.

In Jeremiah 31, there's a proverb that's also brought up in Ezekiel, but we won't look at both places. But it says, the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on egg. You probably have heard that or read that in there before.

Jeremiah quotes the people saying that. Ezekiel quotes the people saying that too. But what does it mean? In both places, God says you can't say this anymore.

The fathers have eaten sour grapes. Well, eating sour grapes is a pretty bracing experience. Your teeth will be set on eggs.

You'll grimace from eating something sour like that. But it's saying, well, usually the person who eats the sour grapes will be the one who grimaces, obviously. How come the fathers ate the sour grapes, but it's the kids who have to grimace? It's the kids who are

experiencing the consequences of what their fathers did.

Now, what the Jews were saying at this point is they were going to be destroyed by Babylon, but they're not blaming themselves. Our fathers did all these sins. It was Manasseh in his days, a couple generations ago.

They ate the sour grapes. How come we're the ones who have to grimace? And of course, Jeremiah and Ezekiel both said, well, it's not that easy. It's not that simple.

Your fathers did eat the sour grapes, but you did too. You're doing the same things they were doing. You've done as much sins as they have.

So it's not a case of you're suffering for your father's sins. You're suffering for your own sins. But that was a proverb, you know, and it was something that is said to be a proverb that they were using.

Let me give you just a couple more from the New Testament. These are examples of Jewish proverbs that are not in our book of Proverbs, but they were just known verbally. People verbally would, you know, wise people would make statements.

Again, it's like the stuff you find in poor Richard's almanac, witticisms that have truth in them that can be applied to more than one situation. In Luke chapter 4 and verse 23, Jesus said to them, you will surely say this proverb to me, physician, heal yourself. That's the proverb.

Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in your country. Now, physician, heal yourself. Obviously, it's a challenge to someone who thinks he's a physician.

If he's sick, well, why doesn't he heal himself first? It's sort of like what they said to Jesus when he was on the cross. You've saved others, why don't you save yourself? Or it's like the man who's a shoemaker who goes barefoot, or his family goes barefoot. You know, why don't you clothe your own family first? Why don't you take care of your own issues first? You know, you represent yourself as somebody who does something.

Now, he was in his hometown of Nazareth. He said, you'll probably say to me, physician, heal yourself. And how do they explain it? We heard you did some miracles in Capernaum, but you're here at home.

Nazareth is your home. Why don't you do at home what you're supposedly doing elsewhere? That's kind of how they're applying that particular proverb. Jesus said, you'll probably use that proverb.

And I guess they probably did, because I don't think he was wrong. If you look at one other case in this case, John chapter 4, Jesus makes reference to a couple of proverbs

here. Verse 35, John 4, 35.

Do you not say, there are still four months and then comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look to the fields. Most scholars believe that he's kind of a proverb. There are four months before the harvest, which means Rome wasn't built in a day.

You plant your seed, you're going to have to wait for the harvest. It's not going to be tomorrow. It's going to be four months from planting time to harvest time.

So don't expect immediate results. He says, now, you might say that. You might use that proverb.

It's four months until the harvest. But I'm telling you the opposite. The harvest is now.

The seeds have been planted now, and here they come. Here comes the harvest, ripe to be gotten. So he's basically saying the proverb in this case doesn't apply.

It is a general proverb that would make sense in most cases, but he says, I'm making an exception here. And there's another proverb in here he uses. Yeah.

In verse 37, he says, for this saying is true, quote, one sows and another reaps, end quote. Now, that true is a proverb about the division of labor. Not all jobs are done by completely beginning to end by one person.

One person might sow the seeds. Another person may be the one who's around to reap it. Likewise, in many projects, the person who starts the project may not be around to finish it.

Others will join in. And there's different parts of the job that different people do. That's I mean, it's a proverbial statement.

But he says, yeah, well, others have sown. But I'm sending you out to reap. So, you know, one sows and another reaps.

But you just see that Jesus and the prophets and David, they're quoting proverbs. These are not proverbs from the book of proverbs. They're just additional proverbs.

There must be an awful lot of them. There are these wise men and wise women who are known to give these witty sayings that were pregnant with meaning in a lot of ways. So we know that Solomon, who wrote proverbs, or wrote most of it, was the wisest man of his day and probably of many days before and after.

When he was young and became king, God came to him and said in a dream, ask for anything you want, I'll give it to you. And Solomon said, well, you know, the people are a multitude. I'm just a child.

Give me wisdom. Give me discernment so I can rule them wisely. And God saw that as a noble request.

He says, you didn't ask to be the richest man or have all the enemies submit to you or to be, you know, healthier, any of that stuff. He says, so I'm going to give you what you ask for and also the things you didn't ask for. You're going to be the richest man, most famous man.

Your enemies will be at peace with you and I'm going to make you the wisest man. Of course, we know Jesus was wiser. God used this hyperbole with Solomon.

He said, you'll be wiser than all before you and all after you. But that kind of a hyperbole is used on several occasions for different things that aren't quite literally so. I mean, like I said, Jesus is wiser than Solomon.

Jesus said one greater than Solomon is here. So anyway, Solomon was uniquely wise and he spoke 3,000 Proverbs, we're told in Scripture. Why did he ask for wisdom? Why do you ask for wisdom anyway? He says in Proverbs, when I was a child on my father's knee, that's David, Solomon on his knee.

So my father said, seek wisdom, get understanding, seek discernment. So apparently, David built it into Solomon's value system early on. Be smart, be wise.

And so when God later asked Solomon, what do you want? Wisdom. So that's one thing that stuck with him from David. And we know that Solomon did lapse into some foolishness and it was actually women, it says who turns his heart away from God.