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Wisdom Literature (Part 2)



Wisdom Literature - Steve Gregg

The Wisdom Literature of the Bible offers practical advice on living wisely and is often written in poetic form. In this presentation, Steve Gregg discusses how wisdom literature differs from other genres in the Bible and emphasizes that it shouldn't be taken as promises or prophecies. Among the practical wisdom offered are warnings against foolish choices and encouragement to pursue God's will, which ultimately leads to a happier life. Overall, the Wisdom Literature offers valuable insights for anyone seeking to live a wise and fulfilling life.

Transcript

Last time, I gave out some notes, which you might not have brought, so I printed out a portion of them on a single sheet. The notes I gave you last time were like stapled, several pages, but it's an extensive long-term study of Proverbs that we began last time. And when I say long-term, it's because eventually we're going to be looking at the main subjects of Proverbs and practical life-type instructions from Proverbs on different topics.

But right now, we're kind of in an introductory phase. I'm not going to cover things in the same order there on the notes that you have. I want to look at the back of that page.

Because we were talking last time about Proverbs as a specimen of Hebrew Wisdom Literature. If you have the notes from last time, I think the title of the notes was Hebrew or Jewish Wisdom Literature. To understand Proverbs and to apply Proverbs, we have to understand something about Jewish Wisdom Literature.

That's what we talked about last time. I was mentioning that Wisdom Literature is a different category than, say, Law. It's not the same as Torah, where God gave commands and there were penalties for breaking those commands.

I mean, legal penalties. The Proverbs are not promises either. They sometimes do predict results.

If you do this, this will happen. But they're not actual promises of God. They're more like observations.

They're not prophecies either. And they're different than many other kinds of literature in the Bible. There are prophecies in the Bible.

There are promises in the Bible. There's certainly law. Now, the Proverbs have some overlap with this because they give instruction or advice and they predict results if you keep that advice.

But as I was saying last time, you can't take the Proverbs as promises from God because that's not how they're intended to be. Proverbs, for example, is a father, Solomon, in most cases, giving instructions to his son about how to be a wise child. He says in chapter 4 that when he was a child, his father, David, held him on his knee and said, listen, make sure you get wisdom.

Make sure you get understanding. That's the principal thing. Whatever you get, get understanding.

And, of course, when Solomon then took over the kingship after David died, God asked Solomon, what would you like? Ask anything. And Solomon said, how about wisdom? How about understanding? And God says, I like that. That's a good request.

You didn't ask for money. You didn't ask for fame. You didn't ask for victory over your enemies.

I'm going to give you all those things you didn't ask for. I'm going to give you what you asked for until I'm going to make you the wisest man anywhere. And we're told in 1 Kings, in chapter 4, that Solomon wrote 3,000 Proverbs and about 1,000 songs.

Now, we don't have all 3,000 of his Proverbs, nor certainly all his songs. We have one of his songs, which is called the Song of Solomon. But he wrote lots of other songs, too.

And as far as his Proverbs go, we probably, I mean, I'm guessing, estimating about maybe 800 or 900 of his Proverbs are in this book, Proverbs. There are also some, what we could call Proverbs, in the Book of Ecclesiastes. The wisdom literature of the Bible is a block of literature.

By the way, it's always written in poetry. Now, not everything that's in poetry is wisdom literature. But wisdom literature is virtually always written in poetry.

And Hebrew poetry differs from the poetry of our language, where we meter and rhyme and so forth. There are important parts of poetry in English, but that's not what makes something poetry in Hebrew. The more aesthetic element of Hebrew poetry, to the ear of the Jew, was repetition of the same idea in different words.

So, the most common thing in Hebrew poetry, it doesn't exist in every line, but the most common feature of Hebrew poetry is couplets or triplets of lines that say either exactly

the same thing in different words, or the second line is very closely related to it. Like, the first line might be a positive, and like the flip side, the negative of that would be the next line. We're going to look at some examples of those.

But it is poetry, and sometimes it's a little hard to understand. Now, prophecy usually is poetry also. At least Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets mostly wrote their books in Hebrew poetry also.

So, Hebrew poetry is a major genre, and wisdom literature is a subcategory of the general genre of poetry. Wisdom literature and prophecy usually are written in poetry. The books in the Bible that are wisdom books include not only Proverbs, but the Book of Job.

Now, the Book of Job is almost all written in poetry, except for the first two chapters, and the last portion of chapter 42, the last chapter. You've got an introduction written in prose and a closing written in prose, but everything in between, about 39 chapters, are just poetry. But the poetry there is the musings of wise men, philosophers, Job being one of them, and his three friends, and then another eventually shows up, and then even God speaks at the end, and they all speak in poetry.

But it's wisdom literature because basically it's musings about the nature of things, why things are the way they are. It's all very philosophical. And in the case of the Book of Job, of course, it's an inquiry into the mysterious ways of God.

Why does a good man suffer as if he wasn't a good man, and so forth. These are the kinds of things that philosophers and wise men talk about. And, of course, Job has the opinions of as many as five people, including Job, if one of those people is God.

But again, that's just a kind of book that the Jews would see as part of the exploration of mysterious realities and philosophical things. That's part of wisdom literature. Wisdom literature can be very practical, not just musing about mysteries, but actually what's the wise way to live.

It's the kind of stuff you go to counselors about. If you go to a counselor, you hope you have a wise one and not a fool, because a wise counselor will recognize what you're doing that needs to change, because you're going to get the same results as long as you do the same thing. Or, you know, what should be done to get certain results.

This is what the Proverbs are mainly about. This is what wisdom literature often is. It's the idea of watching how things usually happen, and what cause and effect can usually be observed in the real world.

That a man who's lazy, generally speaking, he's going to come to poverty. A man who's hardworking and industrious, generally speaking, he's going to do well financially. Now, this would be stated as an absolute in Proverbs.

