

PROVERBS

SKILL IN THE ART OF LIVING

PART THREE – “LEARN SO YOU CAN LIVE”

By Pastor David Fields

Proverbs 1:8-19

I. Parenting and Learning to Listen

*“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction
and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.*

⁹They are a garland to grace your head
and a chain to adorn your neck."

Proverbs 1:8-9

*“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction **and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.**” Proverbs 1:8*

Later in Proverbs 31:1-9, we have the very words of King Lemuel's mother to him - as a young king learning to orient his life toward the right things:

"Listen my son! Listen, son of my womb!"

She goes on to warn him against using all his energies on chasing girls and abusing booze, and instead, to focus on his task of:

“...speak[ing] up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute...” and to “defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

Proverbs 31:8-9

A. Parenting

God's word is telling us that responsibility for parenting is not divided based on gender. Young women need their dads to parent them. Young men need their moms to parent them. Each parent, with

their gender intact and all that means, each will bring aspects of instruction that round out the wisdom that is passed on.

This Proverb reminds parents of our duty to offer warnings to our kids. Modern science confirms this approach. We know that our pre-frontal cortex – where we make important choices, our executive functioning – is not fully formed until around age 25. Parents – you are your kids pre-frontal cortex on loan.

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The father not only warns in his own words, he ‘quotes.’ He is helping his son to get a feel for ‘how it sounds’ when someone tries to entice you with slick words. What peer pressure sounds like.

B. Being Parented

There is this modern proverb that goes, *You live and learn*. Which basically means, ‘You go on and make your own mistakes, and then learn from them. Have your own experiences. You’ll learn for yourself.’

In my experience, people almost always go on repeating their mistakes in some form or another over and over, *ad nauseum*, until they get some outside help - Until they get some wisdom from someone wise. Until they learn to listen, and to listen to the right people.

The Proverbs take a different approach - one that will save you heartache, headache and maybe even save your life. They don't say, 'You live, and you learn.' They reverse that. They say, 'Learn, so you can live; and live well.' The first instruction of this book of wisdom is what?

Listen! Be humble. Take the posture of a learner. And learn *who* to listen to.

C. Household of God

This kind of instruction typically happens in homes, but many people didn't have a stable home environment to learn in. Some people, for various reasons, have been under-parented, or parented in homes that did not love God or teach His ways – even if, sometimes, they claimed to.

The church is described as, ‘the household of God.’ We are a place for spiritual mothers and fathers to help us grow into maturity.

D. The Beauty of Wisdom on Display

“They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.” - Proverbs 1:9

God wants us to be wise for our own good. But more - living by His wisdom is attractive to those who need to know God. Living with wisdom becomes a major part of our missional faithfulness - a way to help people see the beauty and glory of God.

“The Bible says, ‘Let your reasonableness be evident to everyone’ (Philippians 4:5). I love that word ‘reasonableness.’ It’s the opposite of being trigger-

happy and harsh and censorious [i.e., severely critical of others]. It means being fair, especially toward those those who disagree with you. In this angry world, such reasonableness is impressive. God is saying to us, ‘May I put that pendant around your neck?’” - Ray Ortlund¹

A garland to grace your head. A chain to adorn your neck. We say to God:

Yes please! I want to live by your wisdom.

Make me attractive in that way.

Humble. Helpful. Kind. Generous. Full of integrity.
Able to navigate the challenges of life in a world that can
be chaotic and morally bankrupt.

II. The Warning: Don't Be a Gangster

A. Don't Be a Gangster

We might think:

Why would anyone end up on the path of the violent?

We might think:

This warning seems like a strange place to start instructions to us on wisdom?

We need to remember that the story of humanity after the Fall, in Genesis 4, begins with one brother being jealous of the other and turning to violence and murder. Greed and jealousy are a real feature of the human heart.

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[illegible]

¹ Ortlund, R. C. (31 Mar 2012). Proverbs: Wisdom that Works. In R.K. Hughes (Ed.), *Preaching the Word*. Crossway.

Baked into the story of Scripture is the reality that there are impulses in our hearts that tend toward greed and misuse of others in process.

What's the temptation here?

- The lure of excitement and power.
- The lure of easy money.
- The lure of security and belonging.

B. Ill-Gotten Gain

Proverbs 1:19:

"Such are the paths of **all who go after ill-gotten gain**;" (NIV)

Or "...of **everyone** who is greedy for unjust gain." (ESV)

"At its core, unjust gain succeeds by stepping on someone else. Along the way we will meet people like this - self-centered, narcissistic backstabbers. They can show up in many forms in our world. For starters:

- Bullies at school ganging up on another kid, tormenting him or her to the point of despair.
- Computer hackers stealing people's identity and money.
- Political 'good old boys' neglecting their constituents but taking care of each other.
- Racists treating others as non-persons who just don't count and can be disposed of or held down forever.
 - Neighbours who need bad things to be true of someone else in order to justify themselves, gossiping the other person's reputation to death.
 - A faction splitting a church.

The list could go on and on. There are many legal, polite, arguable, even religious ways of saying, 'Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood.' But what is this all about? Pride, envy, greed, jealousy, retaliation and so forth." – Ray Ortlund²

Because of *that*, because deep in our own hearts is a kind of self-centeredness, without the grace of Jesus can get swept into this kind of life. We *all* need this warning as well. We need this wisdom. We need God's help.

The Proverbs are highly suspicious of gains without the work. Any promise of 'easy money,' of getting ahead without working for it, the Proverbs lead us to say, 'Yah, I doubt that's valid.'

There are ways of cheating, that in the end are only cheating yourself. Like, the process of researching and writing the paper is *the learning*. This is your intellectual formation.

