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Proverbs Introduction (Part 2)



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

In this section of his talk, Steve Gregg delves into the book of Proverbs and highlights the importance of wisdom in the Bible. He emphasizes the significance of applying wisdom in one's life, stating that it is a resource that can help people become more discerning and navigate towards a righteous path. Gregg stresses the importance of prioritizing God's law in decision-making rather than earthly wisdom because fearing God is the beginning of true knowledge. The speaker also emphasizes the value of generosity and diligence, pointing to Proverbs to underscore these principles.

Transcript

When I was in high school, there was a young man, I think he was a year younger than me. He might have been in my same grade, but it was during the Jesus movement. A lot of hippies were getting saved, and he had been not only a hippie-type kid, but he had used a lot of LSD, and his mind was not in its original state.

Let's put it that way. In fact, people called him Crazy Eddie because he was nuts. Then he got saved.

Like many other people who got saved out of the drug culture, he became a real zealous convert. He got it in his head to study the book of Proverbs, and memorized Proverbs. Not the entire book, but he memorized lots of Proverbs.

I went with a small team to Germany when I was 19, and he went with us. He was not crazy anymore. His mind was healed.

He was still a little bit immature kind of a guy, but he had a lot of wisdom. What I remember about Eddie is that after he had been saved for a while, he would quote a proverb in almost every situation where one was applicable. In almost every situation, one is.

The Proverbs cover so much practical areas of life. I remember it was something you just could count on. In every situation where we were negotiating or making plans or doing anything, the team, he'd always quote something from the Proverbs that was applicable.

Although I loved the Proverbs, I hadn't become as familiar with the Proverbs as he was at that time. It really made an impression on me how few things there are that the Bible doesn't address about practical life. When I was new in the ministry, I went in the ministry when I was 16, and I was not only young, I was inexperienced.

I had a fairly sheltered life. I didn't come out of the drug culture much. I had been sheltered.

My parents hadn't let me see certain kinds of movies. I was raised in a Baptist church, youth group. I knew as a young teacher that I didn't know much.

I especially did not want to give people counsel about things in their life because, A, I thought in those days that you might need some special training to be a counselor of some kind, some kind of professional type of training, or else at least you had to be old and wise and have some experience under your belt, which I didn't have either of those things. But what I found was that people came and asked counsel from me anyway because I was, even though I was only 16, so were they, or they might have even been younger. And I remember telling people, Don't come to me for counsel.

I don't know anything. I'm just learning myself. I'm just a kid.

But as it turned out, when people would come anyway and tell me their problems, it would be obvious to me that the thing that they were troubled by was the neglect of some truth that was obviously in the Bible. I mean, I listened to the Bible well enough to know that the Bible addresses the very thing they're talking about. And over the years, this happened a great deal.

I've had hundreds of people, I'm sure, in the 40 years I've been in the ministry, come to me against my wishes for counseling. I've never really advertised myself as a counselor and don't particularly relish that role. But nonetheless, I don't think I've heard, not very many anyway, people come to me with any kind of a problem that couldn't be addressed directly from Scripture and in many cases from Proverbs.

The counsel of God in Proverbs is pretty thorough. And we're going to continue our introduction to the book of Proverbs now. And we'll be looking at quite a few individual Proverbs just in the course of illustrating different things about the book in our introduction.

Eventually, we're going to be going through the book itself, but not chapter by chapter so much as topic by topic because that seems to me the most reasonable way to cover Proverbs. Proverbs is one of those books that might have, in a chapter of 31 verses, might have two verses on the same subject, if that. And the rest are 29 different subjects, you know.

But those two verses on that one subject have some other verses on the same subject a

few chapters over and some more a few chapters over. So to take everything Proverbs says on a given subject has always been my preferred method of studying the book of Proverbs, at least of teaching it. I'd like you to look at the notes.

We're going to talk about the role of wisdom in the spiritual life. In our last lecture, we were talking about wisdom literature as a genre in the Hebrew canon of Scripture and even in the non-canonical books, the apocryphal books. Everyone knows the word canon and canonical? The canon is the approved list of books that belong to the Bible.

A canonical book is obviously a book that belongs in the canon of Scripture. So there are canonical and non-canonical. The latter category are apocryphal.

They're called books of wisdom literature. And we were talking about that class of literature yesterday. We're going to talk now about wisdom itself as it is presented to us in Proverbs.

Because not only is Proverbs a fine example of wisdom literature, but the subject of wisdom is like the dominant subject that is being discussed. In other words, it's not just a book of wise sayings because a lot of those wise things are about wisdom itself. It focuses on the value of wisdom.

Chapter 8, of course, is wisdom is personified as a woman and gives a very lofty speech in praise of herself, which is, of course, Solomon putting into her mouth his own praise for wisdom as he would praise a woman that he admires. But among the things that we learn about wisdom in the book of Proverbs, and I've organized these thoughts in what strikes me as a logical order so it's not going to be in the order that they appear in the book. First of all is the idea that God is rational and therefore he expects us to be rational.

He made us as rational creatures. I mentioned this yesterday, of course. The other animals sometimes have the appearance of wisdom in being able to do all kinds of things.

It would be engineering feats that would challenge intelligent human beings to duplicate even the migration of birds and of butterflies for that matter. Little things that have brains the size of a pen or smaller, they can migrate from Massachusetts to central Mexico to a grove of trees they've never been to before because their parents, their grandparents were there. They travel 30,000 miles under uncharted territory and end up in the same grove of trees their grandparents were in with every other generation or something.