You know, the swathful man will come to poverty. The diligent man will be wealthy. I mean, those are statements that sound absolute.

That's why I said they shouldn't be taken as promises or prophecies. They're observations. They're generalities.

They are basically the kind of thing you would counsel somebody about if they have in mind a certain goal. You want to live harmoniously with people? Well, then don't sing loudly to them early in the morning when they're trying to sleep. You know, answer with a soft answer rather than grievous words, and it'll cause strife to cease.

Get rid of the tail bearer and strife will cease. Well, usually. There's a sense in which you could add, except when it doesn't happen that way, you know, because these are not absolutes.

We can say, yeah, this is true. A hardworking man will get rich, except in those cases where it doesn't happen that way, which can be caused by any number of things. A bad economy, a government that steals everything he earns.

You know, there's many things that may cause you not to be rich, although you work hard. But if you want to get rich, the idea is you'd be stupid not to work hard because that's the way people normally prosper. And that's what Proverbs are like.

And so the book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes is a similar kind of book. Actually, Ecclesiastes has multiple verses that could be included in Proverbs. They're the same kind of verses.

But Ecclesiastes is specifically the writings of a man at the end of his life, Solomon, reflecting back on right and wrong choices that he made and largely about the regrets and the frustration of having pursued the chief good of man through things that don't produce it, but which, as he says, are like striving after the wind and futility and emptiness and so forth. And so Ecclesiastes is a wisdom book, too. It's, like I said, reflections on what really is the chief good of man and what pursuits will lead to that.

There are fragments of wisdom literature in some other parts of the Bible that are not really wisdom books, like Jesus sometimes will quote a proverb that was apparently a known proverb at his time. I think I brought this up last time. It's been long enough.

I don't remember exactly. But in John chapter four, we have an example of Jesus quoting a couple of proverbs that were known, apparently, to his listeners. In John chapter four, verse thirty five, Jesus is talking to his disciples about these Samaritans who are coming to learn about Christ.

And he says in verse thirty five, 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 at the fields for the

harvest. They are white harvest. Now, he says, do you not say, there are four months and then comes the harvest? He's saying, isn't that a statement, people? Isn't that a saying among you? Isn't this a common proverb? Four months and the harvest? What's that mean? Well, you plant the crops, you have to wait four months before you get something.

Rome wasn't built in a day, after all. You've got to wait for things. All good things come to those who wait.

The idea is, you know, you don't get the harvest just by planting seeds and then walking out and harvesting this. No, you've got to wait. There's four months until the harvest.

And that is a saying. And Jesus said, don't you people say that? Well, listen, right now I've got a harvest for you right now. These people, the fields are white for this harvest.

But he does so by making reference to this, what almost all Bible scholars, I think, recognize as a proverb. Likewise, in verse 37, another one, Jesus says, in this the saying is true. One sows and another reaps.

Now, see, that would be another proverb. The saying is, one sows and another reaps. Once again, it's sort of like four months until the harvest, only saying, you know, you may start a project and it may be finished, but it may be after you're gone.

It may be someone else to finish it, but it doesn't mean that you starting it was a worthless effort, just because you don't live to see it come to fruition. Someone else may finish the project, may reap the harvest that you planted. But if you don't plant it, there won't be a harvest.

These are proverbs that kind of encapsulate truths for life. And, you know, these are, they're not only about what they're talking about. They're about that.

But they're about similar things, there's a principle that is seen there. And you might apply it to many situations. Where there's smoke, there's fire.

Jesus actually twice said, where the corpse is, the eagles will be gathered. Now, he said it in two different places, about two different situations, with apparently different meaning in each case, in my opinion. Some people think it meant the same thing, but we won't go into that.

But the idea that where the corpse is, the eagles are, actually comes from Job. In Job chapter 39, I think it is, or 37, someplace there, God says to Job, the eagles, you know, where the slain are, there they are, there the young are. And the idea is that, you know, if you want to find a dead body, look for the eagles, or we might say vultures.

That would be like saying where there's smoke, there's fire. You know, that's one of our

proverbs. There's a lot of proverbs.

I mentioned last time that what got me first interested in proverbs was back when I was like a sophomore in high school. And I had a teacher who said, you can't make a silk purse from a sow's ear. And then he said, that's from the book of Proverbs.

Well, it actually isn't. He thought it was, but it's not. It's not in the book of Proverbs.

But it's kind of the same kind of a thing. Can't make a silk purse from a sow's ear is, of course, literally true, but the idea is more far-reaching. You know, you can't do much with poor resources.

You know, if you don't have something sufficient for your task at the beginning to work with, you're not going to be able to magically, you're not going to be able to turn, you know, lead into gold, for example. You can't turn pig swine ear, you know, into silk. So, these are just ways that there are encapsulated wisdom of the Jews, and they loved it.

They loved it. They wrote several books that aren't in our Bible. There are apocryphal books written in the period between the Old and the New Testament.

One is called Ecclesiasticus, which is not the same thing as Ecclesiastes. The Catholics have it in their Bible. Ecclesiasticus is also called the wisdom of Cyrax, or Jesus, the son of Cyrax.

Another Jesus. And then there's one called the wisdom of Solomon. Another one, Solomon didn't write, but it's another wisdom, similar proverbs that the Jews have in, not in their Bible, but in, among their ancient writings.

And so, I've sometimes quoted a Jewish friend of mine who, Moishe Rosen, who started the Jews for Jesus, was a good friend of mine. And his organization put out a couple of albums by their Jewish rock group called Liberated Wailing Wall. And when the second album came out, I was visiting with him once, and I said, so which of these albums do you like better? And he said, I have two daughters, which of them do I like better? You know, you might have heard me say things like that about my children, you know, who's my favorite child.

