

# Proverbs

## Knowing the God of Prudence



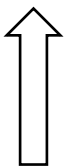
### Lesson 1 ..... *Understanding the Heart*

#### Pointers for reading Proverbs<sup>1</sup>

- Remember Proverbs is Hebrew poetry that uses parallelism (refer to handout on parallelism). In trying to understand a proverb you need to compare the phrases very closely and watch for the interplay between words. You see and internalize the wisdom as you think deeply about it and wrestle with it.
- No one proverb gives you the whole picture, they each look at certain aspects of a situation. Therefore, a proverb must be read in light of all the proverbs. "Only all together do the proverbs bring us a wise, nuanced, theologically rich, many-faceted view of the world."<sup>2</sup>
- "The New Testament shows us that the kind of relationship with the Lord that Proverbs calls for can be fully realized only through faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup>

#### **Day 1- Knowing the Heart**

#### **Proverbs 4:23-27, 16:2, 20:9, 28:14**



*Father, help me to gain a heart of wisdom as I read your words on how to live wisely. Help me to see the world the way you do and to have the mind of Christ, who is the source of all wisdom, so that my life honors you in all that I do and say.*

1. What do you learn about the heart from these verses?

2. What do you think it means in 4:23 to *keep* your heart?

a. Define the word vigilant. Why would we need to keep our heart with *all vigilance*?

b. What does it mean that from the heart *flow the springs of life*?

#### For Discussion

How does what you say (4:24), what you look at (4:25) and where you go (4:26) influence your heart? How is this connected with *keeping* your heart?



How will you put *keeping your heart with all vigilance* into practice?

3. It's easy for us to believe the best of ourselves, but the wisdom of 16:2 gives us good reason to doubt our motives. How could you put the wisdom of being suspicious of your motives to work in your life?

### Digging Deeper

Matthew 12:34 *You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*

- What do you learn about the heart from Jesus' rebuke to the pharisees?

## **Day 2- Reordering Desires**

### **Proverbs 10:24, 11:6, 19:2, 29:25, 20:13, 21:17**

### Picture and Ponder

"In the Bible the heart is not primarily the seat of the emotions in contrast to the head as the seat of reason. Rather, the heart is the seat of your deepest trusts, commitments, and loves, from which everything flows."<sup>4</sup>

1. What do you learn about desire from 10:24, 11:6, (In many translations, *lust*, in the ESV, is translated as desires or evil desires) and 19:2?
  - a. How have you ever experienced desires taking you captive?

### Picture and Ponder

"Wise people do not simply accept their desires as they are, nor with hasty feet run to fulfill them. Rather, as Augustine counseled, they reorder their desires with the knowledge of the truth."<sup>5</sup>

### For Discussion

What does it mean to have your desires out of order? How do you reorder your desires with truth?

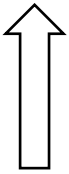
2. What is the way of danger and what is the way of safety according to Proverbs 29:25?
  - a. In what way is the fear of man, or we could say, the desire for approval, a trap?
  - b. How has the desire for approval shown itself in your life?
3. Proverbs 20:13 and 21:17 talk about love of sleep and love of pleasure. What can result from this according to Solomon?
  - a. What have you observed to be true when the desire for comfort is the top priority in life?
4. The wisdom of 27:1 reminds us that we don't know what tomorrow holds. How does boasting about tomorrow display a desire for control?



When we are driven by our desire for approval, comfort or control then we have displaced God as the ruler of our life and these other desires become idols that we serve and worship. It is not that we love these things too much, but that we love God

too little.<sup>6</sup> It is only when God is the supreme love and desire of your heart that these other desires take their proper place in your life.

- ◆ Which one of these desires tends to rule your life?
- ◆ What fear is behind it?
- ◆ How does the gospel (the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection) truly satisfy this desire?



*Father forgive me for sometimes loving other things in practice more than I love you. Please show me the ways I let comfort, control or the approval of others take your place. Cause my heart to be so in love with you that these other desires lose their strength.*

### **Day 3- Temptation**

#### **Proverbs 7**

1. Verses 1-4 tell us how to avoid falling to temptation. If you were writing this to a loved one, how would you communicate what these verses say?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Verses 5 and 21 tell us temptation often begins with *smooth words*. How have you observed this to be true in your own life, or in someone else's life?

- a. Proverbs 5:3, says, *the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil...*In sexual temptation, how could words ignite temptation? How can you avoid this?
3. What do you see that is so foolish or *lacking sense* in verses 6-9?
    - a. What or where is it that you need to avoid so that you don't fall into temptation?
  4. Why are the smooth words of verses 15 and 18 so effective; what do they appeal to?
  5. What two paths to destruction does verse 25 show?



In verses 14-15 we see the temptress performing her religious duties and then leaving them to go out and sin. She had reduced her relationship with God to mere rituals, justifying her sinful behavior because she had supposedly done her duty to God.

