

Proverbs 22-07-20b

Let's resume our study now. This is the 20th day of July 2022. I don't think I said that in the first session, but we're here in the book of Proverbs.

We have covered the first three verses now, including introduction and a discussion of the structure, the purpose, the authorship, the authority, and the nature of this book. And now we're going to start moving through it to enjoy the wonderfully distilled pearls of wisdom that it contains. We are beginning here in chapter one with an extended discussion of what the book accomplishes and how it accomplishes it.

So as we pick up here in verse four, to give prudence to the simple, there is a sense in which we are all simple, right? No one of us knows everything in every area. We're good and qualified and experienced in some ways, and we're just completely in the dark in others. It is true of everyone.

I know people that have the means motive opportunity and gift to make millions of dollars and yet maybe can't program a VCR or operate a computer. Our wisdom is often in narrow vertical columns. It does great in some ways and not in others.

But what the book of Proverbs does is in those areas where we are unqualified, in areas where we lack, where we are vulnerable, where we are exposed, where we are in danger of failing, Proverbs will help. So the simple here is put for any area of ignorance or vulnerability that we may have. We may be naive in some areas.

We may be inexperienced in some areas. We may be open to exploitation or being taken advantage of. There are a rash of new phishing schemes, phishing spelled with a PH, text messages that come over your phone and pretend to be from your phone service provider or from Amazon or some other common service.

And they say, we've had to suspend your account. Please tap the following links so that we can help you fix this problem. Well, it is not from who it pretends to be.

And unsuspecting individuals can be taken in and you can have your phone or your computer infected. You can have your banking information stolen and your accounts emptied and worse. So the Proverbs are designed to give prudence to the simple.

And we always like to think, well, somebody over there in the cheap seats is the simple. That's not me. No, that's us.

Just say simple. Give me the hat. Assign me that color.

Put me in that chair. I am the simple and I want prudence. Um, the, uh, those who are susceptible to being led or being influenced and never before in the history of mankind have there been so many external influences and influencers with such power to wield

on the unsuspecting and those who are easily misled.

People who are not schooled in logic don't see through the simplest fallacies, appeal to authority, fallacy of composition, fallacy of division, ad hoc fallacy, the post hoc fallacy, uh, and, and many others. You know, uh, the post hoc is one of my favorite post hoc ergo prompter hoc. In other words, because this circumstance followed a previous circumstance, that previous circumstance caused it.

I prayed last night, the sun would come up this morning and looky there up. It came. My prayer made the sun come up.

Uh, but, but people are not schooled even in the secular realm in spotting faulty arguments, non sequiturs, things that do not follow, um, appeal to emotion, um, shouting ad hominem, many other ploys and tactics that are used. This is a bad policy because look at the guy whose policy it is. If you think the current sitting president past or present is a rascal and you say, well, that policy can't be good because it's this guy's policy or that guy's policy.

Well, that does not follow. The biggest rascal in the world may occasionally, uh, have a good policy for weird reasons. You know, the old saying goes, uh, on the analog, uh, a broken clock is always, is still right twice a day.

Um, and a dingbat can occasionally make a good decision or, or end up doing the right thing for the wrong reasons. Who knows? But the, to give prudence to the simple, um, Orma is the word prudence, O R M A H. And this is the capacity for not being fooled. This is escaping the schemes and the ploys, the plots, and the deceptions of someone who is trying to manipulate you.

Prudence is the ability to spot the false motive, the bad gouge. We used to say at school, the bad information that this, this is not healthy. This is not right.

This, there is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death. Spotting that is Orma. It is prudence.

That's what the Proverbs are designed to impart in still and equip those who lack it. And sometimes we only lack it in, in a particular area. People can be smart in business and foolish in love.

They can be wise in their personal relationships, but make horrible investments. Um, you can be simple in, in subcategories. So we all need this prudence.

The young man in the second part of this prudence to the simple, to the young man, it will give knowledge and discretion. As soon as you say, this is a youth. This is the word that was used of the ones that came out and were mocking old bald head and the bear came and mauled them.

