

## Proverbs Introduction and Chapter 1- John Karmelich

1. I call this lesson, "Choosing the Right Path in Life."
2. Let's start with a quote from Jesus. That's always a good thing to do in a bible study. ☺ Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Matthew 7:13-14, NIV)
  - a) What Jesus is saying, through a story, is that there are two paths one can choose in life.
  - b) One path is wide as to accommodate many people.
  - c) One path is narrow, as only a few people need travel on it.
  - d) This narrow path leads to everlasting path. The wide path has a dead end. ☺
  - e) The point of this two-line parable is about making the right choices in life. Unfortunately, a majority of people choose the wrong path and never end up in heaven.
3. On that happy note, ☺ welcome to my study of the Book of Proverbs.
  - a) Proverbs is mainly a set of instructions on how to live life.
  - b) My favorite description of Proverbs is "A bunch of short sayings, riddles and brain-teasers designed to teach us how life works".
  - c) Instead of Proverbs stating, "Here are God's rules on life", this book uses riddles and "sayings". The idea to think about what those proverbs mean.
    - i) The reason Proverbs does this is we remember something more when we have to think about it. If the text is blunt, we easily forget the message. If the text requires us to think about it, we have better memory recall of that concept.
  - d) Here's another saying about Proverbs I like: "The Book of Psalms is designed to be read when we are on our knees. The Book of Proverbs is designed to be read when we are on the move". (Source unknown). The idea is that the Psalms are a book of prayers and praises to God. The Book of Proverbs is a practical guide to how to live life.
4. OK, let's hit the tough question first: Are we as Christians required to obey the commands of the Book of Proverbs?
  - a) Well, for starters, Proverbs does not give many direct commands. It is mostly a set of riddles, sayings, and "brain-teasers" designed to teach us how to best live our lives. Salvation for the Christian is about trusting in Jesus for our salvation and accepting the fact He paid the price for our sins. Proverbs helps us make decisions as Christians.
  - b) The daily life of the Christian is about trying to live a life that is pleasing to God. In order to please God, first, we have to figure out what He wants us to do in order to please Him. That is what bible study is about. It gets more complicated as certain Old Testament rules do apply to Christians (e.g., "do not steal") and certain ones do not apply (e.g., the food laws of Leviticus 13). The New Testament is the interpretation to understand how we are to apply the Old Testament to our lives.
  - c) With that said, the Book of Proverbs is a good set of concepts on how to live a happy life. In other words, "Do you want to live a happy, fulfilled life as God desires for us? Then study Proverbs, as this is God's guidelines to live such a life.
5. It's time for me to explain the difference between "knowledge", "intelligence" and "wisdom". Let me use my favorite illustration on this: Being hungry and eating a sandwich.
  - a) "Knowledge" is to comprehend that if you are hungry, and there is a sandwich in front of you, (assuming you like sandwiches ☺), eating that sandwich will satisfy your appetite. In other words, your brain is aware that if you eat that sandwich, you won't be hungry anymore. That information implanted in your brain is "knowledge".
  - b) "Intelligence" is how fast one figures out eating that sandwich will satisfy one's appetite. Intelligence is about speed. It is about how fast one figures something out.

- c) "Wisdom" is when one actually eats the sandwich. If one knows the sandwich will satisfy one's appetite and still, one does not eat the sandwich, one may be intelligent, but that person is not wise.
    - i) Grant it, biblical wisdom is wider in scope, as we'll discover as we go through the Book of Proverbs. The basic idea of wisdom is application of biblical knowledge.
  - d) This is what the Book of Proverbs is all about: Giving people the correct set of knowledge so that we can correctly apply it to our life. In other words, God does not lead us by the hand to make the right decisions. That is still up to us. Still, if we are willing, God does provide the set of instructions so that we can make the wisest decisions for our lives.