You think, wow, how do those little brains know how to do that? I couldn't do that. You put me in an airplane without a map, I couldn't find that spot, but they can. Animals appear sometimes to have tremendous wisdom, but they don't.

That's the wisdom of God. God does that in order to confound the wise. He's chosen the foolish things like animals to confound the wise because those who don't believe in God simply cannot explain, can't even begin to explain how this is done.

But human beings actually are given rational powers and can do amazing things because God has made people intellectually capable of duplicating some of his own activity of thought. He's a thinking God, a purposeful God, a rational and wise God, and that's exactly what he expects us to be. Not God part, but thinking and rational and wise.

And so wisdom is an aspect of God's own nature, which he has shared with us and not with other creatures. I assume he's also shared it with angels. We don't know very much about angels, but when they are portrayed to us, they are portrayed to be very human-like in many respects.

So I'm going to assume that perhaps angels also are rational. They appear to be. But we don't know much about them and don't need to.

We know about ourselves, and therefore what God has given us is a gift that he expects us to steward. If a person does not use their mind to become wise, they're therefore neglecting a stewardship for which we will be held accountable someday. And so God has given us resources, including wisdom literature, to impart that wisdom.

And you can see from the opening of Proverbs that that's what the book is for. That's what Solomon had in mind when he wrote it. Most of it is written to his son, but it says in the opening verses, the Proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel, to know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity, to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

And so that's what this book is for. It's to impart knowledge and discretion and prudence and wisdom and understanding to people who are young and foolish and simple and unwise. And so we can see that by God giving Solomon the gifts he had of wisdom and his literary gifts, God has given us a resource which reflects his desire for us to become wise and to help us, sort of shepherd us in that direction.

In chapter 2 in verse 6 of Proverbs, it says, For the Lord gives wisdom. From his mouth come knowledge and understanding. Which means, of course, not only that we receive it from him, but he possesses it.

Wisdom comes from him. Because he possesses wisdom, wisdom comes from him. And in Proverbs, interestingly enough, when wisdom is being discussed, or for that matter when foolishness is being discussed, it's not talking about somebody's IQ.

Obviously having rational powers at a higher level than someone else may in some senses give a person an advantage in some enterprises. Not necessarily in the area of

spirituality though. Because God has chosen the foolish things to confound the wise.

That means the things that are regarded foolish by human reckoning. But real wisdom, which God insists upon, is not so much the kind of thing that we call intelligence. It's not the kind of thing that you can be tested for at school.

In IQ tests and so forth. Wisdom in the Bible, let me just tell you what wisdom is in any context. What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge? They are different.

Knowledge is of course the apprehension of facts. The acquisition of information. You know the names of the people here by now.

I trust. That's just knowledge. You know your way around this campus.

That's knowledge. You're familiar with it. You have taken in information.

It's now in your memory bank. You have this store of knowledge. But what is wisdom? Wisdom is something different.

Wisdom is knowing how to apply the knowledge that's available to you to desired ends. See, true wisdom really is knowing how to get to a desired end from where you are, using the knowledge you have. For example, if you are walking through these woods here, and you happen upon a little animal about the size of a cat or smaller, you know, if it's black with a white stripe down it all the way down its body and tail, you're familiar with that animal.

You know what that is. Your knowledge that that is a skunk, that's just part of what you know. You also know some other things about that animal.

Now, wisdom would be, what do you do about that? You see, you don't want to get sprayed by the skunk, and so your reaction to that encounter will be wise or foolish. If you decide to go up and pet it, that's foolish. If you decide to stand still and wait for it to walk away, that's probably wise, or you walk away yourself.

In other words, wisdom is not the knowledge of what the animal is. Wisdom is knowing what to do about it and to have a good outcome. Now, in secular world, wisdom is considered to exist in those who are perhaps successful businessmen.

They have business wisdom. They've got business savvy or financial wisdom. We would like for our rulers to have political wisdom and so forth.

But you see, when we talk about that kind of wisdom, what we mean is that these people have certain goals that they consider to be desirable goals, and they know what steps to take to get them closer to those goals. Wisdom is the sense of saying, if we want to get here, then it'd be wise to do it this way instead of some other way that wouldn't get us closer to it. That'd be foolish to do something else.

So wisdom is knowing how to apply the knowledge you have to reach a goal that is desirable. That's generically true of what we would call wisdom. But biblically, there's another aspect.

It's not only knowing how to get to a desired goal. It's being wise enough to know what a desired goal is. And so in the Proverbs, we often have Solomon saying, such and such is better than something else.

Better is a dinner of herbs where there's love than a house full of sacrifices or barbecues, really, where hatred is. In other words, you need to know what's really more desirable. A fool may be wise in earthly wisdom, meaning he knows how to set a goal and go for it.

He wants to get rich. He knows what to do to get there. But is getting rich really the wisest goal to choose? That's another story.

You see, wisdom in the Bible goes beyond the awareness of how to take steps to get to a desired goal. It includes that along with the additional knowledge of what is a good goal. And in the Bible, that factor has got to be informed by an awareness of God.

And of course, knowing that God is to be feared, knowing that God is to be obeyed, knowing what God has said, knowing what will get you into trouble with God, what will not get you in trouble with God, what will curry favor with God, and what will get you, as I said, in trouble. That knowledge about God, the knowledge of God, is really the beginning of wisdom. I mean, if you look at Proverbs chapter 9 and verse 10, it says, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One, that is the knowledge of God, is understanding.

Now, there are many people who are atheists, or otherwise irreverent people, who are quite successful in their various pursuits, whether it's in finance or education or business or anything else, or political ambitions they have. They know how to pull the strings, they know how to jump through hoops, they know how to manipulate the system, they know how to get what they want. That's savvy, that's wisdom of a worldly sort.

