

# Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

## Week 28: Proverbs, *Small Bits of Big Wisdom*

Welcome to week 28 of the Bible Reading Coach Podcast. My name is Karl Vaters and I'm here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks.

This week, we're going to be heading into the book of Proverbs. For me, Proverbs is one of those pinnacles in the Bible and certainly one of the pinnacles of the Old Testament books. It was produced at Israel's peak, during the time of their greatest prosperity and their greatest righteousness, and all of those things. And the problem is that after the peak, things go downhill. And after Proverbs, it goes downhill fast, but this week, at least, let's enjoy the view from the top.

So the Proverbs overview is simple. Chapters one through nine, gives us the purpose of the book, and gives us the purpose of wisdom. The word proverbs itself simply means a small wise saying so the first nine chapters of the book frames that way. And then the rest of it is really simply small sayings of wisdom, some of them just one verse long, some of them a full chapter that develop something. But it's the kind of book that there's so much in. A lot of people who read through the Bible will read a big segment a day and then read a proverb a day. I like the flow of reading it through from Genesis to Revelation like we're doing right now. But Proverbs is one of those books that really encourages you to slow down and pay attention to every single verse.

So to give you an idea of what the first nine chapters do on how the book of Proverbs defines itself and defines wisdom, let's take a look at the first seven verses chapter one, verses one through seven. The book will start like this when you begin, after this. "The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, King of Israel, for gaining wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight, for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair, for giving prudence to those who are simple knowledge and discretion to the young. Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

So when you read this, those first seven verses that you read tell you what to expect for the rest of the book. What are the Proverbs? What is their purpose, and it tells you right up front to gain wisdom, words of insight, really getting instruction in prudent behavior, that is things that are just and for how to behave correctly, to help people who are simple gain wisdom to help people who are wise, add to their learning, to understand even other proverbs and parables, so that when other people give you things that are mysteries, and "Is that valid or not". The Proverbs, if you know them, will be a benchmark by which we can understand even other words of wisdom. So this book will help willing students get started on a path to wisdom, so that we can live a well ordered life from the time we're young, so that we won't be foolish, so that we won't be evil, but that we'll be wise and that we'll behave correctly.

So as you get through this, again, as I say, you're going to have moments where a single verse is going to go, Whoa, I want to slow down and take time with that. And if that's the case, do so. Yeah, by the end of the week, we want to make it all the way through. But it really is helpful at times, especially if the Lord really lays a particular Proverb on your heart. It touches

on so many different subjects in so many different life situations. I guarantee you, there will be multiple times as you read through this week, where a verse is going to jump out at you and you're going to go "Whoa, that's right where I live right now." If so, do whatever you need to do, copy and paste it to a document, print it up, underline it. You know, whatever you do to pay attention to it, meditate on it. Memorize it, Proverbs is a great book for verses to memorize.

So let's take a look as we go through it. There's so much going on. Let me give you a handful of themes to look for as you read through the book of Proverbs in this coming week. First of all, it defines for us what wisdom is. So that's what we've read already in the first seven verses. So keep that in mind it is to help people who are simple gain more wisdom, it has helped to help the wise go even deeper. It is to help us have an understanding of who God is, so that we respect and honor and fear him more so that we walk in holiness more, that is what wisdom does all of those things.

It's interesting that wisdom is often personified. So for instance, there are places where it says wisdom walks through the streets crying out and there's a reason for that. Often wisdom is personified as a woman, which is really interesting, especially for their era. So let me give you why that matters for a couple reasons. First of all, it matters that wisdom is sometimes personified, not just as an intellectual pursuit, but like wisdom as a person to talk to, right. The reason wisdom is personified, first of all, is because the image that it gives us in our head of wisdom, going through the streets and looking for an honorable person helps us to understand what's really going on here. But it also helps us to understand that wisdom is about right relationships, and not just about thinking smart thoughts. It has to engage in relationship with other people in order for it to move from being intellect, to wisdom.

And secondly, you'll notice that wisdom is personified as a woman quite often, which again, in their culture is really huge. They lived in a culture where women were treated lower than cattle. But the gospel of Jesus, the teachings of Scripture, always elevate women to a higher plane all the way from the beginning where the Bible says men and women were both created in God's image, to the way that Jesus treated women, and elevated their status, and all the way in between those two. And proverbs will show you that too. So take a look at how women are elevated, and even given the place of instructing us as they're personified as wisdom, it's really an extraordinary thing to see. You'll see actually, you'll see the adulterous personified as a woman in Proverbs seven, and wisdom in Proverbs 31, that proverbs 31 Woman and the extraordinary things that she does. So you'll see that both male and female are seen as both sinful human beings and as people who can offer us wisdom.

It's kind of an interesting thing of the interplay of the genders throughout this book, so pay attention to that as you go through it. Also notice as you go through the book this week, that wisdom is much more than simply knowledge applied. For years, I used to use that definition. Wisdom is knowledge applied correctly. And that's not a wrong definition, but it's not as complete as proverbs shows it to be. It's not just simply applying knowledge correctly, it's living in right relationship. It's living a holy life. It's understanding who God is and how we relate to him. It is so much. Bottom line, wisdom is inseparable from moral behavior.