These are not our, what does it mean? Inexperienced, brash, prone to value their own opinion too highly because of that youth and inexperience. Um, so what does a brash and inexperienced person need? They need knowledge and discretion knowledge. This is dot, uh, D a a T is insight and knowledge of good and evil.

The knowledge of good and evil. This is dot comes from yada. Uh, it breaks the rule of, of putting an M in front of something.

Yada to know you'd say my yard. It makes an ugly combination in Hebrew. So they, they put a suffix on it instead.

So instead of ma yada or mud or something, me da base it's dot, but it comes from yada to know. So this knowledge is knowledge of what is good and what is evil in the moral sense. Discretion is ma zima.

This is one of your main words that comes from, uh, zama ma zima. This is M E Z I M M A H. This is what puts you on your guard and prevents you being duped. It is similar to prudence or ma and ma zima are variations on the theme of not being misled, not being deceived, not being manipulated and maneuvered into, uh, unwise and immoral choices.

That's the purpose. And that finishes verse four. All of these are qualities that are imparted in the study and digestion of the content of this book.

Taking this truth on board provides these things. Now in verse five, we are going to start to have some, some concrete verbs. We've had virtually no verbs up above.

Once we had to know and to perceive and to receive, uh, to give, these are all things that are in the abstract, but now we get to the concrete here in verse five, a wise notice man is in italics. A wise one will hear and increase learning and amount of understanding will attain wise counsel. So what did you have in verse four? It is useful, beneficial, and essential, useful, essential, and beneficial to the simple.

It is also valuable to someone who is wise, even in our areas of strength. You could say verse four addresses our areas of weakness. Verse five addresses our areas of strength.

Makes sense. It doesn't matter if you're smart or dumb, wise or foolish Proverbs, these truths are going to help. So the wise man can increase his learning and attain unto wise counsel.

A wise man can analyze wise counsel. Remember we saw up above, uh, to receive the instruction of wisdom for anyone to parse what purport to be wise words and figure out if they really are wise or not. Here, a wise man will attain or attain to wise counsel.

What does this mean? Um, the, the word there for wise counsel is, is a word that is used for steering a ship. It's, it's operating the rudder and establishing a course. Uh, wise

counsel is, is sailing near the wind, sailing the proper tack, having your sails and rigging and rudder all cooperate for maximum effectiveness in the direction you want to go.

This word attain unto wise counsel is, uh, Takbulot. And I won't spell that for you. Probably don't want to write it down.

I just think Hebrew is such a beautiful language, but, uh, I will spell it for you. It's T A C H B U L O T H. You can see O-T-H is a plural there. Uh, Ot, uh, Takbulot, wise counsels.

But these are principles by which you can steer a, an effective course through life. You're captain of your ship and master of your fate because you've got a great chart with your course mapped out and you know how to follow it. So this wise person in verse six, because he has increased his learning and has attained to the practical outworking of that learning.

It isn't just empty knowledge. It's not the knowledge Paul talks about that puffs up knowledge, puffs up, love builds up. This is knowledge that is practical.

And because of that in verse six, this wise one, this man of understanding will understand a proverb and an enigma. Um, the proverb here is a, uh, is, is a figure. It's like a metaphor or a simile.

It's a figure of speech. It's not the same as the, uh, word for Proverbs up in verse one. Um, this is a simile or a metaphor, something that initially might seem opaque.

Um, but you will be able to see past the surface and see into it and figure out what it means. You think about Joseph's dreams of the sun, moon, and stars, or the sheaves in the field and the sheaves are bowing down. Initially you think, well, what does that, what does that mean? Uh, or, um, Nebuchadnezzar's dream, uh, and the interpretation thereof and the wisest men in Babylon couldn't figure it out, but Daniel could to understand a picture, a representation, a figure is what this Melitza is.

A proverb is a Melitza, M-E-L-I-T-Z-A-H. And the enigma is, is, uh, a riddle. It's, it's a question that doesn't have an obvious answer.