6. It's time for the "who, what, when and where's" of the Book of Proverbs:
- a) "Who": Mostly written by King Solomon. He was the third king in Israel's history, after Saul and David. Solomon was the son of David (Proverbs 1:1). The last few chapters of this book include some other authors. The bible said that Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs (1st Kings 4:32). That means he either creatively came up with them and/or he collected them from other sources. (See Ecclesiastes 1:13). Out of those 3,000 proverbs, about 400 of them made into this book.
  - b) "What": Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings designed to teach us about life. Most of them are in two line pairs: That is the first line is designed to be connected to the second line in some way. There are some of Proverbs in six line groupings as well.
    - i) Note that the first nine chapters are an introduction to the book. The focus these nine chapters are on the importance of wisdom.
    - ii) The actual two line "sayings" begin in chapter 10. They end at Chapter 29. Chapters 30 and 31 are special chapter-long epilogues.
  - c) "Where": This one is quick and easy: In Israel. Enough said. ☺
  - d) "When": King Solomon lived around 950 BC. (Just remember it was roughly a thousand years before Christ.) Most of this book was written in his lifetime.
    - i) Chapter 25 opens with "These are more proverbs of Solomon, copied by the men of Hezekiah king of Judah". (Proverbs 25:1, NIV). The point is the last few chapters were organized at the time of King Hezekiah, who lived roughly 200 years after Solomon. This leads most scholars to believe the book, as we know it today, was officially organized, roughly seven hundred years before Christ.
    - ii) Remember that the chapter breaks were not added until the 12th Century AD. They were added to help us locate passages of the bible. The original text is in Hebrew. Most English translations are directly from the Hebrew, with some "help" of other Greek and Latin translations.
  - e) "Why": To help bible readers become wiser people and live a life pleasing to God. That's easy to say. The trick is actually to go through with it! ☺
7. I was thinking about King Solomon, the author who wrote most of Proverbs. If you study his life in 1st Kings and in the Book of Ecclesiastes, he was knowledgeable, but in the end, not wise.
- a) When Solomon first became king, God asked Solomon "What would you like?" Solomon responded with (in effect), "make me a wise king". God then said, "Good answer!" ☺ God then said in effect, "Since you didn't ask for power or material things, I'll give you power and possessions as a bonus prize ". King Solomon was known as the wisest king in the history of Israel. He also led the country to its greatest period of prosperity in the history of that nation. (This is all in 1st Kings Chapter 4).
  - b) In 1st Kings Chapter 11, it says Solomon eventually turned away from God. His weakness was women. He married foreign wives and started worshipping the pagan gods of those wives. Near the end of his life, Solomon realized what a mistake he made. That's a key point the Book of Ecclesiastes, which was written by King Solomon.
    - i) Here's my point: Solomon prayed for wisdom, and was granted that request and wrote Proverbs. Obviously, he was a wise man based on what he wrote down.

- ii) What history taught us about Solomon is having head-knowledge is not enough. Solomon still turned away from God later in life. The point is having the head-knowledge is a key starting point, but that alone won't keep you on the right path. The discipline to stay focused is a life-long journey with no special short cuts.
  - iii) Before we can know how to apply "Godly head-knowledge", first we have to know what is the right head-knowledge. That is the book of Proverbs. How we apply that knowledge is scattered through this book. We'll discuss that more as we go.
8. Proverbs Chapter 1, Verse 1: The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:
- a) Well, if you have any doubt who is the author, it is stated in Verse 1.
  - b) Notice that Solomon emphasizes the fact he is "Son of David". Notice also that Solomon does not call himself a king. I'm sure Solomon was a king when he started writing this book. Because Solomon is comparing himself to a "son of a king", the idea is that the teachings of this book should start when a person is young in life. This will become more obvious as we go.
  - c) Know that the first seven verses are usually combined as an introduction to this book. Beginning in Verse 8 is the first set of actual Proverbs to be contemplated.
9. Verse 2: for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight;<sup>3</sup> for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair;<sup>4</sup> for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young--<sup>5</sup> let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance--<sup>6</sup> for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.