Biblical wisdom always involves proper moral behavior. So sometimes we'll look back in history, we'll see the writings of wise people, right? And we'll think, oh, they were so wise. And then you look into their life and you find out they were horrible people who did horrible things to others. And you look at that, and you go, well, they were wise, but they weren't nice. Well, I'm

sorry. But holy behavior is a part of wisdom. They're not wise. If they are living a degenerate life without repentance, that's not wise. Now, wise people also sin and do things that are wrong. But wisdom calls us to repentance and back to holiness. Again, you'll see that play itself out over and over in Proverbs as well.

You'll see in Proverbs, an encouragement to stay away from evil, to act rightly, not self-righteously, but to act rightly. We'll notice where wisdom comes from. Wisdom comes from God. Which is why without a moral core, you're not in a place where you can hear God's voice clearly. Why do we need to walk uprightly before God? because God is the source of wisdom. And if we're not in a good relationship with God, then we can't tap into the source correctly. We can become smarter but without a good relationship with God, we cannot become wiser. It's like having a computer and standing outside of WiFi range and going, Oh, I don't know why I can't connect to the source. Well, because you're outside of WiFi range, move in closer to the source. "Well I don't want to I want to stay here, I can stay here if I want to." Yeah, you can stand there with your computer if you want to but you're not going to get WiFi. Because the source is too far away. If you want to connect to the source, you gotta move closer to the source.

So we can complain, you know, I want to be wise, but I don't want to do it in a religious way. I don't want God involved well, then you won't become wise. God is the source of wisdom, you want wisdom, you've got to draw closer to the Lord. You're gonna see that in this a whole lot. And then you're gonna see a circular progression that happens in Proverbs. You're gonna see [that] right behavior opens us up to hear wisdom, as we just talked about. And then wisdom leads us to even more right behavior, which opens us up to greater wisdom, which opens us up to more right behavior, right? It's this wonderful upward spiral. And then when we behave badly, we cut that off, and only repentance brings us back into it. You'll see that happening over and over again, as you read through the Proverbs in this coming week.

So what else are we going to see? We're gonna see also, in Proverbs, that happiness is not the goal of a wise life. Happiness is the byproduct of wise choices, or the Bible really, I think happiness or joy are two terms that are used. Sometimes blessing and blessed are terms that are used there. Our goal is not to become happy. People have said this before, you know, with our kids, "I just want my kids to be happy." And I've always said no, that's not what I want. And now for my grandkids, it is not enough that my grandkids are happy. I want them to be happy. But I don't just want them to be happy. I want them to be wise. I want them to be moral. I want them to be contributors to society, I want them to be worshipers, I want more for my kids than just being happy. Because there are a lot of people out there doing bad things, but they're happy with it. And that's not good enough. I want more than that. Happiness is not the goal.

Another thing to note as we go through this, these are Proverbs, not promises. Proverbs not promises. In general, doing these behaviors produces these results. But there's no individual guarantee because there are times when we will do all the right things, and bad stuff still happens because we live in a broken world where bad things happen. So don't go through the Proverbs and go, Oh, here's the recipe for hope and happiness and wealth in my life. If I do these things, it'll all happen. And then you go do them. And you don't get the same results as somebody else who did them. And you go, Well, why is God mad at me, God's not mad at you. We live in a broken world where bad things happen. These are principles, they're not promises. So if we approach them as promises, we're likely to be disappointed. If we see them as principles that in the long run will produce a better life, then we're going to be in a better place.

And by better life, of course, we need to define that properly. It means closer to God better in right relationship with others, making right decisions. It doesn't mean constant wealth and health and prosperity and happiness all the time. You will also notice a lot of things in the Proverbs about fair scales, fair scales matter to God. The old picture of the butcher who puts their thumb on the scale to get more money for the meat, right? That's what people have done all of history. Now they do it electronically, right? They fake how much you're getting in order to get more money out of you. And the Bible is really about fair scales, an equal exchange of goods and services matters to God. On speech, take a look at how often it matters, that we tell the truth and we speak honestly. Care for the poor is a huge theme, in the book of Proverbs, is important for us. Even the care for animals. So those of you who are animal lovers, Proverbs even speaks up for the animals. Proverbs 12:10 says, "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal." Now, people get far more ink than animals do. But it shows you how deep into this idea of caring that the book of Proverbs goes, it's really important for us to see that.

Also, this book will tell us that wisdom was in fact, the raw material of creation, wisdom is so important that it was part of the raw material of creation. We'll see it in chapter 3, verse 19, when it says this, "By wisdom, the Lord laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place. So the Bible says that in many places, but it's confirmed here, that creation was a very ordered process, using principles and not just simply at the whim of God because he felt like it one day. Wisdom is part of the raw material of creation. It wasn't created by wisdom, wisdom, personified, it was created by God. And John 1 tells us that Christ was, you know, so you got the spirit hovering over the waters, you've got God the Father speaking into creation, and you've got God the Son, Jesus, as John 1 says, who was the word who created all things. So God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the Creator, but he used wisdom as a character trait flowing from him in the process of creation.

