

**BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Win the Day!**

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**Message Title: The Need for Wisdom pt. 1**

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A little over two decades ago I read an article by the journalist Peggy Noonan and, at the end of that article which was about culture and values and what seemed to be changing, she said something that has stuck with me over these years. She ended the article by saying, **"What you applaud, you encourage. Be careful what you celebrate." I've thought about that over the years. What do we as a culture, as a society, celebrate?** It seems to me over the last several years we as a society have come to celebrate foolishness. We applaud foolishness. We seem to be celebrating dysfunction. As a matter of fact, I can't imagine a category of people in our culture more dysfunctional than our celebrities, and what is a celebrity by definition? It's someone we celebrate. As a matter of fact, if you become so dysfunctional, we'll put you on television and we'll make a show about you and we'll pay you millions of dollars because, apparently, as a society we're highly entertained by dysfunction. But I would suggest to you that some of us aren't that entertained by it because every week our job is to pick up the pieces and the disasters and the pains and the hurts that define people's lives because of the foolishness and the dysfunction of the culture in which we live.

Nobody gets up in the morning and says, "I think I'll ruin my life today". Yet everyday thousands of people do just that. But what if there was a better way to live? What if there was a way to live life with the highest of degree of skill? Think of it this way: You only have one life. There are no do-overs. Wouldn't you then want to live this one life with the highest degree of skill? What if, in living with skill, the longings, the hopes, the dreams of your soul were actually realized? Would you be interested in that?

If you have a Bible, turn with us to Proverbs, Chapter 1. Proverbs on one hand is a very simple, easy to understand book. As a matter of fact, people that read through their Bible get lost in Leviticus, go in the tanker in Numbers but they finally hit Proverbs and it's like, "Finally, something makes sense". I understand that they are pithy little sayings that are fairly understandable but it's also true that there is tremendous depth and complexity to the book of Proverbs. It's actually a very difficult book to teach because of the way it's put together. Reading through Proverbs, getting the little pithy sayings, and saying, "I understand Proverbs," would be like learning the C scale on an instrument and saying, "I have mastered the instrument". There's a whole lot more to Proverbs than just that.

Now two things you might find helpful. One is Proverbs seems like just a random collection of sayings and to some degree that is true. But I think there is a reason for that. I think the idea of how it's put together is to communicate that life isn't compartmentalized, but rather all these things come together to define life. If you have a problem with your temper, you also have a problem with lust; you also have a problem with your mouth; you also have a problem with your money. All these topics are mixed together to say one thing bleeds into another. It's all interrelated, so Proverbs is organized that way.

The second helpful thing to understand is that Proverbs moves in what I might refer to as cycles. So, you go through what seems like this random discussion about a number of topics, and then it kind of cycles around, and it does that again, and then it cycles, and it does that again. Each cycle adds more depth, more understanding, more discovery. As you cycle through the book of Proverbs, each of these different issues gains more and more depth. That's basically the way I think the book of Proverbs is organized. For our discussion I'm just going to use some random verses out of Chapter 1.

**The proverbs of Solomon the Son of David, king of Israel.** (\*NASB, Proverbs 1:1)

Solomon is not the only author. We would say he is the primary author. What is the purpose of Proverbs? Verse 2:

**To know wisdom and instruction.**

The word **know** is important to understand—*know or knowledge*—in the book of Proverbs. It does not mean *information that's in your head*. We have a concept that's actually taken from the Greek educational system that there is such a thing as *head knowledge*. I may *know something in my head* doesn't mean I necessarily live that way. The Hebrew educational model had no category for head knowledge. If you know it, you live it and, if you don't live it, you don't know it—which I think is the correct model. So, the idea of *knowledge or knowing* in Proverbs carries more the idea of *experience*. This is something you know, and you know it to the degree you experience it. You actually live this way. So, when he says **to know wisdom** it means we live with wisdom.

