



Intro + chapters 1 & 2

Taught at our Sunday evening service, 5th September 2021 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: 1 Kings 4:29-34

Good evening. Let's pray.

Introduction

Well, I hope you're hungry! Over the next 15 weeks we're going to study the 31 chapters of the Bible that make up the book of Proverbs, so roughly two chapters a week.

And I am so excited about this. Proverbs is nothing short of amazing. It is practical, challenging, and if applied - life changing. It talks of good things such as wisdom, mercy, faithfulness, peace, righteousness and diligence. And it talks of things we should avoid with all our might, from stupidity, to foolishness, adultery, violence, wickedness and laziness. And the way it often does this is through contrasting one against the other - whether that be wisdom compared to foolishness, diligence compared to laziness or the immoral woman compared to the excellent wife.

As we study it, we'll certainly understand why the forward in the NKJV says "the simple truth is that if people followed the advice of Proverbs, many of their problems would be reduced dramatically".

And it's perhaps the easiest book of the Bible to summarise quickly:

Because if you are going to summarise Proverbs in one word, it's WISDOM

If you are going to summarise Proverbs in two words, it's GET WISDOM

If you are going to summarise Proverbs in three words, it's GET WISDOM NOW

Wisdom

But what do we mean by wisdom? We need to be careful on our definition, for the world at large thinks it's pretty wise, when in reality it hasn't got a clue.

Indeed, elsewhere in the Bible, James warns us of the difference between worldly wisdom, and godly wisdom:

James 3:13-17

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

Note how much of that is attitude. And our attitude comes from our hearts. And our hearts are by nature, as the Bible describes, desperately wicked. Our only hope? Jesus.

And so it follows that you cannot have godly wisdom without Christ. Indeed, we read in Colossians chapter 2 that it's in the Father and in Christ that all treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. Therefore it is only by God's grace, and through his Word, that we can be truly wise.

But is it as simple as reading our Bibles? No. Because the Bible, including Proverbs, will do you no good if you don't apply it. Just like having a cheque you don't cash, or a discount code you don't use, the value comes in the application of it.

Even Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, and author of most of the book of Proverbs, failed to heed the advice written in it throughout all his life, and he was the worse for it.

So as we go through this book, we should be prepared to learn, to recognise where we are wrong, and to apply God's wisdom to our lives. I like Charles Spurgeon's thought... he said:

A man who says "I was wrong" really in effect says "I am a little wiser today than I was yesterday"

Charles Spurgeon

Overview of Proverbs

So as a quick **overview**, Proverbs, which itself is quoted 9 times in the New Testament, is the 20th book of the Bible, with 31 chapters containing a total of 915 verses - that equates to between 550-800 proverbs, depending on how you're counting.

The majority of the book was written by King Solomon of Israel, David's son, with the last two chapters written by Agur and Lemuel respectively. And it was written around 1000BC after Solomon had become king (though chapters 25-29 were compiled later by King Hezekiah in around 700BC). And in case you don't know, this is one of three books of the Bible that were penned by Solomon - the others being Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs.

So regarding the **author**, given how much of the Old Testament talks of not only Solomon, but his family, we know a lot about him. But there are three things in particular that I want you to note tonight:

First, Solomon asked for wisdom

In fact, we read in 1 Kings 3:5-14 that God asked him "what shall I give you?" - and wisdom was Solomon's request. And that is something you and I can ask for too.

James, in the context of asking for wisdom in trials, writes:

James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

What a promise that is! And when you see how much God blessed Solomon with wisdom, why wouldn't we ask for the same too?!

Second, God gave him wisdom

But not just a bit - no, He gave him wisdom in abundance as we read in 1 Kings chapter 4 earlier.

Solomon was the wisest man to have ever lived. And people didn't Google, or look up Wikipedia - they went to hear Solomon's wisdom. Indeed, one commentator noted that Solomon could not have borrowed much, if any of what we read in proverbs from men before him, as all uninspired ethical writers lived after his day.

And third, Solomon's background wasn't an easy one

This is important to note, for there is neither limit to the wisdom God will bless you with because of your background, nor should you or I hold back in proclaiming God's wisdom because of what has happened previously - no matter how close to home.