But I just thought that's so typically Jewish. I mean, like Jewish wisdom, proverbial speaking, you know. They're both unique.

They're both likable in their own way, you know. It's like, which of my two daughters do I like better? That kind of expression is very typical of Hebrew wisdom literature and consideration. Before we look at certain proverbs to itemize the different kinds of proverbs there are, which I want to do, I just want to point out that the overall teaching of proverbs is that wisdom is, of all things earthly, the most valuable.

In fact, one might not even call it earthly, because it resides in God. God is the source of wisdom, is perhaps even wisdom itself, in a certain way, and that he is the source of all wisdom for us. In fact, in Proverbs chapter 8, we have one chapter where wisdom, who is sometimes personified in the book of Proverbs as a woman, is speaking through the whole chapter.

Let me just say this about why wisdom is personified as a woman. Solomon is writing to his son, and repeatedly he warns his son to avoid the wrong kind of woman, who he sometimes calls the foolish woman. And he gives examples of the way that she seeks to seduce a man and so forth, and what he needs to look out for.

And, in a sense, one gets the impression that foolishness itself is personified in this woman. But then wisdom is also personified as well. He wants his son to choose wisdom and be attracted to wisdom.

As a man is attracted to a woman, he wants her to pursue as a jewel, as a gem, as something desirable, as he would pursue a woman. Wisdom itself. And, many times, wisdom is personified and speaks as a woman.

And that is the case, actually it happens in chapter 1, but when you come to chapter 8, wisdom is speaking through this entire chapter. And in verse 22, wisdom says, It was the Lord possessed wisdom. God is wise.

Before there was anything else, before he made anything, wisdom resided in God, with God. God was innately wise. But he makes us in his own image so that we can be wise too.

And he basically points out throughout the book that you can choose wisdom. You have a choice. You can be a fool or you can be wise.

In Proverbs 8, 14, it says, wisdom is speaking, it says, Now, God is the one who possesses wisdom from the beginning. He's a rational God. He's the only rational God there is.

The only real God. And he is rational. And when he made man in his image, and made man different than animals, one of the principal and obvious differences between man and animals is the rationality, the ability to reason, the ability to sort things out and choose between things wisely or foolishly.

Adam and Eve acted foolishly, obviously, but God made them able to do wisely. And wisdom here says, That is, good kings, when they reign, they reign through wisdom. That is, they use wisdom in their reigning.

Solomon himself being a chief example in his early reign. Famous for his wisdom. Internationally famous.

The Queen of Sheba came from another country to come and hear him because she'd heard about his wisdom. But, of course, kings don't always reign by wisdom, but the idea is, ideally, God wants us to be wise. And kings and people who are very important are not beyond this response.

In fact, they need it more than anyone else. We all need to be wise. And if we're not wise, then we are falling short of what God is like and what God made us to be like.

The rational God made man to be rational. And true wisdom in this Proverbs is not merely intellectual. There's different kinds of worldly wisdom.

I mean, a person might be very wise in his handling of money. He might be very wise in his dealings with people. I mean, wisdom is, I mean, not only Christians can be wise, but wisdom requires knowing what values to place as superior to other values.

An unbeliever who doesn't seek God has not got that kind of wisdom. True wisdom has got to look at all the things that are available to pursue in life and say, it makes more sense to pursue God. It makes more sense to pursue eternal things than to pursue these temporal things or these worldly things.

Now, people who don't seek God are not very wise because of that. Because that's a choice that a wise person, considering all the options, would say, oh, definitely, it's a no-brainer. Certainly, to seek that which is eternal is infinitely more important and valuable than what isn't eternal.

So, I mean, a truly wise person pursues God. There are people who don't pursue God who are, in measure, wise about other things. If they choose another pursuit, there's some pursuits that are more foolish than others.

A man who pursues, let's say, a good marriage, that's not the highest thing you can pursue. It's certainly better than pursuing flagrant womanizing and passing gratifications with strangers all the time. Obviously, even among unbelievers, some things that can be chosen are much wiser than other things that can be chosen.

Many unbelievers have chosen not to use drugs. Other people, obviously far more foolish, have chosen to use recreational drugs. It's a very stupid thing to do.

And the way it plays out in life has shown to be a very foolish thing. It's very dangerous and just a waste of time and very foolish. Bad for your brain cells.

There are people who are not Christians who have made a wiser choice and decided, I'm not going to do that to my brain cells. I'm going to treasure my brain cells. They may not treasure God, and therefore they're not as wise as they could be, but among the less wise, among the unbelievers, some choices still are wiser than others.

And the wisdom is, therefore, first being able to choose a goal that is really worthy of choosing, and then recognizing what steps I can take in my life that will tend toward reaching that goal. And there's no guarantees about the future. Again, a man may say, well, I want to have a good marriage that pleases God.

That's a good goal. And he might choose a wife that he thinks is going to be consistent with this. She's a godly woman.

And that's a wise choice, perhaps. But on the other hand, he may choose unwisely. I mean, she may look like a good choice, but if he moves rashly, if he doesn't look into her background, if he ignores reports about her that people are saying because he's blinded by his infatuation with her, then he might choose foolishly, even though he really wants a good thing.

What he really wants is a godly marriage that pleases God. But you can still make very stupid choices wishing for that, and they're not the choices that are conducive to it. Wisdom is going to see, this is a good goal, and the most likely steps to take to get there are these steps.

And that's what Proverbs do. That's what wisdom literature is. Now, in Proverbs, it's very clear that wisdom is considered to be moral in nature.

We were looking at Proverbs 8 a moment ago. In verses, well, 21 through 30, it says that wisdom speaking says, I may cause those who love me to inherit wealth, that I may fill their treasuries. The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works evolved, I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, ever there was on earth.