But if they don't fear God, then they're not taking into consideration those things that really would inform them of what are the best goals to seek. It may be a legitimate thing to seek to be wealthy, if that is what your fear of God has informed you that He wants you to do. He wants you to make wealth and maybe finance something that's godly with it.

I mean, there's nothing wrong with having wealth, but if having wealth is the goal in itself, or being famous is the goal in itself, or being powerful is the goal in itself, those things sans the fear of God, without God in the picture, those things are just, well, what is Solomon saying elsewhere? Emptiness. Vanity. It's like striving after the wind.

And so, biblical wisdom has a moral, ethical, spiritual aspect to it. It's not just

intellectual. It's putting God in His proper place.

In the place where you fear God, as you should. And through that fear of God, that's the foundation from which you begin your thinking. It's the beginning of wisdom.

And in chapter 1, we have a very similar statement in verse 7. Proverbs 1, 7 says, Now, what Solomon is going to be assuming throughout here and conveying to us is that no matter how intelligent a person is worldly-wise, he's a fool. If he does not know to fear God, if he chooses evil ways, if he's a violator of God's law, if he's immoral, then he's a fool. And therefore, in Proverbs, and the Bible in general, more than in, say, secular literature where you find the same words, the word fool and the word wise, more often than not, when they're being used in this sense, they refer to a moral quality.

It's a spiritual assessment of someone. So, when the Bible talks about this, especially in Proverbs, when it talks about the simple-minded or the foolish, we might say, well, you know, a person can't help it if they're just not that smart. And we think of someone whose intellectual powers are low.

That's not what it's talking about. It's talking about the man. It doesn't matter.

He might be an intellectual giant. But if he's not taking God into consideration in all his plans, he's the one who's the fool. The fool is an evil man in Proverbs.

And the wise man in Proverbs is a godly man because you don't - it's Jonathan - no, it wasn't Jonathan. It was John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrim's Progress. He said that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

And he that has not the beginning has neither the middle part nor the end either. And so, starting with the fear of the Lord means that wisdom has as its foundation a moral consideration. And it is a moral assessment rather than an intellectual assessment in Proverbs.

If you look at Proverbs 8, we have wisdom personified as if it is a woman speaking. And, of course, it's a long chapter. It has many things.

But in verses 7 and 8, wisdom says, For my mouth will speak truth. Wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are with righteousness.

Nothing crooked or perverse is in them. That is, if you're considering something wicked or perverse or wickedness, then that's not wisdom. Wisdom doesn't speak that way.

All of wisdom's words are righteousness. And you're not going to find any crookedness or corruption in what the Bible would refer to as wisdom. In chapter 21 of Proverbs, in verse 30, it says, There is no wisdom or understanding or counsel against the Lord.

In other words, anything that is said against the Lord just cannot be categorized as

wisdom, ever. Wisdom is always going to be in harmony with reverence for God. And if you know what God has said to do, doing it is always going to be the wise thing.

And if what you're planning seems to have possible earthly benefits, but it doesn't go along with what God says, it's not wise to pursue it, even if it would make you the richest man or the most powerful man or the most successful man in the world to do so. Now, yesterday I was saying that there's different means of divine guidance and that Christians often gravitate toward one pole or another. Some Christians say only the Bible.

Just the Bible is the word of God and you only use the Bible for guidance. Other people get a little mystical and say, I've got to get a word from the Lord about everything. I've got to get a prophetic word almost.

And they're always looking for some kind of a special revelation. And those things were acknowledged as genuine means by which God gives guidance in Scripture. The kings who had to guide the nation and individuals could look to the law of God.

That's the word of God, the written word for instruction. Or they could, if they were fortunate enough to have a prophet, they could get a prophetic word from God. But there was also that third category, the wisdom of the wise or the counsel of the wise.

They also considered that along with the guidance that you get from the written Scripture and the special revelation you might get from the Holy Spirit through a prophetic voice, there is also the standard way that God usually guides people. That's just, don't be stupid. Wisdom.

Wisdom is a legitimate means of divine guidance. Some people may think of it as, oh, you know, too, I don't know, too unspiritual to just think things through and make a decision based on what really is consonant with godly goals and so forth without any special revelation. But that is special, in a sense, revelation.

Human beings are the only ones given this power. The animals don't have this power. It is a special aptitude that God has given us that is part of our being in His image.

That we can see that it would be very stupid to do a certain thing if we hope to have this particular godly goal reached. Our wisdom is a means by which God is instructing us. Not the only way, but certainly a legitimate way.

In chapter 8 of Proverbs, where again, wisdom as a woman is speaking, in verses 32 through 35, she says, Now therefore listen to me, my children, for blessed are those who keep my ways. That is, you walk in the way that wisdom would dictate. That's guidance.

Hear instruction and be wise and do not disdain it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the post of my doors, for whoever finds me, that is

wisdom, finds life and obtains favor from the Lord. So if you want to do what the Lord favors, if you want to do what's pleasing to God, then wisdom is going to be one of the resources that's going to be a leading method by which God is going to lead you in the paths that please Him.

Now Solomon, in order to sort of convey to his son, to whom many of these Proverbs were addressed, the same value of wisdom that David, his father, had conveyed to him, often points out how wisdom is worth more than many other things that people value. In chapter 3, for example, verses 13 through 15, he says, Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding, for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all things you may desire cannot be compared with her.