- a) Notice the word "for" is used over and over again in these verses.
  - b) Do you want to know the purpose of Proverbs? Look no further than these five verses.
  - c) Let's start with "for attaining wisdom": The first purpose of Proverbs is to attain wisdom. The idea of wisdom is bigger than the "sandwich" illustration given earlier. The idea of wisdom, in the biblical sense, is about applying God's rules to our life for happiness.
    - i) Let me put it another way. In school, the most important thing to learn is how to apply knowledge to one's life. It's not the facts and figures one remembers in the long run, but learning "logic". It's about learning how life works. One can then go out in whatever situation and apply that knowledge to one's life.
    - ii) The bible can be thought of as a big instruction book on how to live a happy life as well as how to get into heaven. The key is to apply that knowledge as taught in the book. That is what biblical "wisdom" is all about. That is why it is first.
  - d) The next word is "discipline". People are scared of that word. We associate it with diet and exercise and think we can't do it. Let's put it this way: "Do you brush your teeth every day? Congratulations, you have discipline! ☺ Discipline is simply about taking the right course of action when it is tempting to take an alternative course. Remember Jesus had twelve disciples. The word "disciple" and "discipline" have the same root word!
  - e) The next word is "For understanding words of insight": This one is self-explanatory. The purpose of Proverbs is so we can understand what is being written for our sakes.
  - f) The next phrase is "for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life". I've already touched on discipline so I'll stop here. "Prudent" is simply about making the decision to do the right thing. It is another way of saying to "act out" in one's life what is pleasing to God.
  - g) The next phrase is "doing what is right and just and fair". So far in this study, the most important thing I've said is that we should live our lives in a way that is pleasing to God. I've yet to go into any significant details about what that means. These three words (which vary with different translations) are a good place to start.
  - h) Let's start with the phrase, "To do what is right". It is the most straightforward of the three word terms. This is best explained in examples:
    - i) Sometimes it is hard to tell the truth even when it is the right thing to do.

- ii) Sometimes it is hard to say no to peer pressure when it is the right thing to do. Sometimes it is hard to walk away from temptation, even though it is the right thing to do.
- iii) This is similar to "righteousness", which is the idea of doing what is right.
- i) The next term is "just". The idea of "just" is associated with justice. It is like a judge makes a correct verdict in a court sentence. A judge could do the wrong thing and say, "That criminal looks so innocent even though the evidence is against him. I think I'll set him free just to be nice and so that person will like me." That's not justice. The concept of "doing the right thing" also applies to punishing the guilty as well as helping the innocent.
- j) The idea of "fair" is similar to doing what is right and just. We all know life is not fair. Living in a sinful world, one has to accept the idea that things happen to us that cannot be made right. Still, that is no excuse to not be as fair as possible in our dealings with others.
- k) (Just to take a quick breather here, the reason I'm going into details about these words is because it is the foundation of the rest of the book. We need to grasp the details of the first seven verses to understand the rest of the book. OK, back to the word study! ☺)
- l) Verse 4 begins with "for giving prudence to the simple".
  - i) The idea of a "simple" person is one who accepts everything. It is describing a person, usually a young person, who doesn't have the ability to discern good information from bad information and accepts everything as true. It can also describe a person who is easily persuaded. The point is Proverbs is designed for such a person. It is designed to teach us how to make good decisions in life. It goes back my opening line of "choosing the right path in life".
  - ii) The idea of this phrase is that Proverbs is a tool to help all of us make the right decisions as we go through our lives.
- m) The next phrase is "knowledge and discretion to the young":
  - i) A young person, by definition, lacks the maturity to make good decisions. The point is Proverbs is not only for those who can be persuaded to do the wrong thing (i.e., all of us on any given day! ☺). It is also an excellent set of tools designed to teach our children how to live a life pleasing to God.