There's a question without an obvious answer. That's what an enigma or a riddle is. There is an answer.

There is a solution to the obvious. Understanding these Proverbs, taking these truths on board enables us to see past what is obvious and see past what is given at first blush and gain insight and understanding into the deeper truth. This, by the way, has application as we look at the rest of Scripture.

Much of Scripture is a picture. The narratives are often underestimated as just being stories that may occasionally have a moral at the conclusion, but we've seen in the

narrative sections of Scripture, they are fraught. They are weighted down.

They are freight trains, each boxcar of which is full of treasure. And to see past the story and see why God included that story in his inspired word is kind of what this is talking about. So this wisdom is not just good in life.

And as we try to solve the puzzles of secular living, but also as we work our way through the word of God, as we spend time in reflection and meditation on different passages of Scripture, we do our Bible reading where we go and just revisit something that we studied in the past to see into it and extract the value from it. That's what it means to increase learning and attain unto wise counsel, to understand a figure and an enigma. How many times have we seen together sections of Scripture, statements in Scripture that were very puzzling on the face and suddenly they make sense? Why didn't I see that? You know, we have those forehead smacking moments.

It is so clear. That's what these truths will do for each one of us, whether it's an area of current ignorance or foolishness or inexperience as the youth, or whether it's an area where we think we are wise. This is the great thing about being a student and teacher of the word of God, is I don't care how long somebody does this, every day is a time to learn.

And it is as exciting to learn something, you know, many years into the process as it was in the earliest days when you first realized that, wow, there's really a lot of treasure in here. It never gets old. It's never tiresome.

It's never without its value. It's never without surprise, enlightenment, encouragement, satisfaction, gratification, insight, humility. Why did it take me so long to understand this? But I'm so glad I understand it now and thanking God for it.

That's what Proverbs will do. So that is verses five and six, the words of the wise and their enigmas. You can actually answer questions such as, if God is all powerful, why doesn't he eliminate evil? If he's powerful enough and doesn't want to do it, then he's a mean God.

If he's not powerful enough, then why would you worship him as God? These supposed absolute statements of God can't be the God you think he is, or he would do something I think he ought to do. You can see past that. So then we come to verse seven, and this is the fundamental theme statement of the book.

Its purpose and its benefits have been given in verses two through six. Now there is a clear statement of theme, of truth, of why you would even bother. The fear of the Lord, the fear of the Tetragrammaton, Yahweh, is the beginning of knowledge.

This fear of the Lord is not cowering, cringing, mortal fear. It is reverential awe. It is recognizing the distance between almighty God and a worm such as I, yet made in the

image of God, at least conceptually.

I'm going to do a discourse one of these days on the image of God. There's a lot being said about it in recent days, and it's not right, but that's a topic for another time. So holy fear.

This is the attitude we feel when our heart is right toward God. It is a mixture of love and respect. When we love our parents, we honor our parents.

We respect God's command to honor father and mother, and it is a combination of love, duty, respect, honor. It is a complex when our heart is right in that regard toward one another or toward God. There are many implications.

It is a powerful set of ideas. This is why the law and the prophets are summed up in love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, all your mind. That says a lot.

And love your neighbor as you love yourself. Do unto others as you would have others do unto you is another turn on that, the golden rule. But this is not servile fear.

This is not cringing with your forehead up in front of your eyes. Fear, you know this, it is fear of failing God, failing the grace of God, fear of falling short, fear of offending God, of being unsuitable and unsatisfactory, of receiving so much of what he has given and failing to be thankful for it, of failing to bless his name, failing to give him the worship that is his due. We saw this in the book of Malachi.

If I am a father, where is my honor? If I am a master, where is my fear? I am a great king. Why do you not treat me as such? Why do you do all of these heinously disrespectful, shallow, callous, self-serving, indifferent, and apathetic actions when you are the unique, exceptional, one-of-a-kind people of God? How can you disregard the God who conferred that grace and that favor on you? That is the fear of the Lord. So, because of that desire to please, to serve, to be acceptable in his sight, to avail ourselves of his grace, of his strength, of his provision, this will engender in us a natural hatred of evil.