So wisdom is the thing of supreme value that Solomon wants his son to have. Elsewhere in Proverbs, he's going to say a wise son is a glory to his father. But a son who brings shame is a rottenness to the bones or whatever.

There's a desire in a wise father's heart to see his son be wise. Solomon's son, if this was Rehoboam, didn't turn out to be that wise. You know what Rehoboam's problem was.

The Bible says that when Solomon was dead, he had a crisis. There was a rebellion brewing, and he went to the older counselors who had served alongside his father, and they gave him good counsel. But he wasn't sure he liked their counsel, so he went to the younger counselors who grew up in his generation, and they gave him the opposite counsel.

He kind of liked it because it was a little more selfish, self-aggrandizing kind of course that he wanted to do. So he followed the foolish counsel of the foolish counselors and ended up disastrous. So Solomon would have rolled over in his grave.

But David would have rolled over in his grave if he saw something Solomon did later in life. Knowing what to do and then doing it is going to be wisdom, the right thing to do in doing it. Solomon had the wisdom to know how to make administrative decisions apparently for the country because the country prospered in many ways and expanded under him.

But really personal character is something that will determine whether you're going to continue in wisdom or not. But wisdom, he's urging his son to see wisdom as more valuable than riches, than silver, than gold, than rubies. You might, when you hear in verse 15, she is more precious than rubies, you might think immediately of the last chapter of Proverbs where it's actually a description of the excellent wife, as some modern translations say, that King James is the virtuous woman.

She's more valuable than rubies, more rare. That's what it means. It's harder to find one.

And by the way, that's not Solomon's words, that's his mother's words to him. If you happen to read Proverbs 31, that's his mom telling him that about women. You're not going to find many.

We think of Proverbs 31 as a tribute to womanhood. It's not a very flattering tribute to womanhood because it says, here's what a good woman looks like, you won't find one. And he's sort of going to find a ruby.

Rubies are great and valuable because they're rare. You don't find them very often. Same thing with a good woman.

But that can't be misogynistic since it was his mother telling him that. But you see, throughout Proverbs, you'll find that wisdom is depicted, personified sort of as a virtuous woman. And folly in Proverbs is depicted as a clamorous, foolish, even immoral woman.

There's many, in the early chapters, many references to the immoral woman. And she's almost equated with foolishness. You almost get the impression that you've got not only a warning against real women who are evil, but warning against foolishness which itself is a seductress.

Foolishness itself is like an evil woman, whereas wisdom is like a virtuous and attractive and honorable woman. And so both wisdom and the virtuous woman are said to be more precious than rubies. But the point is that Solomon is getting across or trying to get across to his son that the things that people usually would seek after, money for example, are not as valuable as wisdom is.

If you have to make a choice between one or the other, go for the wisdom. In chapter 16 and verse 16, he says, how much better is it to get wisdom than gold? To get understanding is more to be chosen than silver. Same thought, of course, just a repeat of it.

But the idea is almost everybody would go for the gold if they had the choice. That is almost everyone who's not wise. It's very tempting, especially now with gold at whatever it is, \$1,400 an ounce.

I wish I had all that gold I bought when it was \$300 an ounce. I sold it when it was \$300 an ounce too. Then the next point of importance about wisdom is that wisdom finds its highest expression in Christ himself.

Now Solomon doesn't bring this up because Solomon's Old Testament, he doesn't know about Christ. At least he doesn't know what we know about Christ. But the New Testament does.

And in Matthew chapter 7, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, after Jesus has laid out his instructions to his disciples, in chapter 7, beginning at verse 24, Jesus says,

Therefore, whoever hears these words of mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on a rock. But he says, whoever hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. Why? Well, he said, because there are storms coming.

Your life will be tested. Storms, floods come, the rains come. The houses, as far as we know in these two illustrations, are identical houses except for one thing.

One is built on a rock and one is built on sand. And it made all the difference because one withstood the tests and one did not. And Jesus is saying, if you want to be wise, you're going to want your house to stand the test.

You're not going to be satisfied to have short-term health and prosperity and those things. You're going to want to have what you're sowing, what you're producing in your life, to be something that lasts forever. And so the wise person will choose that course that Jesus taught because that's like building a house on rock that will not fall when tested.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 30, Paul is speaking about Christ as a number of things in our life. He says, but of him, that is of God, you are in Christ Jesus, who, that is Christ, became for us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Christ has become for us wisdom.

To know Christ is to know wisdom. To follow Christ is to follow wisdom. So really the things we're going to read about in Proverbs are consonant with Christ himself because they are God's wisdom expressed in aphorisms in Proverbs and riddles and so forth.

But the ultimate expression of God's wisdom is Christ and therefore there's not going to be any contradiction. But there are some things we have to understand about Proverbs, that is about the genre of a proverb and how it functions in the Bible because we all know as evangelicals that we look at the entire Bible as the Word of God. But not everything in the Bible is the same kind of expression of the Word of God and if we make a mistake about what we're reading we will make a serious error that could be harmful.

For example, in the Bible, which is the Word of God, there are different kinds of material. There are poems. A lot of it is poetry, I've told you that.

The Psalms are poetry, most of the prophets were in poetry. As such, we have to realize that poems use flowery, non-literal figurativeness sometimes. If you take them as literally as you take, say, historical narrative, you're making a serious mistake.

When Isaiah says, the trees of the field will clap their hands. Well, first of all, trees don't have hands and so they couldn't clap hands anyway. And if you say, well, he's probably just picturing the branches, like arms, and they're clapping their branches.