  - ii) Let me apply this phrase another way: I don't know many kids who would rather study Proverbs than say, play a video game. ☺ It is the duty of Godly parents and those who influence young people to teach the principals taught in this book.
- n) Next is, "Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance": In other words, before one can start to learn how to live a life pleasing to God, first, one has to have a desire to do so.
  - i) This verse is saying in effect, "The wise will get wiser". It is wise in the first place to want to learn how to please God. That person will become even wiser for choosing the right path to go upon.
  - ii) Next, notice this is a journey. It is not that one says to God, "OK, Lord, I desire to be wise, fill my brain with stuff so all I have to do is go live it out."
  - iii) If there is one thing I have learned about God in my life, is that He only gives us what we can handle at any one moment. If God tried to give us everything He wanted to learn at one moment, it would overwhelm us.
    - a) My point is "getting wisdom" is not a one step process, but a lifelong learning experience.
- o) Verse 6 states that wisdom is, "For understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise." Here we have the purpose of "getting wise". It is about understanding what God desires from as is written in this book.
  - i) Verse 6 is saying that Proverbs speaks in parables and riddles. Remember Proverbs does not give a blunt set of commands. Most of Proverbs uses short "expressions". We must think about these Proverbs in order to understand them.

- ii) What Verse 5 and 6 together are also saying is that we are to seek God's help in order to understand and apply the Proverbs of this book.
  - iii) Remember that the actual Proverbs of this book have not begun. We are still in the introduction. These opening verses are to understand that God wants us to choose to do the right thing. God desires that we learn the principals of this book. God desires we actually apply them to our lives, and most importantly, God wants us to seek Him to help us understand what these verses mean.
    - a) In other words, we have to pray our way through this book!
    - b) As we study Proverbs, the text will have different applications for you than it does for me. The Holy Spirit will guide each of us to apply these Proverbs to our lives. That is my prayer as we go through this book.
  - iv) Do I think only a saved person can comprehend all of Proverbs? Of course not. A lot of the Book of Proverbs is practical wisdom. Remember that Proverbs is not a book on how to get saved, although we will find hints of that topic every now and then. Proverbs is a book on how to live a happy life as God desires us to live.
    - a) At the same time, I am convinced one cannot fully apply all of Proverbs to their lives without God's help. Some of this book has principals on how to stick close to God in all that we do. It's hard to have godly wisdom if you don't believe and trust in that god in the first place!
10. Verse 7: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge
- a) If I had to pick one verse to memorize in this chapter, it would be this one.
    - i) In fact, this is only half of a verse, so I'm making it easier on you. ☺
  - b) Let's explain what "fear of the LORD" means:
    - i) It is not the fear that God will come and zap you to hell for sinning. Salvation for the Christian is about trusting Jesus as payment for all of our sins, past, present and future. We may lose "rewards" for disobedience, but not our salvation.
    - ii) The "fear of the Lord" is the realization that God will judge us for eternity based on how we act here on earth.
      - a) Jesus said, "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken." (Matt. 12:36 NIV)
    - iii) You can also put this "fear" on a positive note: If you love someone, you don't want to offend them. If we love God, then we want to please Him in all that we do and we know it displeases God when we sin.
  - c) The point of this half a verse is the foundation for living a Godly life begins with the "fear of the Lord". That is, to realize there is a God, and we are accountable to Him.
    - i) This is our motivational factor to be obedient to God's commands. Let's face it, if there was no God, there will be no judgment day and therefore, there is no reason to avoid any temptation. Grant it, living a moral life all unto itself leads to a happier life, but if "this is all that there is", in the end, it serves no greater purpose.
11. Verse 7 (part 2) but fools despise wisdom and discipline.
- a) Here is the first example where Proverbs speaks in "pairs":
    - i) Verse 7, Part 1: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
    - ii) Verse 7, Part 2: But fools despise wisdom and discipline.
  - b) It's time for a quick discussion of Hebrew poetry.
    - i) In English poetry, we tend to think of poetry is when the last syllable of a line rhymes with the last syllable of the next line.