Evil offends God, therefore, I hate it. Not because it oppresses people, not because it marginalizes some category. What I hate, I hate because it offends God, not because it offends people or hurts their feelings or makes them feel bad.

My definition of what is good and what is evil is what pleases or what offends my Father in heaven. That is the fear of the Lord. And if you establish your ethics and your morality based on what something has by way of an effect on people or people groups, you are well on the way to being deceived and being manipulated.

So, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It is the foundation for wisdom. Making sure people get treated the way they want to be treated is not the beginning of

wisdom.

It is not the foundation on which you can build a practical set of tools and skills for living life. But that is what is broadly taught and adopted in the modern day. It is a fundamental, seminal, original mistake.

As I have said about the pebble at the top of the mountain that separates those who understand free will and God's sovereignty and those who don't, misunderstanding, talking about Calvinists, if you misunderstand that depravity, our disability from sin and being conceived in iniquity and born corrupt, that prevents us from being able to please God. That is separate and distinct and not the same as an ability to choose God. Even though we are hopelessly corrupt, fallen and incapable of doing anything to please God, all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.

Our iniquities blow us away with the wind, but that disability, that total depravity, if you will, is an inability to produce righteousness that is acceptable in God's sight. It is in no way related to our ability to choose God. So, that understanding, if you miss that, everything that follows, if you go down the rest of the letters in TULIP, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, Perseverance of the Saints, none of that is going to be right because you failed right out of the gate.

You stumbled as soon as the thing opened. The gun went off and you fell flat on your face. You are not running down the track.

You are not going to clear the hurdles, much less break the tape. Same thing here. The fundamental basis for wisdom is understanding what pleases and displeases God.

His standards. What He has declared to be righteous or evil. You cannot get anywhere in reforming society, raising man, solving social ills, or any of the rest of it, if you start from any place other than the fear of the Lord.

Nothing else will work. Nothing else has power. So, our proper attitude toward God gives us a hatred of evil and enables us to welcome and embrace what is good, and noble, and lovely, and righteous, and of good report.

Think on these things. Remember our, to the extent that understanding of that verse, you have the same idea here. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

If you're going to advance in knowledge and gain all of these benefits in verses two through six, it has to start with and be motivated by a desire to please God and be pleasing in His sight. And, of course, how do you please God? What is the negative statement in Hebrews 11.6? What makes it impossible to please God? You can quote 11.6 of Hebrews. Without what? Say it out loud.

Without faith. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. He that comes to God, you're

going to get stopped at the gate.

The guardian throne room angel is going to stop you. You cannot even go through the veil which is His flesh, the new and living way. You're still not going to get into the throne room without faith.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is what opens the veil and gives us access to the throne of grace. Faith. Without faith, it is impossible.

So, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. We express that fear of the Lord in faith. We value God.

We believe what the Word of God says about Him and His righteousness, what is good and what is evil. And faith is thus the true beginning of wisdom. So, faith, the fear of the Lord, this is the beginning.

This is what lifts us up and moves us in the direction of God. What is the opposite? There's a man named James Smith who made a very pithy observation about verse 7 here. If the first half of verse 7 points to the levitational power of faith, the second half points to the gravitational pull of folly.

There is a levitational quality in faith. It levitates us. It raises us up.

But foolishness has a gravitational pull that wants to crash us down into the dirt. You can be raised or you can be pulled down. Fools despise wisdom and discipline.

Verse 7 is only eight words in Hebrew. It's just eight words. It's a beautiful distillation.

It's the first of these wonderful, highly polished gems that has a brilliant shine and requires time to digest. The fear of the Lord, beginning of knowledge. Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

So, as you would expect, it doesn't come as a surprise that our relationship with God defines everything else. These proverbial pearls of wisdom that guide us in practical application are meaningless if we don't have a healthy relationship with God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Don't even tackle the wisdom. Don't move on to the Proverbs until your heart is right with the Lord. Faith is the expression of our respect for, awe of, appreciation and love for God.