Wisdom. When there were no deaths, I, wisdom, was brought forth. And so forth.

It's obviously a characteristic of God in creation, in governing, and so forth, is wisdom, and that's what wisdom is claiming for itself. In Proverbs, excuse me, 9, 10, it says, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Now, if a person doesn't fear God, hardly anything about them can be said to be wise.

I mean, if you are sleeping on a railroad track, and you're not afraid that a train may come and kill you during the night, you're not a smart person, because there is true danger there. You know, maybe a train won't come, but you don't know. You're risking everything.

You're risking putting yourself on a collision course with something that can smash you like a bug. And that's what anyone does who doesn't fear God. Now, fear of God doesn't mean you're afraid.

It just means you recognize this is an awesome thing. There is a God. He has an opinion

about everything I do.

I'm going to have to answer to Him for it. There will be consequences. Just that knowledge should make everyone somewhat tremble.

And God said to Isaiah, to this man will I look, the one who trembles at my word. You know, Paul said in 2 Corinthians, knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. Anyone who is smart will know they should fear God.

And yet the Bible speaks about evil men. It says there's no fear of God before their eyes. To me, I can hardly imagine anything more shocking than for people not to fear God.

I'm not afraid of God, but you see the Bible says in Proverbs, by the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil. Okay, so by fearing trains, I don't sleep on train tracks. You know, I stay out of trouble that way.

I don't live in fear of trains. But if my car stalled on a railroad track and I was having a hard time getting my seat belt off and a train was coming, I would feel fear. And it's only rational that a person would feel fear in that case.

But when people are on a collision course with God because of the choices they're making in their lives and they feel no fear, there's this sheer stupidity. It was John Bunyan, the writer of Pilgrim's Progress, who said, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and he who lacks the beginning also lacks the middle part and the end. In other words, a person who doesn't fear God doesn't have any wisdom of any kind at all, neither the beginning nor the end of it.

And so wisdom, in Solomon's teaching, is always God-mindful. It's always God-conscious. It's always aware that there is a God who evaluates what I'm going to do.

There is a God who rewards certain behaviors and punishes other behaviors. Anyone who doesn't take that into consideration might as well be walking around the world blindfolded and with earplugs on and risking collision with anything that could destroy them. It would be just that smart to not fear God.

And so wisdom is not merely intelligence. It is an intelligence that's permeated with the consciousness of God and fear of God. Anyone who doesn't have that, I don't care how many degrees they have, they have no brains.

At least their brains have not been turned on and put to use. The book of Proverbs also suggests that wisdom is a legitimate means of divine guidance. Now this is interesting to people who are Christians because they always want to know, how do I know the will of God? How do I know what God wants me to do? Now not everyone in the world wants to know what God wants them to do because they don't care.

They don't want to do the will of God. But someone who is wise enough to fear God wants to do the will of God. Wants to align themselves with Him in their choices and choose for themselves the consequences that come with doing what pleases God.

And how do I know it? How do I be led by God? How do I know what He wants me to do? Well obviously there's different ways. You can be led by the Spirit. The Bible can actually give commands about what to do.

White counselors can tell you what to do. But the point is that wisdom itself is a gift of God to humanity to let them know what they should do in many cases. Now wisdom won't always answer every question about what you need to do, but there's plenty of things that you can choose by wisdom when you go grocery shopping.

You can choose all kinds of foolish things and unhealthy things because you're just trying to please your palate. Or you can buy things that you know are going to be nourishing. That's wisdom at work or foolishness at work.

And God wants you to be wise. In Ephesians Paul said, do not be unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is. In other words, the will of the Lord is that you not be unwise.

Be not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is. It's a way of knowing the will of God. God gives us smarts to know what to do in many cases.

Also, Proverbs is very clear that wisdom is to be desired above virtually everything else. This is stated numerous times. Proverbs 3 for example, and verses 13-15.

Proverbs 3.13 says, Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all things you may desire cannot compare with her.

Everything else you might desire is incomparable with wisdom. If you don't seek wisdom first, then you're seeking something that's not comparable to it in value. All things you can desire are not comparable to it in value.

It's more precious than gold, silver, rubies, you name it. This is what Proverbs frequently affirms. In Proverbs 16.16 Solomon writes, How much better it is to get wisdom than gold, and to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.

Now obviously many people who set their goals in life are looking right at the gold and the silver as probably the best thing to go for. Because they're looking for maybe security in all the eggs, they're going to make as much as they can while they've got years of work that they can do. They want to make wise investments.

Maybe they want to have an elevated standard of living which requires getting more of that and more comforts. They think that's valuable. Obviously seeking prosperity is not evil.

Of course what you do with your prosperity has more to do with whether you're good or evil. A man can be very rich and use his money to do many good things. Or he can be very rich and just hoard it and try to be selfish with it.

But money is not a bad thing. Loving money is a bad thing. Loving money is the root of all kinds of evil.

But God is the giver of wealth. He's the one who gives all good things. Every good gift and every perfect gift.

But if a person says, I want to make money, I want to get silver and gold and rubies, and that's really pretty much my main goal in life, that's not smart. Jesus said if you seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all these other things will be added to you. That doesn't mean you'll be wealthy, but all the things you need will be wealthy.

He says don't worry about what you're going to eat. Don't worry about what you're going to wear. Don't worry about those things.

The heathen worry about those things. You don't have to worry about that. They don't have a father like you do.

Your father will take care of that. You just seek His will. So wisdom is not to seek after wealth.

Now there is such a thing as seeking after God's will and realizing that one thing God might want you to do is to work at a job and to manage your income in a way that's good. Good meaning helpful to the kingdom of God in general and to the poor. But also maybe good in terms of providing for your old age maybe.

I mean God might do that. I never did that, but a lot of people do. And that might be wise.