So when we tap into wisdom, we tap into the order of creation around us, the world starts to make more sense, when we draw close to God and His wisdom, because it is through wisdom that God made the world. That makes sense, right? It helps us understand our place in the world. We'll also see in the book of Proverbs, that wisdom can't be gained by our own brains, it's not a matter of thinking harder. We can't do it. In our current state of behavior if we're in a sinful state of behavior.

Solomon is really, really clear about where wisdom starts. 11 times in Proverbs, look for these, here's a treasure hunt for you right? 11 times in Proverbs, he references the fear of the Lord. That's as many times as the rest of the Bible mentions the phrase, "the fear of the Lord." And here are a couple places, Proverbs 9:10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Proverbs 15:33, "The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom." So look for those phrases "the fear of the Lord."

Now, what does that mean when it says 'fear of the Lord'? Let's talk about that because does it mean afraid, "I don't want God near me"? No. Several years ago, it's been 15 years or so ago, I walked across Grand Canyon for the first time. And before we did, in our training, one of the things that everybody who'd walked across before and a training video that we watched told us, "You need to have a fear of the canyon. If you don't have a proper fear of the canyon, the canyon could kill you." And it was like, What do you mean by fear? Well, make sure you've got plenty of water, plenty of food, make sure you're trained, be aware of the dangers, be aware of overheat, be aware of the dryness, be aware of the slip of the canyon, you've got if you don't

have the proper, respectful fear of Grand Canyon, and you just saunter into it, like you're gonna get across because you're just all of that, literally the canyon and kills people every year who don't have the proper fear and respect for it. That's the kind of fear we're talking about.

Understanding the magnificence of God, understanding the all powerfulness of God and having a proper respect for his holiness. It's not that we cower in fear. The only time we should cower in fear before God is if we're constantly persistently living in sin. And people persistently living in sin, have no fear of God. That's part of why they go into sin. So we understand God is about love. He draws us to Himself. When we give our lives to Christ, we are His children. So there is love there. But there's also a respect just like any child has for a loving parent. I love my parents, but I have a deep and abiding respect for them. And when I was a kid, at times dad was scary. He was never mean, he was never abusive. But when I did something wrong... Right? That's the kind of fear we're talking about.

Okay. And what else do we have? That's, talking about the fear of the Lord, let's finish that part with this. And then we'll finish the whole thing up. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, then the love of God is the goal of wisdom. Let me say that again. Because it's really important. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, then the love of God is the goal of wisdom. We know that, not because we're going to see it, particularly in the book of Proverbs, but because that's how it ends up with Jesus. Right? What does Jesus say is the great commandment? To love the Lord your God, not to fear, okay? When Jesus is asked, "What's the greatest commandment?", he doesn't say, "To fear the Lord God", he said, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. But an understanding of God will always go through fear. We'll always have an understanding of, we are not God, and how distant he is from us and how holy he is and how all powerful he is. And that reverence in that respect and yes, fear is the doorway towards really loving who he is when we recognize that a holy and all powerful God gave himself in sacrifice on the cross through Jesus for me. Talk about a place where I just simply want to love him back. But understanding the power of the reverence and the fear of God is the door that gets us there.

So as we conclude this teaching, and as you start to read Proverbs this week, what are we going to look for? Let's go through it again. First of all, take a look at the themes that wisdom is about right knowledge and right behavior, interacting together, take a look at how wisdom can only be gained in relationship, a relationship with God and then a correct relationship with each other as well. And I also encourage you, as you read it this week, if you're the kind of person who just reads it all in bulk in one day, or even a whole bunch one time per day, I encourage you to maybe map out three or four times per day, every day this week to dip into it a little bit. Why? Because you're going to read a chapter with five or six verses, sometimes each one of them is going to be worth studying all by itself and if you just try to do it all in one chunk, yeah, you'll get something out of it, but I think you'll get more out of it if you do it in little bits and pieces so that between those bits and pieces you can think about, you can ponder on, you can memorize some things, you can just have these few sections of verses go over in your head and in your heart until you read the next section. I think you'll get more out of it, if you say let's say every morning, you're going to read a little bit at your lunch, break your read a little bit more at night before you go to bed, your read a little more. So instead of one per day, or all of it once per week, three times per day, for the next six days. And divide it up that way. I think you'll get more out of it because you'll have a chance to ponder and think about it in between time, I encourage

you to consider that in your reading this week, a few bits at various times. Take the time to ponder them. This is such a rich passage of scripture. There's so much wonderful stuff going on here. I really am excited for you if you've never read the Proverbs before especially, or maybe you've read them before and now this teaching has shown you the things to look for that you've never noticed before. I'm excited for your reading this week. I know you're gonna get a lot out of it. There's so much rich stuff in Proverbs. Thanks for that. We'll see you next week.

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