So, what is wisdom? Wisdom can seem like one of those words that's so abstract it's hard to figure out what exactly do we mean? The term is really not that abstract. It's a Hebrew word that basically means *a skill*. When you read back through the Old Testament and they describe the craftsmen who were building the temple, they are described as those with great skill. It's this word—those with great wisdom. 11:42 So in the book of Proverbs wisdom is the ability to live life with great skill.

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So, in the book of Proverbs wisdom is the ability to live life with great skill, like an artist really. The second word is to know wisdom **and instruction**. Instruction carries the idea of training, the idea of discipline, the idea of correction. Maybe the best imagery would be the imagery of a coach. A coach teaches; a coach disciplines; a coach trains; a coach corrects. So, it's kind of a moral coach. It's the idea of living life with skill and having this moral coach to help us do that—to discern or to sort out the sayings of understanding—in other words, to figure out what's true and what's not true amidst the hundreds and thousands of voices in our culture telling you how to live. How do you sort that out? Well that's what the book of Proverbs is here to help you with. Verse 3:

**To receive instruction in wise behavior...in skillful living,**  
It's defined in verse 3 with three words,  
**Righteousness, and justice and equity.**

These three words are words that we're fairly familiar with if you were here in our study of the book of Amos. The word **righteousness** is the Hebrew word *tzedek*. It's used to define a

righteous person. A righteous person is basically one who is willing to disadvantage himself in order to advantage the community. A righteous person understands this isn't just about me and my needs and what I can get but rather we, together, have a commitment to the greater good. When righteousness is not followed, the community begins to break down. Society suffers. The wicked in Proverbs would simply be defined as those who disadvantage the community in order to advantage themselves and when that happens, society, culture, community begin to disintegrate. So skillful living involves righteousness.

The second one is **justice**. It's the Hebrew word *mispat*. It basically means to give someone their due—which includes both reward and punishment without respect to race, to socioeconomic status, to gender, to anything like that. It's just desiring to be just whether it's in the marketplace, the court systems or your family. It's seeking to be just, regardless of any of those other factors.

The third word **equity** is very similar to justice. It's basically a word that would mean to be true or to be level. If you imagine putting a level on something, trying to get the bubble right in the middle—that's the word equity. It carries the idea of fairness in how I treat my employees, in how I treat my neighbors, in how I treat members of my family. Whatever my opportunity is, I seek to treat people fairly. So, *righteousness, justice and equity* are the behaviors that define skillful living. When those behaviors are followed, not only is my life better but the community around me is better; the culture is better; the society is better.

Verse 4:

**To give prudence or sense to the naïve, [I want to define that term in just a second here.]  
To the youth knowledge and discretion,**

Again **knowledge** is the experience of living this out and **discretion** of sorting out what's true and what's not true. The word **youth** there—I really like this Hebrew word because youth is referring to anyone from infancy all the way up until you're an elder. So, people my age, we're among the youth. You've got to like that; it's most of us.

Verse 5:

**A wise man will hear and increase in learning,  
And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,  
To understand a proverb and a figure,  
The words of the wise and their riddles. (Vs. 5-6)**

Simply stated that's just saying that to live skillfully, to be counted among the wise, you must be teachable. You must be willing to listen and to learn. That becomes more critical when we understand the definition of the fool.

Verse 7 is really the anchor; it's the foundation of the book of Proverbs.

**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;  
Fools despise wisdom and instruction.**

**Fear** is a respect, a sense of awe. In the context of Proverbs fear carries the idea of God *knows*; God is the *teacher*; God knows the *truth*; God is the *definer* of what is right and wrong. Therefore, I listen to Him; I learn from Him; I submit to that. That's what it means here in Proverbs. **The fear of the Lord is the beginning.** “Beginning” does not mean chronologically as

much as it means it's the foundation stone. It's not like something I start with and I leave behind but it's the foundation upon which all wisdom is built.