Now of course Jesus said don't lay up for yourself treasures on earth, but that's for yourself. Don't lay up for yourself, He said, treasures on earth. Solomon says that the ant is wise because it gathers food in the summer so there will be food in the winter.

Not just for itself, for its whole community. Its wise, industrious behavior during times of opportunity serve its whole community. It doesn't really get any more than anyone else in the anthill gets, but they all survive because of His input.

Joseph was that way too. God certainly directed Joseph for the seven years of famine to gather up during the seven years of plenty for the famine time. But it wasn't just for

Joseph, it was for, He kept all of Egypt alive and eventually all of Israel alive and many of the nations around were kept alive in the famine.

So I mean, to gather up goods and to have money is not in itself evil. The question is, who is it for? Are you laying up for yourself treasures on earth? Well then Jesus said don't do that. But then nothing is supposed to be for yourself.

Everything is God's. You're not your own. You've been baptized.

So if God leads you to lay up wealth, then you need to use wisdom in the management of wealth. And by the way, if you happen to live in America and happen to be employed or retired and have income, you're probably wealthier than most people in history have been. You don't have to be a wealthy American.

Just being an American makes you, in a sense, wealthier than almost anyone who ever lived several hundred years ago and before. Which means we have been given much that we might not have even sought. I myself have never sought money.

It's just never had the attraction to me that it does something. I really, from the time I was youth, having food and clothing, let's be content with those things, Paul said. And I truly am.

I don't really desire any. But look, this is my house. It's actually my wife's house here.

She's the one who bought it and furnished it. But I mean, I have what many people wish they could have. And I've never sought it.

And I never wanted it. And if I ever lost it, it would mean nothing to me. Because I don't care about it.

Well, on the other hand, because I'm an American, I do have money come in. And that gives me a responsibility of stewardship, which I never asked for. It's just, living here in America, money comes in.

You need some to live, but money just comes in easier in America than in most other places. And for that, that puts responsibility on me or on anyone. I wouldn't lay up anything for myself in terms of earthly goods, but there's stuff here.

It's laid out in the sense that it's not in motion anywhere. There's no one here taking the piano out and taking the furniture out. It's here.

It's laid out. But I don't consider it to be for me. I mean, it's for what we use it for, which we think is for the kingdom of God.

And if it was ever not useful for some purpose God had for it, I'd have no problems with it being God. Because wisdom is you choose the kingdom of God. You choose God's favor.

And you don't choose things as your goal. Now, worldly people normally do choose things as their goal, but Solomon says, more than wealth, more than silver and gold and rubies, seek wisdom. You'll be happier with that than anything else.

Any other wealth or anything like that. It's to be desired above many other things that people value. And I would say this too, that the Bible teaches that wisdom, the wisdom of God, finds its highest expression in Jesus himself.

So, it says in 1 Corinthians 1.30 that Jesus has become to us wisdom. That's in the place where Paul is talking about how the gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing, but that's okay. We're not worried about these things.

The foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. So, Christ has become our wisdom. All I care about is to be in sync with Christ.

That's wise. Having wisdom is to have Jesus. And, of course, Jesus even said that at the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

In Matthew 7, verse 24, it says, Therefore, whoever hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who builds his house on a rock. That's a wise thing to do if you want your house not to fall down in a storm. And he said, Whoever hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man who builds his house on sand.

And that's not going to go well. But the thing is, it's hearing and doing his words that distinguishes between being wise and foolish. Now, that's the New Testament spin on this.

But the Old Testament, it doesn't cancel out the Old Testament spin. It is still the case that while we recognize that anything Jesus said is the highest in wisdom, he didn't speak about everything we do. He didn't speak about what we're going to have for dinner tonight or whether we're going to buy something we see for sale or not.

He didn't answer those questions. Wisdom often has to dictate most of our choices. And therefore, the Jews recognized wisdom is another way, maybe one of the most important ways, of knowing what is right to do and what God wants you to do.

Now, on the other side of the notes, let's talk about proverbs as individual sayings. Proverbs are pretty aphorisms and similes and metaphors that summarize general observable truths. And some of them are single lines, not so much the ones in the Book of Proverbs.

Those ones usually have at least two lines, but in other places there are proverbs in the Old Testament that are single lines. I think we went over these quickly last time, if I recall. David, when he was being pursued by Saul, Saul was accusing David of being a treacherous traitor and that's how he was justifying his own pursuit of David.

And David had done nothing wrong. And once David cut off a piece of Saul's robe in the cave and Saul didn't know it. And then when Saul was a safe distance away, David came out of the cave and waved it in the air and said, Saul, this is your piece of your mantle.

I cut it off. I could have killed you. And David said in 1 Samuel 24, 13, there's this proverb, wickedness proceeds from the wicked.

Now, we might call that a tautology. A tautology is where you basically just say the same thing twice and adding no information. But it's not strictly a tautology.

Wickedness proceeds from the wicked means, if you're calling your enemy wicked and yourself not wicked, well, who's doing the wicked stuff? Wickedness proceeds from wicked people. David is being accused of being wicked, but he hasn't done any wicked stuff. Saul's not calling himself wicked, but he's doing wicked things.

So, the proverb is wickedness proceeds from the wicked is simply an observation. You can tell if a person is wicked by if there's wickedness coming from them. You can even judge your own state of whether you're wicked or not by whether wickedness is coming out of you and your behavior.

In Ezekiel, there's a proverb. Ezekiel 16, 44 says, like mother, like daughter. We've got a very similar one in English, like father, like son.

And, of course, basically that is simply observing that the child who's raised in the home of certain parents will no doubt be strongly influenced by those parents in the way that they'll behave. In Proverbs 117, when Solomon is warning his son not to cast in with wicked criminals who want to kill and steal people's property, he makes this proverb, in Proverbs 117, it says, Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. That's a one-line proverb.

In vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. What's that mean? It means if you're going to spread a net to catch a bird, spread the net while the bird's not watching. Even a bird is smart enough not to walk into a trap that he watched you set.

I've even found the limit of the opossum's stupidity. I have a trap I catch, we have an opossum living under our shed. I've caught the same opossum in the same trap ten times.

The other night I set it, and it didn't go for the bait. It didn't go in. It didn't catch it.

So, I guess even opossums are smart enough, eventually, to recognize a trap. What Solomon's saying is even a bird can recognize a trap if it's obvious. And that's what he's saying.

He's saying, if these guys are telling you to go rob and kill and so forth, that's a trap for

you. You better be as smart as a bird and stay away from that. Don't be stupid.

That's what he's saying. Don't be dumber than a bird. In Matthew 11, 19, Jesus said, Wisdom is justified by her children.

Now, it's hard to know exactly what that means. It could mean one or another thing. Wisdom is justified by her children may mean wisdom is justified by those who embrace it.

That is, their own wisdom seems right in their own sights. Whoever holds a view can find ways to justify that view, and it's justified. Or, it may mean that by her offspring.

Wisdom is recognizable by what kind of behavior her offspring comes from that wisdom. But, it's a proverbial statement that Jesus uses. I already mentioned, Jesus said, Where the body is, there the eagles will be gathered.

Jesus said that in Luke 17, 37. He also said it in Matthew 24, 28. And the verse in Job that that is probably taken from is Job 39, 30.

And then we already mentioned Jesus used that proverb in John 4, 37, One sows and another reaps. He says that is a saying. He says that's a proverb.

And it is. So, whenever you see a proverb, and it says something that seems like only obvious. It's only obvious.

One person sows, another person may reap. You know, where there's dead body, vultures or eagles will be gathered. I mean, it's a very obvious observation.

But, you ask, this is a pregnant statement. It actually, there's a principle in there that applies to a much larger set of things. So, that's what we have to look at the proverbs with that in mind.

Now, besides the one-line proverbs, there are the very many of them that are couplets. And of these couplets, there's at least two different kinds. There are couplets that amplify, and there's couplets that contrast.

Now, a couplet that amplifies, the second line kind of increases or expands on the first line. Essentially the same thing, only making it stronger. The ones that are contrast, the second line shows the flip side, or the opposite of it.

Let me give you some examples of amplifications. Proverbs 9, 17. Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.

Now, there's two lines here. Stolen water is the subject one, and bread eaten in secret. But, those are kind of similar.

Things that are secretive, things that are illicit, sometimes they hold an attraction. Stolen water is sweet. It's just regular water.

Water is odorless, colorless, tasteless. But, it's a sweet thing to the sinful heart to feel like you're getting away with something. This water, I wasn't supposed to have it, but I got it illegitimately.

I'm enjoying it more because of that. Bread eaten in secret is enjoyable. This is describing, of course, the nature of a fallen person.

Whatever is forbidden is thereby made more attractive. No doubt this is why Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. They had all the fruit in the world.

They just weren't allowed to eat that. But, there was a law against it. Paul said, I would not have known covetous if there hadn't been a law that said you should not covet.

He said, by the law, not only is the knowledge of sin, but also the law works in me all manner of evil desire that wasn't there before. Why? Because of the sinfulness of human nature. If you feel like you can get away with something, and it's a little bit naughty, it's something you really know that you don't want people to know, but you got away with it.

There's a certain carnal, not a godly enjoyment, there's a certain carnal enjoyment of that. And that's what it means. Stolen water is sweet.

Bread eaten in secret is pleasant. Those are two lines that mean essentially the same thing. One amplifies on the other.

Another case, Proverbs 19.24, and there's any number of these, I'm just picking out a few samples. A slothful man buries his hand in the bowl and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again. Now, a slothful man, Solomon has a lot of insults for slothful people.

He has no respect for people who are lazy. He's always about being diligent and always about how stupid a person is who is just lazy. And he says extreme things, like he'll say, as a door moves on its hinges, so does a slothful man on his bed.

He may move a little bit, but he's attached. He's not getting away from his bed. I mean, there's just things like that.

The slothful man says, there's a lion in the streets, I'll be torn to pieces. In other words, I can't go out to work because, who knows, there's lions out there, right? Well, has anyone seen one? No, but they could be there. You never know.

Any excuse for not working. That's what Solomon does to slothful people. He says, a slothful man hides his hand in the bowl.

He's talking about a situation where you're at a Jewish meal. There's a bowl of sop in the

middle, and you dip your matzos, or you dip your pita bread in it. Everyone uses the same bowl.

Like at the Last Supper, Jesus said, the one I'm dipping in the bowl with right now is the one who's going to betray me. The slothful man, he's got his food in his hand. You reach out the bowl.

He's too lazy to bring it back to his mouth. His hand's just going to stay there. He's just that lazy.

He's not willing to use any energy at all, even to feed himself. That's the picture. He hides his hand in the bowl.

It grieves him to bring it even to his mouth again. It's just too much work for a man who is that slothful. So, those two things kind of amplify each other.

Another example, maybe the last one of this type, is Proverbs 22.7. The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is a servant to the lender. Now, the poor man is being ruled over by the rich man. The man who has to borrow is a poor man.

And the man who is poor and has to borrow is a servant to the man who lends to him. Now, by the way, the Bible nowhere says that being in debt is immoral. Jesus even said, lend, asking for nothing in return to people.

Lending would be wrong if being in debt was wrong, because you're putting somebody in debt. You might say, but Jesus said don't expect anything back, so isn't that more like a gift? Kind of like a gift. You could give a gift, but some people don't want charity.