Well, is that literally what he's predicting too? Trees clapping their branches? Or is there something else he's trying to get across? This is a poetic image of the whole creation rejoicing. I don't know if we're supposed to think literally of trees, you know, clapping. It's rather a poetic expression of which there are thousands, especially in the poetic books.

Now, proverbs are a genre to themselves that we need to not mistake for something else. Proverbs are not, to be confused with laws, they are not commands, they are wisdom. Now, of course, all of God's commands, all of God's laws are in accord with wisdom.

But, for example, when the Bible says in Proverbs, answer a fool according to his folly. And then in the next verse it says, don't answer a fool according to his folly. If you're looking at these as commands, like the Ten Commandments, how are you going to obey? One says do it, one says don't do it.

But if you understand that what the Proverbs is doing is expressing wisdom to you. You'll realize that he's not commanding you to do this or to not do this. Essentially what he's saying is you need to discern when it's the right time to answer a fool according to his folly.

Because sometimes you should so that you'll put him in his place. Other times it's not going to be the right thing to do because you'll just become like him. There's like some wiggle room here where you've got to use some real wisdom.

It's not saying always do this or always do that. So, in many cases, like it'll say, don't go surety for a stranger. In other words, don't sign as a cosigner on a loan for somebody you don't know or trust.

But of course the assumption is you're probably going to lose your shirt if you do that. But on the other hand, if you are willing to lose your shirt and you figure this is someone in real need and I'm willing to lose my shirt for it, then go ahead and do it. If you can afford it and if it's a gift you're willing to make to help somebody out if they fall on hard times.

There are times when, you know, generosity, when love, when mercy would incline you to go against something. Because what the proverb is giving is a generality. They are not commands.

Whereas if you would do something against them, you'd be violating some command of God. But you might be going against wisdom and it's not good to do that. But remember, wisdom is knowing how to get from where you are to a desired goal.

If you don't mind doing something that's not immoral, that may bring hurt to yourself temporarily for someone else, that's okay. Sometimes that can be a virtuous thing to do.

It's not wise if what you're looking at is for your own good.

But if you're looking out for someone else's good, it may be moral and ethical to do something that even hurts you. The proverb assumes that you're hoping to stay healthy, live long and prosper. And in general, you do want to do that.

There are times when you're willing to take a hit in those areas for the kingdom of God's sake or for another person's sake. It's not like you should take these as set in stone commandments. These are observations and tendencies and generalities.

That's what the wisdom literature is. Also, it shouldn't be taken as if they are promises. That is a big mistake.

These are not promises. If you read, well, the diligent man will become rich, but the fool will come to poverty. Well, that kind of thing is said a lot of times, and it usually is true.

It's a generality, but it's not always true. And you can't say, God, I was diligent and look, I still am poor. You were wrong, God.

No, no, the statement is generally true. But it's not a promise of God that you can just lay hold of. The statement, train up a child in the way that he shall go, and when he's old, he'll not depart from it.

A lot of Christians take that as a promise of God. I don't blame them for wanting to, but it's a generality. It hasn't always come true, and it's not the unfaithfulness of God.

There is, in fact, a free will in children, and sometimes they make the wrong choice. But it is generally true that a child who's raised with the fear of God, a child who's raised in the proper way, knowing right and wrong, is going to, you know, as, what is it, that statement, as grows the sapling, so stands the oak, or something like that. I mean, the things that are said in Proverbs are mostly true.

But here's how you need to understand a proverb. A proverb is not saying this will always happen this way, or that you must always do this one thing. But it is saying, if what you want is this result, this is the thing you should do to aim at that result.

This is the activity that will tend toward that result, as to something else that will go the other direction. You want good kids, you don't neglect their discipline. You want good kids, you discipline them.

And there's many references to, you know, you'll drive foolishness out of them with the rod, and, you know, they'll do well. Well, they often will, but some kids don't react well. I mean, there is such thing as rebellion.

Remember, God raised kids, too, and they all rebelled against Him. He said so. In Isaiah chapter 1, He says, I've reared up children, and they've all rebelled against Me.

So, He's a perfect parent, you know. None of us are, by the way. None of us are perfect parents.

So, like, when my kids aren't doing what I wish they were, I'll go ahead and take the blame myself. I'm not going to blame anybody for that but myself. But the truth is, I do believe that even parents who do nothing wrong sometimes just have nasty kids that are, you know, the devil gets into them, you know.

And a lot of people say, well, but the Proverbs says they'll never turn away from the Lord. A lot of people say that. I'm trusting God that that's a promise that they're going to come back to Christ at the end of their life.

Well, a lot of them do. A lot of them do. But that's not what the Proverbs says.

The Proverbs doesn't say train up a child in the way that he should go. And after he's backslidden for a while, he'll come back to it. Even when he's old, he'll continue it.

But, I mean, this is describing basically what a wise man would do if what he wants is this result. You want to live long, then do these things. You might not live long anyway.

You might die early. You might die in an accident. You might be crucified at age 33.

But the point is, if you want to live long, you'd be stupid to do anything other than this. If you want to be prosperous, you'd be stupid to do anything other than be diligent. You don't just stay in your bed and sleep if you want to prosper.

You go out and work. Is there a guarantee that you'll prosper? Listen, there's a lot of people in third world countries who are working 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, and they're not very prosperous. Not by anyone's standards.

They're hardly putting food on the table. There is not a guarantee that if you're a hard worker, you're going to be rich. But there is that tendency.

Certainly the Bible indicates that if you want to be productive, you'd better be diligent. That is wise. So wisdom is really knowing what the right thing to do that will aim you in the direction that you really want to go.