Let me explain. One of the very clear topics that Solomon deals with is adultery. His dad was David, his mum was Bathsheba, who committed adultery together. Yet, here, very publicly, Solomon is saying what his parents did was sinful. So note, that sinful lifestyles needn't be perpetuated through generations, and neither is your background an excuse to sin.

As for the **nature** of the book of Proverbs, you might be wondering, "what is a proverb"? One helpful description is that proverbs are short sentences drawn from long experience. That's probably a good way to remember it.

But as mentioned, often one thought is coupled with another - and this is because it is Hebrew poetry. Not with rhyme or meter as our poetry often does, but with two ideas in parallel. And it does this in three main ways:

1. The second thought expressing the **same** thought in a different way
2. The second thought is saying the same truth but from the **opposite** point of view (to contrast)
3. The second statement **developing** the thought of the first

That may or may not help you as we go through, but I share it in case helpful. And if you want to look at that more deeply I can share some details on the technical or literary terms of Synonymous, Antithetic and Synthetic Parallelism that explain this.

Still with me? I hope so, for there are three other things about this book really worth noting:

First, it contains no unscientific statement or inaccurate observation. And that's remarkable given how long ago it was written.

Second, it is morally excellent. There are many ethical writers that have not only spoken good things, but some awful things too! This also sets proverbs apart.

Third, like the rest of the Bible, it does not contradict itself. This is particularly important to note in light of the world's wisdom which on one hand says "Look before you leap" contrasted with "He who hesitates is lost." "A man gets no more than he pays for" contrasted with "The best things in life are free." J Vernon McGee notes that "the proverbs of man contradict each other, because men's ideas differ. But there is no contradiction in the Book of Proverbs because it is inspired by God."

And finally, let's talk about the structure of Proverbs. Structure? What structure you might ask?! At first glance, and many glances thereafter, it can seem quite random.

Some people are inclined to read the Book of Proverbs very much like the man who said, "I enjoy reading the dictionary, but the stories certainly are short." Maybe you feel that way about Proverbs, but I hope you will see it differently as we study the book.

Some suggest Proverbs chronicles the life and learning of a young man at the beginning of the book, with him starting out in life, and by the end a wiser, older man, who can look back at his life with the benefit of hindsight - seeing wisdom for how precious it is. And he gets his first lesson in Proverbs 1:7, which is the key to the book.

But we know that life is more complex than that. There are some wise teenagers, and some stupid old men. When it comes to godly wisdom, a new Christian in their 90s may well have much more to learn than the Christian who is 19 and was saved at 15. And those who have been a Christian for a while should especially note this warning in scripture:

1 Corinthians 10:12

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

That is, whatever your age or stage, you need wisdom. You need God's Word.

So then, we can use the idea of progression and learning through life as a help, but I think what really emerges from the reading of this book are themes - wisdom being the overarching one - that we need to apply to our lives. And by the end of our study I hope we have noted some of those.

And so to summarise the structure, this is what we'll see as we study it together:

- Wisdom and folly contrasted, Chapters 1–9
- Proverbs of Solomon, Chapters 10–24 — (Written and set in order by himself)
- Proverbs of Solomon, Chapters 25–29 — (Set in order by men of Hezekiah)
- Oracle of Agur, Unknown Sage, Chapter 30
- Proverbs of a Mother to Lemuel, Chapter 31

Overview of chapter one

So, pressing on, let's take a look at what we'll cover in chapter one, which we can split into 5 parts:

- v1 - Author of Proverbs
- v2-6 - Purpose of Proverbs
- v7 - Foundation to the book (and life)
- v8-19 - Do not consent to evil
- v20-33 - Wisdom is calling

Overview of chapter two

Overall chapter 2 speaks of the value of wisdom, but zoom in a little and there are two parts to it, the first of which we'll also study this evening:

- v1-9 - The if and when of wisdom
- v10-22 - The effect of wisdom

Chapter one

So, let's get into chapter one where we see the predominant author noted:

Proverbs 1:1

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

Followed by the purpose of all the Proverbs that will follow...

Proverbs 1:2

To know wisdom and instruction,
To perceive the words of understanding,

This is more than mere memorising of facts or statements, it is the application of them. Digging deeper into the original Hebrew words, the word *wisdom* carries the idea of skill. The skill of living life well, no doubt.