Some people just need a little help for a few until payday or something like that. And they don't want a gift, they just want a little assistance. So, you lend it to them.

They plan to pay you back. They'd rather pay you back. But you do it not caring if they pay you back or not.

From your point of view, it could as well be a gift. But, I mean, if he pays you back, that's fine. The point is that there's a difference between a loan and a gift.

And many people are a little proud to take a gift, but not maybe too proud to borrow something until Tuesday for a hamburger today. I'm not asking you to give me a hamburger, just, you know, I'll pay you back Tuesday for a hamburger today. And you say, well, okay, if you pay me back you do, if you don't, you don't.

That's fine. But the point is, being in debt is not a sin. At least the Bible never says this, but it's undesirable because you're in service to whoever lent you.

Anybody who has debt they can't immediately pay off knows this if they've ever sought

to be flexible in life. If they've ever thought about going on a mission trip or just taking a month off work but they have to work hard because they've got this debt hanging over their head. That's something that has to be taken care of and it's like a slavery.

And that's what it is. But the point here is that these two lines are essentially saying the same thing or very much like the same thing. The rich rules over the poor.

The borrower is the servant or slave to the lender. Now there's also those that are contrasts and here's a few examples of those in Proverbs 12.4. An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who causes shame is like rottenness in his bones. Now we have these two different kinds of wives contrasts.

It's making the same point, but by a strong contrast. Both of them are saying a good wife is a great advantage. Everyone should have a good wife.

The flip side of that is a bad wife is a great disadvantage, but that's saying the same thing. But showing the other side is the same thing. And a lot of Proverbs are like that.

Proverbs 12.18 says, There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health. There's two different ways of speaking. Both make the same thing.

The idea is the way you speak is either going to help or hurt. If you speak well, you can heal. If you speak a certain other way, you can hurt.

Both are speaking about the impact of your tongue, the impact of your speaking on somebody else. And both are saying you have a significant impact on people when you speak. That's the lesson.

And it's got both sides showing. Speaking one way can heal. Speaking another way can hurt.

Proverbs 14.23, another example of this. In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty. So again, any labor you do is going to bring some improvement.

Except when it doesn't. Mostly it will. I mean, if you pick up a piece of trash, there's some profit in that.

If you want to buy the piece of trash and leave it, no improvement. I mean, every little bit of effort. In all labor, there's profit.

There could be a lot of profit in some kinds of labor. Others, just a little. But the point is, better to have some profit from your time than none.

And yet, idle chatter just leads to poverty. Idle chatter, therefore, is not work. It's not labor.

The choice is between spending your time doing something profitable or doing something, or just talking about stuff. And so, it's two different things opposite of each other. Chattering or working.

And one has profit, one doesn't. Last example of this kind. Proverbs 27.6. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

So, here we have a person who you think is hurting you, they're wounding you. But they are a friend. And they're doing it because they're faithful to you.

This is something that is for your good. It hurts, but it's a friendly gesture because it's constructive. It's constructive criticism or whatever.

The flip side of that is there are people who kiss you or pamper you or please you, but they're really your enemy. They're not really telling you what you need to hear. They want to flatter you for some advantage.

They're not really your friend. But the point is, one person treats you maybe a little more harshly. The other person kind of coddles you.

You might tend to think the coddler is your friend and the person who hurts you is your enemy. It's the other way around in many cases. The person who is your friend will have to wound you at times to get you to do what's best for you and for all involved.

And the person who is your enemy will often pretend to be your friend by kissing. Like Judas. Judas kissed Jesus.

It wasn't exactly a friendly gesture. Then we have passages where there's clusters of Proverbs all on the same subject. I'm not going to look at those all now right now.

But you can see them in your notes. There are clusters of Proverbs on one subject. Let me look at some of them anyway so you know what I mean by clusters.

Proverbs 10, 19-21. Now those Proverbs all have something to do with speaking. What your words accomplish.

And there's three in a row. Now, for the most part, if you read through a chapter of Proverbs, there's going to be 30 or 31 verses most of the time. You're probably going to have at least 30 subjects.

You usually don't have two verses in a row on the same subject in Proverbs. They're unusual. They're random.

But occasionally they're stuck together. A series of Proverbs on the same subject. That's what I mean by these clusters.

If you look at chapter 16, 12-15. Another example. It says in chapter 16, 12.

Now, I won't talk about what these Proverbs are saying at this point, but one thing is obvious. They're all talking about a king. And most of the Proverbs aren't.

I mean, that's a gathering together of thoughts about kings on one subject. And that's what we sometimes find in these cases. Let me skip over some of these other examples I've given you where you have these clusters.

There's also a few cases where one proverb or one thought is drawn out. It's not a pithy, single couplet like most of them, but it's more like a discussion. Still in poetry, but still extended ideas.

Like in chapter 25, verses 21 and 22. It says, if your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat. And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.

For in so doing, he will cause a fire upon his head, and the Lord will reward you. Now there's instructions in one of them, and then there's kind of an explanation of why this should be done. That extends the thought a little more than just a couplet that has the instructions.

This kind of gives an outcome and explains why this is a little longer than a typical short proverb. In chapter 26, verses 24 through 26, it says, he who hates disguises it with his lips and lays up deceit within himself. When he speaks kindly, do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart.

Though his hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness will be revealed before the whole congregation. Now notice there's three verses in a row talking about the same person. They're not individual proverbs, they're long, extended proverbs about the deceitful person.

Let me give you these two other examples and we'll be done. Proverbs 27, 15, and 16. A continual dripping on a very rainy day, and a contentious woman are alike.

Whoever restrains her, restrains the wind and grasps oil in his right hand. Now, obviously the second verse is expanding on the first one. It's obviously an unflattering comment about the wrong kind of woman.