Without faith, this wisdom is just water off a duck's back. So, the Proverbs are going to do for our daily life, our horizontal navigating through the rocks and shoals and the slings and the arrows of outrageous circumstance. Proverbs is going to do for us in that realm what the Psalms are designed to do in our spiritual life.

It is a good idea before you start chewing on the Proverbs to chew on the Psalms and get the spiritual side. The spiritual side is the vertical post and that's what the Psalms are for. That's our devotional life.

That's our spiritual health and well-being. This is us coming to God, reminding ourselves of truths, entering into prayer and thanksgiving. Think of any of your favorite Psalms and how they draw us toward God in appreciation.

That's where we start. With that established, that's the beginning. Now we can start looking at these Proverbs and saying, okay, I'm a child of God.

I'm here. I have responsibilities. I have stewardship.

How do I function? Proverbs is going to answer the question, what ought we to do? What ought we to do or be doing? What is a worthy practical path? If we are faithful believers, the great title of the book that I've quoted any number of dozens of times, how should we then live? That's what Proverbs will tell us. The law of love, love your neighbor as yourself that Jesus distilled. It was expressed in Leviticus 19, 18.

Leviticus 19, 18 says, you shall not take vengeance nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. God gives the basis and the reason and the motivation to fulfill that command to love your neighbor as yourself at the close of the exhortation.

Why do you do this? Because I'm the Lord. When a difficult task presents itself and it's a challenge in the horizontal realm, well, why am I putting myself through this? Why am I persevering? Why am I gutting it out here? I am the Lord. That's why.

Deuteronomy chapter six, verse five, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. That is the underpinning. So if you look at the wisdom in the book of Proverbs and summarize it, and describe it, and once again, this is something from James Smith.

He has some really great insights, and I want to share this one with you. This is what he says. Extrapolating from the wisdom of Proverbs, one would conclude that the divine plan calls for a society.

In other words, if you take Proverbs to heart, this is the kind of society God expects. It's one in which people work hard, observe each other's rights, respect each other, and treat the less fortunate kindly. It is a society in which people are friendly, enjoy the pleasures of moderation, and love their families and homes.

It is a society in which people are sincere, modest, self-controlled, temperate, reliable, chaste, willing to listen, willing to learn. Does that not sound like a wonderful society in which to function? If everyone had the fear of the Lord and then took the wisdom of Proverbs to

heart, that's what society would look like. Work hard, observe each other's rights, respect each other, treat the less fortunate kindly, be friendly, enjoy the pleasures of moderation, love family and home, sincere, modest, self-controlled, temperate, reliable, chaste, willing to listen, and willing to learn.

That is the diametrical opposite of a lot of what we see today, sadly so. Those who live in this ideal society are forgiving, considerate, discreet, kind to animals, sweet-tempered, liberal, yet prudent, and they keep an eye on their own welfare. So that is what we are entering into.

We're going to begin next time at verse 8. My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother. It's going to begin with the instruction of the father. This book is going to conclude in chapter 31 with the instruction from the mother.

So it's a beautifully designed, many times we think, well, Proverbs, that's just somebody threw a bunch of aphorisms into the Mixmaster and out it came. It is well structured. The content falls into categories.

As I said, many of the sort of black and white absolute expressions of truth are found in chapters 10 through 15, and then the shades of gray will be explored more fully in the later chapters. But we're going to begin the exhortation section next time with chapter 1, verse 8. But in the meantime, we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the provision that you make for us that is so thorough, so replete, and available for every circumstance, every situation, every decision, every challenge, every blessing, every fortunate turn of events that we encounter. We are equipped with wisdom and knowledge to enable us to live our lives not only in a way that works out well in practical terms for us, but most importantly, reflects your standards of righteousness and justice and shines the light of your glory as a reflection to the world around us. We pray that as we reflect on these truths, that your Holy Spirit will illuminate them and bring them to our minds at the point of the need for application so that we can be effective representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ in the time that remains to us in this life.

We pray it in his name. Amen.