    - ii) In Hebrew poetry, the idea is the first "thought" connects to the second "thought". The first line of a Proverb may be the opposite of the second, but somehow they both connect. The idea is to compare and contrast Part 1 with Part 2 of a Proverb.

- iii) Here in Verse 7, we have the first example as such. The idea is the wise person acts one way (Part 1 of this verse), while the foolish person acts the opposite way, (Part 2 of this verse). The verse is "poetic" in that it connects the two halves together by contrasting "the good versus the bad".
  - c) At this point, it is important to define the word "fool".
    - i) "The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."" (Psalm 14:1, 53:1, NIV)
      - a) Notice in this Psalm(s) reference, the fool does not deny God with his head, but his heart. Instinctively, there is too much evidence in the world that a god exists. To turn from God is an act of will, not logic. The point is people enjoy sin (for the lack of a better word) too much and pretend God doesn't care or God doesn't exist. That is the idea of a "fool" in biblical terms.
    - ii) Jesus said that anyone who calls someone a fool is in danger of "hellfire". (Ref.: Matthew 5:22). Yet, Jesus himself refers to others as "fools" throughout the Gospels! (Ref.: Matthew 7:26, 23:17, 23:19, 25:2, et.al.).
      - a) The word "fool" as it is used in the bible refers to one who is displeasing to God and willfully going down the wrong path in life. In other words, it is a person who is going to be sent to hell if they don't change.
      - b) Jesus point in Matthew 5 is that we don't know who is going to hell and it is not our job to determine who is going to heaven or hell.
    - iii) We are to judge people's behavior on earth. Jesus judged behavior all the time. The point of Matthew Chapter 5 (as well as Jesus other statement of "Do not judge" in Matthew 7:1) is that only God determines our salvation and we are never to make that determination. On other hand, there is nothing wrong with making judgments about one's behavior of the moment.
  - d) Now we can get back to Verse 7. This part says, "Fools despise wisdom and discipline."
    - i) It does not mean an atheist can't be a moral person or they lack self-discipline.
    - ii) A biblical "fool" is someone who doesn't care that they are accountable to God. They don't care that they are sinning, as they don't care about accountability.
    - iii) Remember that wisdom is the application of proper knowledge. A person who is not interested in being accountable to God would have no interest in wisdom.
  - e) We are now done "laying the foundation" for Proverbs, I'll pick up the pace of this study. Now that we have defined the key principals, the rest of the chapter should be a lot more self-explanatory.
12. Verse 8: Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.
- a) In Verse 8, we have another poetic "pairing". Here we have "father" mentioned in the first half and "mother" mentioned in the second half.
  - b) To paraphrase this verse, "Listen up kid! You're parents aren't just talking to hear themselves speak. They're older than you and know better than you! They are giving you these lessons based on real life experience!"
  - c) The implication of this verse is 1) One has godly parents and 2) It is the parents primary responsibility (not teachers!) to teach one's children to choose a Godly path in life.
    - i) I am convinced children watch parent's actions far more than what they say. If parents don't back up our words with our actions, it is useless. I'm not saying parents have to be perfect. When I make a mistake to my children, I confess it to them as wrong. One has to be brutally honest with children to raise them right.
  - d) This verse is a poetic illustration and not extremely literal. It states that wisdom comes from both the father and mother. A false idea is if you don't have both a father and a mother, you can't be wise. The point of this verse is to learn these verses as if one had a set of godly parents teaching us right from wrong.

13. Verse 9: They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.
- Verse 9 is saying that Proverbs will be like a garland (sort of a reef-crown) and a chain around one's neck. Is Proverbs being literal? Of course not. I want you to get used to the idea of Proverbs speaking in pictures as it goes.
  - The essential idea is that if one chooses to follow these Proverbs, then one is being obedient to God and His commands. We may not always visually see the difference, but from God's eyes, we are beautifully adorned.
