

**Key Passage: Proverbs 1:7**

**Key Thought: God has brought order out of chaos; wisdom calls for us to maintain right order. Rightly ordered lives are lives of wisdom and blessing.<sup>1</sup>**

**The gospel in Proverbs:**

Proverbs show us how to live as God intended. We see the gospel in Proverbs because Jesus came to show us how to live as God intended. Jesus was a walking proverb. So proverbs are rightly read and rightly understood when they point to the God we see in Jesus Christ.

Genesis 1 is penned against the backdrop of other creation stories, often involving warring gods. And everything is just chaos. But Genesis 1 says God brings order out of chaos. Our God is reasonable, in fact He is reason itself. Our God is ordered; in fact, all things find their proper order in Him. The New Testament makes this clear when it

---

<sup>1</sup> Note, key passages, key thoughts, and hook questions come from Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens*. These notes are compiled from 4 principal sources. In addition to Michael Williams book, notes are also derived from Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences*, Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament*, and H. H. Drake Williams, *Making Sense of the Bible*.

calls Jesus the “Logos” (which, for the Greeks, referred to reason), and when Paul says all things find their meaning and fulfillment in Christ.

Proverbs 8 feels a bit unusual, but it provides a helpful backdrop for understanding how Proverbs function. Proverbs 8 is a text about Lady Wisdom. Unlike all the chaos that surrounds us—the uncertainties, the moral relativism, the self-centeredness that causes everyone to go their own way, with everyone doing what is right in their own eyes—Wisdom is that calm, rational, ordered voice that comes crying out in the streets. It offers meaning, purpose, and boundaries. It calms the chaos [tames the chaotic beasts in Job], and leaves you with a peaceful, calm reassurance. It shines a light in the darkness, showing you the path out of your troubles. And it points the way to our intended goal. So it’s no wonder that Lady Wisdom is described in language that we see appear again in the New Testament when talking about Jesus. Isn’t that what God, in Christ, does for us? Paul says in Colossians “all wisdom is hidden in Christ” (Col 2:2-3), and that means that a wise life, wise decisions, wise choices, may not look wise in the world’s estimation. “Humility doesn’t ensure that you get ahead of your neighbor clawing for your job.” “Loving your enemy drops your guard, and exposes you to be abused. What a loser.” And yet, 1 Corinthians says “you are in Christ who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). Wisdom means to live a righteous and holy life. Toward God and toward others. The two greatest commandments find their place in Proverbs: The greatest commandment (to love God with everything you have) finds resonance in this oft-repeated line in Proverbs: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” And proverb after proverb speaks to how to treat your neighbor as you would yourself, linking how you treat them to how you treat God (Prov 14:31; 17:5; 19:17). In fact, Proverbs specific linking of helping the poor as serving God is used by Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46. Not only that, proverbs says that we need atonement (see Prov 20:9). These are gospel truths. And Proverbs points us in the right direction.

With that background—what you might call the “gospel backdrop” for reading Proverbs—we can open our eyes to see Christ in this book. Proverbs is a name that means “wise sayings.” Wisdom is one of the categories of writing in our Old Testament, along with prophets and law (see Jeremiah 18:18). You know that wise sayings are generally true. They are usually true. They are practically true over the long haul for the vast majority of situations. But they are not rules or commandments that admit of no exceptions. In any book on “how to live your life,” there are general maxims about “the good life” for “John Q Everyman,” but then there is your situation in your context. We shouldn’t read Proverbs as if they are the book of Leviticus.

And that is actually comforting and gospel affirming. On the one hand, if there are general principles that apply well in life, such that, we can even speak of a “well ordered

life,” then that is testimony to an orderer. It speaks to the God who made the world in the first place. Atheists like to point to a problem, or two, or three in nature for which we have trouble seeing an order or purpose. Christians can respond with “God may have an order or purpose we don’t see yet, or hasn’t been revealed yet, or was thwarted by sin and will be returned to its order and purpose in the future. But if you can find one thing, just one, that is so ordered that it couldn’t have arisen by accident, and thus cries out for an ultimate orderer, you devastate the case for atheism. So the fact there are general truths about how to respond to the warp and woof of life and produce generally predictable results speaks to the orderer. C. S. Lewis once argued that the minimal need for extraordinary miracles is a great sign of a well ordering God. And we submit to the God who ordered the work and made it to work the way it does. There is a proper harmony in creation, placed there by God, and there are rules to live by that accord with that harmony. I keep using this line because it is so good: we are punished not just for our sins, but we are punished BY our sins. Like a plant that needs water, sunlight, the right balance of nutrients, and proper soil, we were created to grow and thrive in a righteous environment. There is harmony in creation and in ourselves which sin destroys. It only stands to reason that we would find principles of harmony that, if followed, makes everything better.