And that's the way to look at proverbs. They are patterns, generalities, things that are really counsel, that are observations of a wise man. And many of the proverbs are just things that Solomon says he's learned by observation about things.

For example, he made observations from nature and made deductions from it. In fact, we're even told that when we're first told about how wise Solomon was in 1 Kings 4, it talks about his observations of nature and drawing lessons from there. In 1 Kings 4, in verse 33, it says of him, he also spoke.

This is the verse after it says he had 3,000 proverbs. He spoke in verse 32. Verse 33 says, he also 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 Creepian things, and of fish. So Solomon was a naturalist, among other things. He had an inquisitive mind.

He paid attention to things around him. Of course, in an agrarian, pre-technological world, most of what he observed was in nature, and not in the inside of a cubicle or something, or of a building. But he was observant, and he saw patterns, and he saw connections and correspondences.

For example, in Proverbs chapter 6, an example of this very thing. Proverbs 6, verses 6 through 11. Go to the aunt, you sluggard.

Consider her ways, and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer, or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall your poverty come on you, like a robber, and your need, like an armed man.

Like you'll be overcome, like an invader coming over you. Poverty will be that way against you. But then he takes that from looking at the aunt.

It's interesting, he said, consider her ways, and be wise. I don't know how he knew the worker aunts were female. They are, but I'm not sure how he knew that.

Because they didn't have real good microscopes back then. In Proverbs 24, verses 30 through 34, we have another example of how he observed something from nature and learned something from it. Proverbs 24, 30.

I went by the field of a slothful man, and by the vineyard of a man devoid of understanding. And there it was, all overgrown with thorns. Its surface was covered with nettles.

Its stone wall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well. I looked on it and received instructions.

A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the head of sleep, so your poverty will come on you. He got that from watching the aunts, and he got it from walking down the street and seeing a wall broken down, and weeds growing, and an ill-attended field and vineyard. He said, you know, that's a lazy man.

Those weeds could be pulled with a little diligence. You know, that wall could be kept in good repair with a little diligence. He says, this is what happens.

He was observing the second law of thermodynamics in action. He didn't know the name for it, but he knew that if you don't put in energy to maintain something, it's going to go downhill. And he saw it, and he said, you know, I'm going to learn a lesson from that.

He says, I saw that, and I received understanding. I received instruction. By the way, that's a teachable spirit for you, when you can learn lessons about life from everything you see.

Even just walking down the road and seeing an unmown lawn and a broken-down wall. So, he was observing nature and taking lessons from it. In chapter 30, another author, Agur, this chapter is not written by Solomon, but another wise man, but not too wise, as he himself says.

I mean, I'm not criticizing him in any way. He doesn't criticize himself. In Proverbs 30, this man says about himself, in verse 2, surely I am more stupid than any man.

I do not have the understanding of man, neither did I learn wisdom, nor the knowledge of the Holy One. So, if I say he's not that wise, I'm only taking his word for it. But he did have some wisdom sayings.

Most of them are about how much he doesn't know, but the point is, and that's a wise thing to observe. It's wise to know what you don't know. But, in chapter 30, verses 24 through 28, he says, there are four things, which are little on earth, but they are exceedingly wise.

The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their food in the summer. The rock badgers are a feeble folk, yet they make their homes in the crags of the rocks. The locusts have no king, yet they all advance in ranks.

The spider skillfully grasps with his hands and is in king's palaces. Now, what he's saying is, I've noticed these little animals, and learned, you know, the rock hyrax, it's a vulnerable little animal, so it's smart enough to live in rocks, in the, you know, in crags of rocks where the predators can't get to it. The ant, it's pretty small, and not, you wouldn't think, very intelligent, but it's smart enough to prepare for the winter.

I mean, this is observations from nature, such as you find in the Proverbs. There's also observations of human nature. And Solomon was an observer of human nature, an early psychologist, I suppose, not of the Freudian type, but of the more inspired type.

And there's a lot of interesting wisdom about the way people can be expected to behave or react, that are from his observations, I'm sure. In chapter 12, verse 25, for example, Solomon says, anxiety in the heart of a man causes depression, but a good word and an antidepressant will help. No, he says, anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad.

Not always. Depression can be deep. Sometimes a good word won't really cure it.

But, in general, if you want to avoid contributing to somebody's depression, speak good words to them instead of bad words. What they fill their mind with, and what you help them fill their mind with, is going to help their mood. An observation of human nature.

Chapter 13, verse 12. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it's a tree of life. Hope deferred, that is when you actually have your hopes for something and it is either delayed or canceled.

It can make the heart sick. It can cause bitterness and so forth. Now, by the way, you might say, this is so obvious, why even call this wisdom.

No, it's definitely something that has ramifications that, when you contemplate it, are important. It means, of course, that one of the things that's going to embitter people is having failed expectations. One reason you become bitter at other people is because you expected them to do differently than they did.

If your expectations are too high of people, you are vulnerable to becoming bitter. If you place your expectations lower, you're going to have fewer of your hopes deferred because you won't have that many hopes. You won't have that many expectations from somebody.

When people disappoint your expectations, that's when it hurts relationships and it hurts your own heart. In chapter 18, verse 1, it says, A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire. He rages against all wise judgment.

It's a man who, I guess, doesn't like the accountability of a group. He knows what he wants to do and he doesn't really want anyone counseling otherwise. He even gets angry if people counsel him otherwise because he doesn't have good intentions.

And so he seeks isolation. He seeks non-accountability. He gets defensive and angry when people reason with him about what he's doing wrong.