By the way, Solomon has a lot of things to say unflattering about the wrong kind of man, too. In fact, almost all of the proverbs are presupposing a man as the one being described whether slothful or wise. But there are some that are specifically about women, and this may be for the advantage of his son to make sure he chooses wisely when he chooses his woman.

It says, a continual dripping on a very rainy day, and a contentious woman are alike. In

what way? What's that? They don't stop. That's right.

They're continual. Sort of like someone I know. Anyway, so we can see it doesn't only apply to women.

I'll tell you, when I was younger and I read this, I thought of it as sort of like, you know, Chinese water torture. You're continually dripping. Or like the cartoons.

There were always these cartoons about someone trying to sleep in bed, and the faucet in the bathroom is dripping. You've seen them. And he gets up, and he shuts it tighter.

It stops. He goes back to bed, and it drips again. You've all seen it.

Eventually he's tearing the whole house apart trying to make it stop dripping. Typical thing for cartoons. That's how, when I read this as a youth, I had these images.

But actually I think what he may mean is that continual dripping erodes. If dripping from the roof in one spot continues, a hole forms there. If it happened over thousands of years, it might even be a hole in a rock if the continual dripping is there.

It erodes things. And it can erode a man's character if he's continually being, what's he call it, has a contentious woman all the time. If he's always content with his wife, it certainly erodes his patience and his character perhaps.

But then he says, whoever restrains her restrains the wind and grasps oil with his right hand. Which is a way of saying, it can't be done. You can't restrain the wind, you can't grasp oil in your hands, because it slips through your fingers.

Restraining a contentious woman cannot be done. That's an important thing to note. He's not saying that all women are contentious.

So this is not a statement about women. This is a statement about a certain kind of woman, a contentious woman. It's in her heart to argue.

She just wants to argue about everything. She wants to contend about everything. You can't stop her.

You know, I once heard a preacher say, you know, a wife is like a flower and a husband is like the gardener. And if the gardener takes proper care of the flower, it flourishes. If the flower wilts, it's because the gardener is neglecting it.

And therefore, the bottom line is, your wife's well-being, spiritual and otherwise, is strictly under your control, man. You know, you just treat them right and they'll be happy. That's not the way it is in real life.

It's still good advice. And again, it would be like a proverb, because it is perhaps

generally true. It is generally true.

A man who treats his wife right will be contributing greatly to his own happiness and her flourishing. But women are adults with free will too. My daughters were teenagers when they heard that sermon from this guy and they were offended.

Oh, so men are responsible for their own actions, but women aren't responsible for their actions. Women can't be expected to do anything except when men cultivate them. I mean, women don't have any free agency.

And that's basically what that teaching was saying, which is of course false. God had a wife, Israel, and she did very poorly, though God didn't do badly as a husband. And he makes that point.

He said, I was a good husband to you, how come you rebelled against me? Hosea's wife ran off and committed adultery and we don't have any evidence that he was a bad husband. People do what they're going to do, but this proverb makes it very clear. There's a certain kind of person, in this case a woman.

I'm sure you can find men who are like this too, but a certain kind of woman who's just contentious by nature, just wants to fight, wants to argue, and restraining her is as impossible as restraining the wind. And a man can't always be held responsible for the misbehavior of his wife. The same person who preached that sermon said, a man is like the captain of the ship and it doesn't matter who causes the damage, he's always responsible.

If he's got somebody else running the ship while he's sleeping downstairs, if it runs aground, he's responsible. That may be true of a ship captain. But, of course, a little less so if there's a mutiny.

As long as the ship is submitted to him properly, he's definitely responsible for what takes place. If ever a mutant rebels against him, then there's not much he can do. So, I mean, these analogies of male-female relationships, they're not as realistic as Solomon is.

Now, I don't think Solomon was a very good husband. I don't think any of his thousand wives would have thought he was a model husband. But, poor husband that he was, he knew enough women to know there are some cases where it's not his fault.

There are some cases where even the woman can be at fault for her bad behavior. Now, in Proverbs 27, the same chapter, verses 23-27, we'll close with this. This is one extended proverb.

It says, Well, that's really different than most of the proverbs. It's very long, for one thing. And it's not all about couplets.

But, what does it say? It says, Riches are not forever. So, keep a flock. Keep goats.

Keep cows. Grow grain. I think what he's saying is this, that you may inherit a fortune, but if you don't cultivate something that's going to be renewable and continue to support you, like livestock or a field or something like that, your riches, they don't last forever.

Riches are not forever. Eventually, you'll spend it all up. If you're wise, you're going to look to your opportunities to do something with your opportunities that will, as it were, renew your prosperity year by year for your children and your family and so forth.

Which would be, perhaps, an argument against spending your paycheck on the newest gaming system or something like that. It may be fun. It'll cost a lot of money.

But, it's not going to produce anything for your family in the long run. And the day may come when you lack money and look at that thing and say, I had that much money tied up in that stupid thing. It's no good anymore.

And now I don't have anything renewing it. So, I think this is just advice, of course, in an agrarian society where most people did have land. That's what Israel inherited from their ancestors was land.

Use that land. We might say start a business or do something else that's got the potential to continually produce because whatever you have now on hand, the capital you have now is not going to be there forever. So, don't just waste it or sit on it.

Obviously, use it for something that has continuing value. That's, I think, what that problem is saying. But, it's the real long run.

It's pretty unusual for there to be really long problems. Most of them are really short. And, what we're going to do next time, we're going to start taking the themes in Proverbs.

How to manage money. How to manage marriage. How to manage troublesome neighbors.

Things like that. And, there's a lot of Proverbs on each of these that will explore that. And, we'll also see, not just Proverbs, we'll tie that in with what Jesus said on the same subjects.

What the New Testament says because the New Testament is very much in agreement with the Proverbs. And, sometimes gives more development of what they're talking about.