While the word *instruction* not only implies the need for understanding, but the reality of chastening and disciplining. Just like you teach a young child through disciplining them, so God does with us.

As for understanding, this implies discernment. More than merely understanding the words that are spoken. But this is just the start of the purpose of these proverbs, for the Bible continues...

Proverbs 1:3

To receive the instruction of wisdom,
Justice, judgment, and equity;

That is to know right behaviour, to make right verdicts in life, and fairness.

Proverbs 1:4

To give prudence to the simple,
To the young man knowledge and discretion—

Prudence is not a word that is often used today, but I fear it is even less often applied. CS Lewis defines it as this:

Prudence means practical common sense, taking the trouble to think out what you are doing and what is likely to come of it.

CS Lewis

And we'll see how necessary this is, especially in these opening 9 chapters.

As for who it refers to by the simple? It is those who lack in knowledge and experience, and therefore act rashly and unwisely.

But then note that these proverbs are to instruct the young, not exclusively, but certainly so.

Today, it greatly saddens me to see the divisions in society between young and old. The media do a great job of fuelling this of course, but this is not how the world should be, and it's certainly not how the church should be.

For it's obvious, that no-one is born with knowledge or wisdom. In fact, the only thing children don't need teaching is how to sin. That is the only thing that comes naturally. Therefore, young men, and young women - you have, by definition, a lot to learn. That's not an insult, it's a fact. So where are you going to get wisdom from? Netflix? Google? No, it must be the Bible.

And in every church the older men and older women should be mature enough to teach the younger. And the younger men and younger women should be humble enough to learn from them.

Proverbs 1:5-6

A wise man will hear and increase learning,
And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel,
To understand a proverb and an enigma,
The words of the wise and their riddles.

There is a difference between listening and hearing, right? We know what's meant by "You're not hearing what I'm saying, are you?!" A wise man will hear these proverbs.

And as JVM notes, "This has been the characteristic of all great men. They never reached the place where they felt that they had learned everything."

And a wise man will not learn in isolation, but through wise counsel of others - carefully choosing whom he listens to, so that he may understand, learn and apply more wisdom to his life.

But note this, we read later in Proverbs 25:2

Proverbs 25:2

It is the glory of God to conceal a matter,
But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.

That is, while God has made his gospel easy enough for a child to understand it, the richness of His Word is buried beneath the surface. Just like diamonds and jewels are buried in the ground and require effort to extract, God has not scattered the diamonds of His Word on the ground - but are concealed in His Word that it would be the diligent who will profit from them.

And then key to this chapter, this book, and your life on earth is this...

Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
But fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Yes, that's it. The fear of the Lord. But this is not fear in the sense of cowering in the corner, but that of reverence - knowing who God is, and acting accordingly.

We see an example of this in Noah, who we read in Hebrews 11 was moved with godly fear to build the ark. He could have been moved by the fear of man - by their laughing at him for building a boat so far from water, or talking about rain which had never been seen before. But rather, he knew who God was, what He required of him, and did it.

And so it should be for us - not my will be done, but Thy will be done. In relationships, in jobs, in health, in ministry, even in where we live.

Proverbs 1:8-9

My son, hear the instruction of your father,
And do not forsake the law of your mother;
For they will be a graceful ornament on your head,
And chains about your neck.

So listen to and obey your parents, which as we read in Ephesians 6, is the first commandment with promise. "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

But what about difficult or ungodly parents, you may ask? Well, Proverbs explains how things *should* be. And you can't use bad parents as an excuse for your own sin. Regardless of how you feel, you are always responsible for how you act. And you are to obey them in the Lord - that is, God and His Word are the highest authority in all relationships.

And if you are parents, consider how you instruct your child. You are not a failure as a parent if your home doesn't look like Instagram. You are not a failure if you're not given to crafts, foreign languages or maths. But you are failing if you know the Word of God, know it should be taught, and are failing to do it. I learnt a lot from my parents, but the one thing that really matters is what they have taught me about God.

But coming back to this verse, as one commentator noted, it says that obedience to parents is the best way to become prominent among men. Now, in verse 10 we read...

Proverbs 1:10

My son, if sinners entice you,
Do not consent.

