

May 2023

## **What's the Point...of Proverbs? Mark Garner**

*The book of Proverbs continually encourages us to seek God's wisdom, and it also uses everyday situations to show us how we may see God's truth even in mundane places. It also helps us to look more deeply at the things God teaches us, for in some of Proverbs' simplest sayings, we can find further meaning beneath the surface when we take the time to ponder them.*

### ***The Beginning Of Wisdom (Overview Of Proverbs)***

Proverbs helps us to see the difference between godly wisdom and worldly knowledge, and it helps us to understand the kind of wisdom that God really wants to give us. Since God's thoughts are far higher than ours, he reminds us to trust in him rather than our own understanding; and in turn he promises to bring us spiritual health.

The first several chapters of Proverbs are a call to seek knowledge from God, and also a discussion of the meaning of knowledge, showing the contrast between the world's ways of thinking compared with God's perspectives (Proverbs 1-9). We see a continuing call to fix our eyes on God's words, and to give them careful thought. We also see the need to let God guard our hearts, and to seek God's understanding and his grace even in the simplest things.

The introductory section closes with the invitations of wisdom and of folly; wisdom calls us to come in reverence and accept God's teachings, while folly offers quick fixes, easy ways to feel good and to feel important. Seen this way, the choice isn't so difficult - yet we always need God to keep us on his path.

The rest of the book is the main collection of proverbs (Proverbs 10-31). They usually deal with familiar or timeless questions, and they often contain deeper truths worth looking for. There are a few common themes that come up from time-to-time, including sayings about the fruits of the Spirit such as kindness, peacefulness, patience, and self-control; in these proverbs we see God's understanding of us as well as his care for us.

The tongue is another familiar subject in Proverbs (18:1-8). The tendency to boast or otherwise misuse the tongue is an aspect of human nature, so Proverbs helps us how we can instead use the ability of speech to speak gently and kindly, to encourage others, to reassure others, and to remind one another of God's care and understanding.

Some of the proverbs can be comical, for example in the images of "sluggards" trying to avoid making any effort. They also remind us of the spiritual blessings that come when we continue seeking God, to let him continue teaching us and guiding us, rather than thinking that we have already learned enough or that things should now be easier for us.

### ***Overall Thoughts***

In Proverbs' personification of wisdom, we also see shadows or echoes of Jesus, who was the Word in the beginning, and who became flesh as one of us. Those who find God's wisdom find life (see Proverbs 8:34-35), for his words tell us about Jesus and the true life that comes from walking in his light. Jesus is the light of life, full of deep truths and full of the grace that sustains us each step.

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## **What's the Point...of Proverbs? Caleb Dillinger**

There is a biblical genre of literature called "Wisdom Literature" of which Proverbs is undoubtedly the most well known and quoted. Proverbs the book is a collection of proverbs, the literary device of offering wisdom in small sayings and sentences. While most books of the Bible NEED to be read in large chunks and passages to keep context, Proverbs can be read as individual chapters or sometimes even verses and still maintain proper understanding! But the point of Proverbs is more than just to get a quick piece of insight. The point of Proverbs is to teach humanity that wisdom and God must remain intertwined for wisdom to stand the rest of time.

Proverbs uniquely applies wisdom to the faithful person's interactions with their family, their friends, their enemies, and the world in general. It provides insight into culture, especially the culture of Israel at the time of the writings, but even universal, worldly cultural principles are accounted for. What does it mean to live a fulfilled life? What will help you in your current circumstance? These are the questions Proverbs seeks to answer. It does NOT seek to answer how one gets to heaven. In part, proverbs is not even equipped to answer that question. Because Proverbs focuses on situational and circumstantial truth, not universal truths.

For instance, should you lie? That seems a simple "no." But what about Santa? What about when the child asks if a shot will hurt? All of a sudden, black and white, yes or no platitudes fall short. Proverbs doesn't pretend to be universal truth for all time in all places with all people. It seeks to highlight how one uses wisdom in many circumstances, and how God is at work.

Consider the oft quoted Proverb, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). What if your own understanding of how much gas is left in the car dictates when to stop? Should you instead just trust the Lord? That sounds trivial, but it helps explain how the wide collection of proverbs are not meant to be casually handed out in every circumstance. Consider Proverbs 13:24 – "Whoever spares the rod hates his son." This is NOT talking about how parents should liberally, daily use a rod to beat their children. How do I know this? Because there is a difference between knowledge and wisdom. And Proverbs is meant to make you think, to stimulate your mind in a God centered, spiritual direction. THAT's the point of Proverbs.