Any form of ill-gotten gain, warns the dad, always comes at greater expense than we can often see. The expense of your integrity. The expense of shalom - of your peace with God, with others and with your own self. What seems cheap and easy turns out to be very costly, and painful in the end.

There are no short cuts to your development - to growing in Christ-like character or becoming a person who can think and live with wisdom.

III. The Company You Keep

"Throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse (ESV)/ "...we'll share the loot." (NIV) - Proverbs 1:14

A cause, even a negative one, provides a group to belong to.

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² Ortlund, R.C. *Ibid*.

But put these two together:

V. 11: "...Let's lie in wait for innocent blood..." and
v.14, "...we will all share the loot."

"Help us slit his throat, but we'll take care of you!" How long can that hold together? God is warning us here. Sure, we all long for community. But there's a kind of community to which we should never want to belong.

Rather, let's consider God's alternative, a safe community freely open to all through the grace of our violently crucified Christ." – Ray Ortland³

God's Alternative Community

Proverbs 13:20, "Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm."

The modern Proverb rings true, "You become like the five people you spend the most time with."⁴ You really do.

Paul grabs hold of this quote from the Greek poet Menander in 1 Corinthians 15:33:

"Do not be misled..." says Paul, then he gives us the Proverbial statement, "...Bad company corrupts good character."

What is this saying? – 'Some of you just need to get some better friends. Spend more time with the kind of people who will help you grow into the sort of person who will love God more and love your neighbour even as you love yourself.'

God transforms us, in large part, by gifting us to each other. There is a community who take another route – not the one of violence, or theft, or unjust gain – but the path of self-giving love, humility and generosity. In love, God gives Himself to us in His Son Jesus; and He calls us to be melted by that love so we can, in turn, be generous to those around us.

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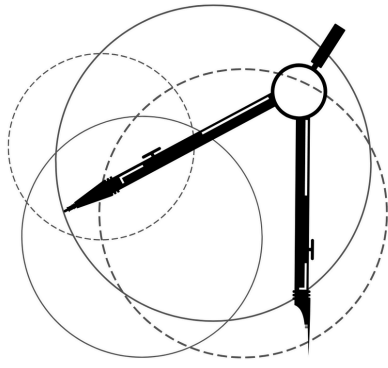
³ Ortland, R.C. *Ibid.*

⁴ Most often attributed to speaker Jim Rohn

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Discussion



Reflection

Spend some time just reading and ‘mulling over’ **Proverbs 1:8-19**.

1. What are some of the ‘voices’ in our world that are vying for your attention, but are not a source of wisdom? How might you need to ‘resist’ voices that are calling you toward unjust gain?
2. This text in Proverbs reminds us to pay close attention to wise voices. Which wise voices do you need to listen more closely to?
3. If you are a parent to kids or youth, what conversations do you need to have with your kids over the next week or two? What ‘warnings’ do you need to offer them?

(I would suggest, for those with kids around 12-18, simply reading a chapter of Proverbs 1-9 each evening with your kids and letting that guide your conversation. Among other things, it will be a basis to touch on peer-pressure, substance abuse and on sexual relationships that would be outside God’s bounds).

Prayer

Take some time to thank God for the wise voices of those who have guided you well. Thank God for the Scriptures and the way God forms us to be wise through them. Ask God to help you to be a voice of wisdom for those in your sphere of influence or care.

APPENDIX: HOW TO USE PROVERBS

This summer, our hope as a church is to steep ourselves in the wisdom of Proverbs. But this book invites a different approach than most others. The Book of Proverbs isn't meant to be speed-read—it's a book to sit with, to meditate on, to 'chew the cud,' as the rabbis would say.

- Chapters 1–9 serve as the introduction. They give us the book's purpose, a guiding epigraph (1:7), and ten speeches from a father to a son about wisdom. This section works well with a 'chapter-a-day' reading rhythm.
- Chapters 10–30 contain collections of short, poetic couplets. These proverbs are often loosely connected but are mostly designed to stand alone—ideal for slow, focused meditation and memorization.

GENERAL GOALS FOR READING THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Go Slow	Stop when something grabs your attention. Sit with it. If it takes three years to get through the book, that's perfectly fine.
Memorize Individual Proverbs	These sayings are written poetically so we can remember and apply them. Like the phrase "fail to plan and you plan to fail"—it sticks because of the way it's worded.
Read in Multiple Translations/Versions	English versions vary in how they handle the poetry. When meditating on a proverb, read it in several translations. While the King James Version isn't always clearest elsewhere, it often preserves the poetic force of Proverbs well, thanks to its translators' classical training.
Be Biased Toward Action	Proverbs are meant to be lived. The goal of meditation is obedience. If all you do this summer is live out one proverb, that's a win.

STRATEGIES FOR INTERNALIZING PROVERBS

Rewrite Proverbs in a Journal.	Use a general journal or a dedicated wisdom notebook. Rewriting helps with memorization and makes the proverb more personally accessible. You might even blend a few translations into a version that sticks best for you.
Put Them in Front of Your Eyes	Use sticky notes or other visible reminders. Place proverbs on your fridge, your desk, your mirror—anywhere you'll see them often.
Practice Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)	<p>Read: Slowly read a chapter or section of Proverbs several times. Look for a verse that 'leaps off the page.'</p> <p>Meditate: Reflect on that proverb. What is it saying? Have you seen this truth in your life? Why might God be highlighting it now?</p> <p>Pray: Talk to God about what you're noticing. Ask for wisdom and strength to live it out.</p> <p>Contemplate: Spend a few quiet moments in God's presence, letting the proverb stick to your soul.</p>