This would not be necessary to say if we saw situations for how they are, or how they might play out. No-one says, hey "come and get addicted to heroin, lose your family your house your job, start crime, and end up in prison". That's not good marketing. And the devil knows it.

But remember the key in verse 7 - the fear of the Lord - knowing who He is and acting accordingly, and consider the example of Joseph with Potiphar's wife... we read in Genesis 39:

Genesis 39:7-10

And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her.

Do not consent. Three words that must be obeyed when you are tempted. And temptation will come, and it will be persistent. Let's look at verses 11-13...

Proverbs 1:11-13

If they say, "Come with us,
Let us lie in wait to shed blood;
Let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause;
Let us swallow them alive like Sheol,
And whole, like those who go down to the Pit;
We shall find all kinds of precious possessions,
We shall fill our houses with spoil;

There is ALWAYS *temporary* reward in sin - whether theft, sexual immorality, or the feeding of an angry nature with violent actions or words. But we're not to be focussed on now only, but now in the context of eternity. Verse 14...

Proverbs 1:14

Cast in your lot among us,
Let us all have one purse"—

Again, this is persistent talk from worldly folk... let us do this, let us do that. You'll be asked to follow the crowd at school, and it will carry on at work - come on, let's all go for a drink here, a club there and so on. But you must be very careful who you choose as friends, who you spend your time with, and most importantly with the decisions you make. You need wisdom, and you need to decide...

Proverbs 1:15

My son, do not walk in the way with them,
Keep your foot from their path;

Do not = this is a CHOICE

And keep = a choice, an action. It's deliberate.

Proverbs 1:16

For their feet run to evil,
And they make haste to shed blood.

"Oh, but we're not killing anyone!" - Jesus doesn't draw the line at your actions, but at your thoughts - He said if you are angry without cause, you have committed murder in your heart.

Therefore maturity means keeping from those who wish to shed blood, with their hands or their hearts. Christian, you need to keep your tongue under control.

Proverbs 1:17

Surely, in vain the net is spread
In the sight of any bird;

In other words, you can't trap those whose eyes are open.

Proverbs 1:18

But they lie in wait for their own blood,
They lurk secretly for their own lives.

What more can be said than what we read in Galatians 6?

Galatians 6:7-8

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

And speaking of those that sow to the flesh...

Proverbs 1:19

So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain;
It takes away the life of its owners.

Oh, that we might listen to this - and not be materialistic like the world around us...

Matthew 16:26

For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

Notice how car manufacturers advertise the deposit, or even the monthly figures - but not the settlement. So with sin - the upfront cost may be small, but what will it cost you in the end?

Again, prudence - thinking through the likely outcome, is so important. We need wisdom, and so we read...

Proverbs 1:20

Wisdom calls aloud outside;
She raises her voice in the open squares.

This is the first time we see wisdom personified. Hard concept? Think of Pixar's "inside out". (Joy, Sadness, Fear, Disgust, and Anger). And so wisdom is calling, but are you listening?

Proverbs 1:21-22

She cries out in the chief concourses,
At the openings of the gates in the city
She speaks her words:
"How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity?
For scorners delight in their scorning,
And fools hate knowledge.

It's easier in the short term to be a fool - but not in the long term. Wisdom says:

Proverbs 1:23

Turn at my rebuke;
Surely I will pour out my spirit on you;
I will make my words known to you.

And as we go through Proverbs, THIS may be your opportunity to listen, turn, repent, learn. Proverbs, God's Word, tells it as it is. You can ignore it, but in the end...

Proverbs 1:24-26

Because I have called and you refused,
I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded,
Because you disdained all my counsel,
And would have none of my rebuke,
I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when your terror comes,

In the end, you'll look stupid for ignoring wisdom. Like we might laugh at some of the viral videos, YouTube videos, or (for the older ones here) "You've been framed" videos - so will wisdom laugh at your foolishness, for that's how stupid your life will look in the end if you ignore wisdom. And like the account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, it will be too late to change your fate then.

In other words, wisdom will say "I told you so."

Proverbs 1:27-29

When your terror comes like a storm,
And your destruction comes like a whirlwind,
When distress and anguish come upon you.
Then they will call on me, but I will not answer;
They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me.
Because they hated knowledge
And did not choose the fear of the LORD,

Again, this is all about choice - and the default setting of human beings is sin + stupidity. You need to choose to fear the Lord. To know who He is, and act accordingly.