- ◆ How do you ever “reward” yourself with something sinful because of some perceived good you have done? Pray and ask God to show you where your heart tends toward this kind of legalism.
- ◆ What are the lies that sin tells you? What are the truths of God that combat those lies?

## Picture and Ponder

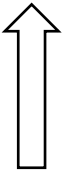
"Here is the secret of the power of faith to break the enslaving force of sinful attractions. If the heart is satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus, the power of sin to lure us away from the wisdom of Christ is broken. And we will love holiness because it is an expression of the personality of the One who brings us so much satisfaction."<sup>7</sup>

## Digging Deeper

1 Corinthians 10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*

Matthew 26:41 *Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

- How do Paul and Jesus help us to deal with temptation?



*Father help me not to enter into temptation. May my heart be so satisfied in you that what sin offers me will have no appeal. Help me to see and love the beauty and wisdom of life in Jesus.*

## **Day 4- Emotions**

**Proverbs 12:25, 18:14, 13:12, 10:28, 12:20, 29:6**

## Picture and Ponder

"Emotions tell us what we believe and value."<sup>8</sup>

1. According to 12:25, what effect does a heart filled with anxiety have?



The rest of the proverb says, *a good word makes the heart glad*. In order to receive a good word, you would need to share your anxiety with a trusted friend. Are you willing to do this? Are you ready with a good word for a friend who is anxious?

- ◆ What kind of *good words* make your heart glad when you are anxious?
  
- ◆ What makes you anxious? What is the underlying reason you are anxious about these things? What truth are you not believing about God when you are anxious?
  
- ◆ Proverbs 30:5 says, *Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him*. Meditate on this truth. How can these good words help you in your anxiety?

### Picture and Ponder

"A good word is wider than the good news which would remove the cause of the anxiety but is not always possible; a good word gives courage to face it."<sup>9</sup>

### Digging Deeper

Philippians 4:6 *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

- What is Paul's remedy for anxiety?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- We know God doesn't give us everything we request, so what are we thanking him for?




- How can you put this into practice in your life?

2. The proverb in 18:14 compares an outward condition and an inward condition. Why are we able to endure difficult outward circumstances like sickness, but a crushed spirit is unbearable?

### For Discussion

How can the way you view your circumstances alter the way you feel?

3. The proverb in 13:12 talks about hope and desire. How do we deal with longings and desires that are not fulfilled without losing our hope?

 What are all the reasons for hope that we have as believers?

4. Where are joy and gladness to be found according to Proverbs 10:28, 12:20 and 29:6?

### For Discussion

To what degree is happiness a choice?



We aren't in control of what emotions we have, but we are in control of how we respond to our emotions. "Our emotions are not a lie, but they may be present because we believe a lie."<sup>10</sup> Emotions are fed largely by what we believe and by what is most important to us. When your emotions threaten to spiral out of control, ask yourself: *How does this emotion I'm feeling reflect what I believe or value?*

\*The questions in this lesson are not to suggest that anxiety or depression have a simple solution or to make anyone feel shame for their struggle. We are complex creatures and being such, there are many reasons for our struggles. We need lots of wisdom and help to sort it all out, so don't hesitate to ask for help.

## **Day 5- The Wise of Heart**

### **Proverbs 10:8, 12:15, 16:21, 17:24, 13:20**

1. What is essential to wisdom according to the proverb in 10:8?
  - a. How do you think the second half of the proverb relates to the first?
  
2. The proverb in 12:15 observes that *a fool is right in his own eyes*. What is so foolish about being sure you are right?
  - a. What stops us from seeking advice?
  
  - b. What kind of advice does wisdom seek?

3. The beginnings of Proverbs 16:21 and 17:24 seem to say the opposite things. How are they both true?

4. Proverbs 13:20 observes one way to become wise. What is it?



Ezekiel 36:26-27 says, *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

Ezekiel is talking about the New Covenant that went into effect when Jesus died and rose again. As believers with God's own Spirit living in us, we no longer have a heart of stone, but a soft heart that is tender to God. Spend some time in prayer thanking God for working in your heart so that you would come to him, thank him for Jesus, who made this possible. Ask him to help you vigilantly keep your heart.

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<sup>1</sup> Paraphrased from Keller, Timothy, with Kathy Keller. *God's Wisdom for Navigating Life*. Viking 2017

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* p. *xi*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*. p.*xiii*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*. P. 85

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*. P.93

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*. P. 93.

<sup>7</sup> Piper, John. *The Pleasures of God*. P. 236

<sup>8</sup> Mahaney, Carolyn. *True Feelings*. Crossway 2017

<sup>9</sup> Kidner, Derek. *Kidner Classic Commentaries, Proverbs* p. 94 The Tyndale Press 1964

<sup>10</sup> Mahaney, Carolyn. *True Feelings*. Crossway 2017