Solomon has seen a lot of people and when he made that judgment about the baby between the two prostitutes, it certainly was a knowledge of human nature that guided him to say, cut the baby in two. He didn't want to cut the baby in two, but he knew that the woman who was just there out of spite because the women lived together, two prostitutes lived in the same house. They both had babies about the same time.

One lost her baby in her sleep. She rolled over on it. There was only one baby, so she stole the other baby and pretended it was hers.

There was a rivalry between these two women and Solomon could see that and said, well, let's give each half. He knew the woman who didn't love the baby would say, yeah,

good, that serves her right. Kill her baby.

But the woman who was the mother would say, no way, you can give her the baby. I'm not going to let my baby die. I mean, that decision comes out of a knowledge of human nature and Solomon exhibited a fair bit of that in certain cases.

In chapter 23, verses 6 and 7, he said, Do not eat the bread of a miser. Now, a miser is an ungenerous man, a greedy man. Nor desire his delicacies, for as he thinks in his heart, so is he.

Eat and drink, he says to you, but his heart is not with you. Now, you've heard that saying, as a man thinks in his heart, so is he. This is actually the verse they're misquoting.

The Bible does not say, as a man thinks in his heart, so is he. It says, as a miser is thinking in his heart when he invites you to eat and drink. It's not what he's saying that reflects who he is.

It's what's really going on in his heart. He's got ulterior motives. He's a miser.

He's not going to be generous unless he's got something he wants from you. This is not true of everybody, necessarily. Everybody's saying that the miser, who is not known to be a generous man, if suddenly he's acting very generous, hey, come eat at my house.

I want to feed you. Eat all you feel. Be sufficient.

Don't judge him by what he's saying. No, there's something else inside him. He's got motives that he's not revealing.

His words are not reflecting where he's at. His heart is really where he's at. And in this case, it's not where his words are.

Don't be deceived by a man's words if they're reflecting an uncharacteristic generosity when he is known to be otherwise. Know that a man isn't always what he presents himself to be by his words. It's what he is characteristically that exhibits where his heart is at.

That's what you're saying here. We have chapter 20 in verse 14. I'm not sure where we're going backward.

I usually list these in forward order. Chapter 20 in verse 14. This is funny.

It is good for nothing, cries the buyer, but when he has gone his way, he boasts. That's like when you're bargaining for something. You don't do that as much in our modern markets and so forth.

If you go down to a flea market or if you go to a yard sale or you go down to Tijuana or something and they're selling stuff, they're very flexible about the price. And so you try to negotiate it down. And the buyer says, Oh, that thing, that's a piece of junk, you know, because you don't want to pay much for it.

You want to convince the person you're not going to value it much. Oh, it's nothing, says the buyer. But once he takes it home, he boasts about the good deal he got.

Man, you should see what I got for this price. I took advantage of that buyer or that seller in a big way. He's saying that when a person's on the purchasing end, they tend to devalue the thing.

Once they've got it, you know, or if they're selling it, for that matter, then they see it as a great deal, as a thing of value. The value you place on a thing then has a lot to do with whether you're trying to acquire it from somebody else or not. If you're trying to acquire it from somebody else, you want to convince them that it's not something of great value so that you don't have to pay much of a price for it.

In chapter 29 in verse 5, actually before that, there's one I don't have in the notes, but this is a good example of human nature too. 28.1. These are just some samples. Proverbs 28.1. The wicked flee when no one pursues.

That's called paranoia. You're running away, but no one's really after you. Now remember, just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not really after you.

They may really be after you, and you are paranoid too. But when you flee and no one's after you, then that's paranoia. And he said what causes that is the fact that your conscience is not clear.

You're a wicked person. The wicked person doesn't have a clear conscience, so he's always going to be nervous. He lives with the awareness that something bad should happen to him.

And so even when it isn't coming, he's always kind of looking in the rearview mirror because he's driving over the speed limit. And a conscience that isn't clear is always going to be a little paranoid. The wicked flee when no one's pursuing.

But the righteous, a man who's got a clear conscience because he's not doing anything wrong, he's bold as a lion. There's nothing that can intimidate him. He knows he's in the right.

He's got God on his side, and he knows it. That's basically an observation of what people are like when they do or do not have a clear conscience about what they're doing. If they're wicked, then they're kind of going to be looking over their shoulder all the time, fearing that someone's after them.

Chapter 29, verse 5, he says, A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his thief, a little bit like the miser who acts generous toward you. He's got something he wants from you. He's not saying what it is, but it's in his heart somewhere, and you better look there instead of at what he's saying because he's going to try to take advantage of you.

So a man who flatters you, he's got something up his sleeve. He's spreading a net for you. Now, it's possible to take this to mean that flattery itself is a trap.

That is, the man may not be intending to set a trap for you, but by flattering you, he's luring you, not even though he may not intend to, but you are in danger of getting proud. You're in danger of falling into the trap of arrogance because you're being flattered. But I think in this case, it's saying the man who's flattering you has intentions of trapping you into some kind of deal or some kind of favor that he wants from you.

Then, of course, there's observations from what I would call characteristic providence. We'll stop in just a moment here. Characteristic providence means the way that things commonly, God does things, how he responds to human behavior commonly.

Not every case. This is characteristic, but it's not universal. In chapter 12, for example, in verse 2, a good man obtains favor from the Lord, but a man of wicked devices he will condemn.

Well, that's probably universal there, but some of the... because that's not really talking about earthly fortunes and so forth. I mean, in general, I mean, it's true. The good man is going to have God's favor as a result.