Proverbs 1:30-31

They would have none of my counsel
And despised my every rebuke.
Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way,
And be filled to the full with their own fancies.

That is, sin will bring reward, but as the Bible tells us, the wages of sin is death.

Proverbs 1:32

For the turning away of the simple will slay them,
And the complacency of fools will destroy them;

That is, God's patience is not permission to sin.

Proverbs 1:33

But whoever listens to me will dwell safely,
And will be secure, without fear of evil."

You want security? Want to fear less? then listen up! And seek wisdom.

Chapter two

As we move into chapter 2, we move from wisdom crying out to us, to us being instructed to cry out for wisdom. And as we look at these first 4 verses, I encourage you to note some key words I have highlighted.

Proverbs 2:1

My son, if you **receive** my words,
And **treasure** my commands within you,

Do you treasure God's commands? Think of the best Christmas or birthday present you ever received, and how much you treasured it. God's Word is so much more valuable, and more special than that present - do you treasure it as much? Does it make you smile as much as that present did?

Proverbs 2:2

So that you **incline your ear** to wisdom,
And **apply your heart** to understanding;

That is, wisdom has to make that 9-inch drop from your head to your heart - or it won't do you any good. So do all you can to encourage that. Read ahead. Make notes. Listen again. Talk about what you learnt.

Proverbs 2:3

Yes, if you **cry out** for discernment,
And **lift up** your voice for understanding,

Or as Peter wrote:

1 Peter 2:2

as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,

...

Proverbs 2:4

If you **seek** her as silver,
And **search** for her as for hidden treasures;

All that I've highlighted on those slides - receive, treasure, incline your ear, apply your heart, cry out, lift up, seek, search - all of that is intentional. It's active choice.

We want easy knowledge. We want to Google and get a quick answer. But it doesn't work like that. Wisdom requires diligence. If you find a book dry, dampen it with a little sweat from your brow!

Proverbs 2:5

Then you will understand the fear of the LORD,
And find the knowledge of God.

THEN. Contingent on the preceding things. So listen up, you can't be a passenger as you go through this book. Be reading it. Thinking/meditating on it. Talking about it. Making notes. Asking yourself questions. It will do you no good if you only memorise it. You need to APPLY it. And we have this great promise from Jesus himself:

Matthew 5:6

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.

Back in proverbs we read...

Proverbs 2:6

For the LORD gives wisdom;
From His mouth come knowledge and understanding;

God. The God of this whole universe. Who made all we see (We've seen that on Sunday mornings in John chapter 1). HE will give you wisdom. Paul writes in Romans chapter 11:

Romans 11:33-36

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

"For who has known the mind of the LORD?

Or who has become His counsellor?"

"Or who has first given to Him

And it shall be repaid to him?"

For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

...

Proverbs 2:7

He stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
He is a shield to those who walk uprightly;

You want God's blessing? Follow His ways. Manufacturers instructions always work best.

Proverbs 2:8

He guards the paths of justice,
And preserves the way of His saints.

And as we read verse 9, notice the THEN again...

Proverbs 2:9

Then you will understand righteousness and justice,
Equity and every good path.

Then. That is, when you receive, treasure, incline your ear, apply your heart, cry out, lift up, seek, and search - then, you will understand.

Don't complain you don't understand God's Word, His will, His way, when you don't pray, don't read His Word, don't use the opportunities in front of you. Let us each encourage others to be here every Sunday. Morning and evening. And at mid-week meetings. And let's be there ourselves.

Summary

How do we summarise all that we've read this evening?

Well, we need wisdom. The good news is it's calling out. And God has promised he will give wisdom to everyone who asks. But also note, He won't give it to you without effort and diligence on your part - praying for wisdom cannot be a mask for laziness.

So let's renew our efforts to learn from the One who made us. And to apply His wisdom to our lives.

Application questions

In closing, I want to leave you with some application questions to think on during this week:

- Where are you trying to gain wisdom from? (be honest!)
- How diligent are you in searching out God's wisdom?
- How can you better apply God's wisdom to your life?

Let's pray.