On the other hand, if everything worked like clockwork all the time, how quickly do you think we would forget about our need and dependence on God? And lest we forget, God is above all things, free to work behind the scenes, in and around the rules of the game and the laws of nature to accomplish his purposes. We pray not simply when we know the inevitable outcome, but especially when we ask for God to change it. So the “this isn’t always the case” nature of proverbs reminds us to look for God rather than the laws of nature as the ultimate authority and thing to count on.

And once I see the value of “wisdom literature,” I begin to see the Gospel through a wisdom lens. Take the Sermon on the Mount. The greatest sermon by the greatest person in the history of the world is surely something worthy of our study. And it has been subjected to a tremendous amount of study. And a tremendous amount of approaches—all differing with each other. But the one that has been most helpful to me is to read the Sermon as “wisdom” literature. Less like Exodus and Leviticus. More like Psalms and Proverbs.

Jesus begins with the “beatitudes;” “Blessed are those who look or act or feel like this; for something good awaits you.” It turns out that very set-up appears in wisdom literature. Look at Psalm 1; Look at any number of Proverbs. We begin to look for value in places a chaotic, self-centered world finds no value. We begin to see order that helps re-order our own lives. And it turns out, this new order...reminds me of Jesus.

So when you read Proverbs, you can place many of them into categories: sexual sin; marriage advice; how to deal with bosses and neighbors. How to manage your money, win friends, and influence people. How to make good use of your time, have food to eat in the winter months, and live a long life. We can re-group the proverbs (as my friend LaGard has done) to help us with topical study. There is value in that. I don't disregard that.

But for some reason, the book of Proverbs has come to us in what feels like a jumbled mess. My first question is not "why did God write this wrong?" It is to ask "why can I learn from the way God gave it"?

And one thing I realize is that this "jumbled mess" of topics all thrown together in different order, in what feels like a hodge-podge way, is how life comes to us. And if that's true, there are four take-aways:

(1) Just as life gives us 50 new crises before breakfast, Proverbs offers wisdom on 50 different crises per chapter. You can make it through today. You can face various obstacles. You can trust in God's resources to help you every step today, even if it doesn't come to you in a neat file folder.

(2) A rightly-ordered life (the life we see in Jesus) is one that isn't phased by the circumstances. Your highs and lows today are not triggered by what comes at you. You find your identity, your worth, your sense of purpose, and your mission before the day begins. And so, you don't go looking for the right way to order your day in order to be happy. You start the day rightly ordered, and then you deal with the issues of life from that place of confidence and peace.

(3) We can fall into the habit of focusing on our favorite issues, and fall prey to our weak side. Proverbs reminds us to be watchful on every side, and to pursue right order in every direction. To be on our guard. Didn't Jesus say something about that?

(4) Daily focus on a variety of issues and topics is like practice. It helps us form habits. And soon, those habits become ingrained, so much that we react and respond appropriately because we know no other way to act. It is a bit like Karate Kid. Proverbs defies categorizing so that we will be "useful for the Master, ready for every good work."

And finally, I learned this line from Tom Olbricht years ago: "Maybe the Bible is not written so much to answer all of our questions as it was written to question us." Proverbs challenges me with topics and questions I'm not asking right now. But maybe I should. And it puts two different issues together in ways I don't think belong together. But maybe they should. And I go to the Bible looking for an answer to my question.

But in my daily Bible reading, perhaps God has something he would like to say to me. And in this, I hear the words of Jesus, “Not my will, but yours be done.”

I see the Gospel in Proverbs, because I see God at work bringing order out of chaos. I see the Gospel in Proverbs, because I see the life of Jesus on display. I see the Gospel in Proverbs, because I see God saying at the same time, “I got this, you will be ok” and “there is a better way, if you will come follow me.”

### **Hook Questions:<sup>2</sup>**

1. How do we go about developing the wisdom that finds its fulfillment in Christ? Do your Christian habits indicate that this is important to you? Why would we want to become like Christ?
2. Is it foolish to live according to biblical guidelines in today’s world? How do you react to movies and television shows that portray Christians as mentally deficient? Do you find it humorous or tragic, and why?

---

<sup>2</sup> Taken from Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens*, p.64.