And the bad man, of course, God's going to condemn him ultimately. But some of them are more about earthly fortunes that come upon people in these cases. In chapter 14, verse 34, it says, Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

This is saying, essentially, that if you're righteous, God will exalt your nation. That is, if your nation is righteous. But if a nation is sinful, the nation's going to be ashamed.

This is generally true. There may be some exceptions. The Roman Empire lasted a long time without being particularly righteous.

And America, which was perhaps comparably more righteous than the Roman Empire, has lasted a shorter time and looks like it may be on its way down now. But it's because we turn to righteousness too. I mean, the thing is that he's saying, generally speaking, you're going to find this to be true, that when a nation forsakes God, it goes down the tubes.

And yet, God will honor a nation that's righteous. But there are nations that were relatively righteous that also came under some hard times. I mean, I don't know that the Sudan has suffered what it has because of its great wickedness.

I mean, it's the Christians there primarily that are being persecuted. So, you're not going to see every time this happens. But most of the time, I mean, this is typically, I'd say this is the typical way that you'd see providence work.

Chapter 22, in verse 9, says, He who has bountiful eye, that's in Hebraism, it means a generous person. It's literally in the Hebrew, a good eye. In Hebrew idiom, good eye means generous.

An evil eye refers to someone who's greedy. You'll find that used repeatedly that way in the Psalms, Proverbs, and even in the New Testament. Jesus uses the term evil eye as a greedy person.

So, he that has a good eye will be blessed. That is, if you're generous, God will bless you. For he gives his bread to the poor.

That is, the person who has a bountiful eye gives his bread to the poor. Therefore, he'll be blessed, usually. Now, some people give their bread to the poor and they still get a raw deal in life.

There's a blessing for them in the next life, but I'm not sure that Solomon's even thinking about that. I think he's thinking about, in general, you'll find that a man who's generous, God is going to prosper him and bless him. Now, the word of faith, people take that kind of thing as a promise, a universal thing.

You know, just give and it'll be given to you. A lot of these things, these wisdom sayings, are mistaken for promises when they are essentially generalities and observations more than intended to be promises. They're advice to a son to choose wise course of living.

Chapter 23, verses 10 and 11, do not remove the ancient landmarks. That means, in the old days, they didn't have, you know, sophisticated surveying of property. They put a landmark at the corners of a field to mark whose property it was.

Sometimes, unscrupulous man would go out at night when his neighbor was asleep and move the landmark and no one could prove it had been moved. There wasn't any county records of where that landmark belonged. Next day, the guy wakes up and he's got a smaller piece of property than he had before because the landmark's a different place.

And that's what is referred to here. Don't remove the ancient landmark. That would be the landmarks that, in Joshua's day, were set up as the boundaries of the property in Israel.

Don't try to steal your neighbor's property, in other words. Nor enter the fields of the fatherless. They would often do this kind of thing to orphans who didn't have, you know, widows and orphans who didn't have a man to stand up for them in court and stuff so that people would take advantage of them by, you know, they inherited property, but the

neighbor would steal their property and move in the landmark.

It says, for their redeemer is mighty and will plead their cause against you. So, if you try to steal or oppress from the poor, from the orphans, God is on their side and will come against you. These are like characteristic providences that Solomon no doubt had observed.

I don't think it's just wishful thinking on his part. I think he'd observed this to actually happen in real life. One other category that we're going to take a break.

Observations of cause and effect. Basically, these are not necessarily providence of God. They could be seen that way, but they're more like the natural result of actions.

Chapter 12, verse 24. The hand of the diligent will bear rule. The sloth will be put under forced labor.

Not because of any special intervention from God necessarily, but just because being diligent tends toward elevation to power. I mean, think of Joseph in the house of Potiphar or even in the prison. He was a diligent guy and he always rose to the top.

He always ended up being the top servant in the house or the top prisoner in the prison. Eventually, the top man in the kingdom. A diligent person will tend to be trusted with more responsibility and will tend to rise.

In chapter 13, verse 18. Poverty and shame will come to him who disdains correction, that he who regards reproof will be honored. Not every case, but in many cases, if you don't listen to counsel, you're going to go the path of poverty and shame just as a natural result of your stupid choice.

In Proverbs 14, 4. Where no oxen are, the trough is clean, but much increase comes by the strength of an ox. What's that mean? Well, where no oxen are, you don't have to shovel out the dung. Where no oxen are, you don't have to muck.

There's no work to be done to maintain the ox, but then they're not going to have the work that the ox does for you either. Basically, he's saying the investment in some farm equipment, you're going to have to maintain it, but it'll be more productive in the long run because the ox can do a lot more work than you and a lot of other people together can do. It's better to make the investment of shoveling out the barn and having the strength of the ox than to say, well, I don't want to take care of an ox, and so you don't have any produce.

Having the equipment, the proper equipment for the farm, is going to lead to prosperity. One more example. Chapter 29, verses 15 and 17, actually.

The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings his mother to shame.

Verse 17, correct your son, and he will give you rest. Yes, he will give delight to your soul.

At least it'll be more likely. If you don't correct him, Solomon saw what happened with Adonijah. He was never corrected, and he ended up being a rebel, ended up dying a rebel.

He didn't give delight to his father's soul. But a disciplined child is going to tend to be more the child you want him to be, or the adult you want him to become, or her. So, these are basically cause and effect observations.

Again, these are not set in stone promises that are always going to come true, but they are things that, if you want to be wise, if you want these results, this is the wise way to go about it. If you don't do this, then you want that result, you're just being dumb. That's basically what it's saying.

Now, we've got a lot more, of course, to say about Proverbs. We've got a ton of stuff, but we're going to stop right there and take a break.