The fool—and I'll define the word fool more in just a minute but simply stated this Hebrew word for fool is used over and over again in Proverbs and it simply means a “*Know-it-all*” —someone who doesn't need to learn. “I don't need to be instructed; I don't need to listen to what God has to say; I know it all.” The Know-it-all despises wisdom and instruction. They don't need wisdom and instruction—they know it all. So, the person who desires to live with skill first must believe that God knows it all and that God is the author of the wisdom that we need to live with skill. So, I become a learner. I want to know what He has to say. The fool says, “I don't need that—I know it all.”

So, let me put Verse 7 in a simple context that makes it easier to understand. Let's imagine that there was a dream basketball camp that involved all of the coaching staffs from the most elite basketball programs. So, you can pick the teams—Kansas, Louisville, Duke, North Carolina—whoever you think is among the elite. All of those coaching staffs come together to offer one dream basketball camp and you are a 16-year-old basketball player and you are invited to the camp. The wise person—the wise basketball player—goes with the understanding, “I am 16 years old and these are the finest minds in all of college basketball.” I go with humility and a teachable spirit that they can teach me so much to develop my skills and make me better. The 16-year-old fool says, “I don't need to hear what they have to say. I am 16 years old and I know it all. The only reason I'm going to this dream basketball camp is I'm going to strut my stuff.” We would say that 16-year-old is a fool. That's the idea of verse 7. Are you a Know-it-all or do you believe there is one who can offer you wisdom and truth that will help you live with great skill?

Starting in verse 8 he kind of goes on to this discussion about the outflow of your choices. 22:16 I want to pick it up in verse 17. It would come with the question, “How foolish are the foolish?” The answer is, “Even a bird gets it. Even a bird gets it, but the foolish do not.”

Verse 17:

**Indeed, it is useless to spread the *baited* net  
In the sight of any bird;**

In other words, the imagery is it's foolish to set a bird trap while the bird is watching because even a bird gets it. I'm not going there.

Verse 18:

**But they, [ the fools] lie in wait for their own blood;  
They ambush their own lives.**

Meaning they set a trap, and then they step in their own trap and **they ambush their own lives**. I would suggest to you life is complicated enough without ambushing your own life, which is what the text is saying.

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Bryan: So, first of all, I'd like to wish everyone a happy new year. Hard to believe it's 2020 already and I'm very excited to be spending some time in the Proverbs. The Proverbs are all about how to live life skillfully and seems to me there's a need for that in our culture today.

A little bit about the Proverbs. We'll take multiple chapters and some of the verses in those chapters at least to get ourselves a good taste of what the Proverbs are all about. One of the things that often frustrates people in the Proverbs is it feels like it's a random collection of Proverbs. It doesn't feel organized at all. And in a lot of ways that's correct, but I think there's a reason for that. There's probably several reasons, but one reason is because life is that way. We tend to want to segment life into kind of, I have an anger problem or I have a tongue problem or I have an immorality problem, but really Proverbs mixes all this together with the idea that the one affects the other and we'll see that as we go through our study.

One of the ways I see it in our culture is often in our wellness programs. A lot of businesses and corporations have wellness programs and many of them use what's called a wellness wheel. So if you think of it like a pie and the different pieces of a pie: You have a spiritual piece, you have a social piece, you have a physical piece, an intellectual piece - a lot of them have an environmental and financial piece and it's kind of the idea that life is segmented that way. But I think biblically the problem is the spiritual is not one piece of the pie. Biblically, a correct diagram would be that the spiritual is the pie filling and it shows up in every area of our life. So, it shows up in our social, it shows up in our physical and intellectual and our financial. And that's basically the way that Proverbs is written. If I have an anger problem, it's going to show up in my morality and it's going to show up on my tongue. And all of these things are interrelated. So, as we go through the Proverbs, I think we'll see that again and again.

You know, the main theme of the Proverbs is if you want to find the life that your soul longs for, yeah, you have to choose to live life God's way., Nobody gets up in the morning and thinks, I think I'll ruin my life today. But people do that every day. And what we need is to learn to live life skillfully in order to find life our souls long for. And that's what we're going to talk about in our study of the Proverbs.