14. Verse 10: My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them.
- Verse 10 to 19 tells a story which I'll call, "Don't let this happen to you". These 10 verses tell of the consequences of going down the wrong path in life.
  - The specific example has to do with joining a bunch of thieves in their plans. The broader concept is about choosing a lifestyle where one is willfully turning from God.
  - Notice it starts with "my son". The idea is to learn this while one is young, but I suppose it can apply to any age in life. Usually it is when one is a teenager that people choose their course in life. It is rare when people change at an older age, but it does happen.
  - One also thinks of a young person as being more naive and gullible, and thus more likely to be enticed by sin.
15. Verse 11: If they say, "Come along with us; let's lie in wait for someone's blood, let's waylay some harmless soul; <sup>12</sup> let's swallow them alive, like the grave, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; <sup>13</sup> we will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder; <sup>14</sup> throw in your lot with us, and we will share a common purse"-- <sup>15</sup> my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths;
- To summarize these verses, imagine a group of "thugs" telling a young person, "Hey, come join us, we're going to rob and kill some stranger and collect all of his stuff. We'll split all that we get equally. Verse 15 ends with the warning not to go along with them.
  - These verses made me wonder, "How and why do criminals recruit new members? Why would they want to recruit others and split the money with more people?"
    - I think part of the answer is the expression "misery loves company". For the criminal, there is a sense of acceptability if others want to join in. I assume there is an adrenaline rush to commit such a crime and one wants to share that thrill with others. It makes the criminal feel accepted if others join in.
    - Some people blame poverty for crime, but the truth comes from a lack of teaching about good morals. The temptation to commit such a crime is probably greater when one is poor, but one has to trust in God and avoid "sinful shortcuts" to life.
    - I'm convinced the greatest temptation for a young person, even more than the money, is wanting to fit in. Everybody wants to be loved and wants to feel a sense of belonging. The temptation for a young person to steal or say, take hard drugs is often associated to wanting to fit in with his or her chosen friends. I'm not saying that people don't steal for money alone. My point is the greater temptation is wanting to conform to one's peers. The point is about choosing the right "friends".
  - The underlying point of all of this gets back to my opening statement of "choosing the right path in life". Nobody being offered their first drink is told, "In a matter of time, you'll be a drunk, and your family will hate you and will waste your life". Obviously, that doesn't apply to everyone, but the point is we don't always see the consequences about the decisions we make in life.
  - Meanwhile, back to the mafia recruitment office. ☺
16. Verse 16: for their feet rush into sin, they are swift to shed blood.
- I'm sure the first time one commits a sin of this nature, it is a strong adrenaline rush. The second time gets easier as one wants that "high" again. The emphasis of this verse is on speed. Such people develop a desire to repeat that same sin over and over again, to a point where it seems like they can't wait to do this.

- b) The lesson of these verses is to "think out" one's decisions. When one is young and naive, one rarely thinks about the long term consequences of one's actions. The advice being given out here is to think about one's decisions.
  - c) Does this mean I have to stop and ponder every decision I make in life? It's not as hard as it sounds. Big decisions are (or should be) thought out carefully anyway. The idea here is if one understands even the basic bible commandments, (i.e., do not steal, do not murder), then one should instantly know this choice in life is wrong.
17. Verse 17: How useless to spread a net in full view of all the birds!
- a) Birds are not very smart and will usually go inside most bird traps. If one lays out a trap in full view of the bird, that bird will rarely go into the trap. Just watching you set up the trap usually scares away the bird.
  - b) Let's think about this line in context of the story of recruiting someone into a life of crime:
    - i) In this one line parable, the point is setting a bird trap when the bird is watching is a waste of time. The "bird" in this story is God Himself, who watches everything. It could also refer to angelic beings that watch over our lives.
    - ii) The point is eventually, one suffers for making this bad choice. It may be immediately after the crime, or it may be years later, or it may be eternal suffering.
18. Verse 18: These men lie in wait for their own blood; they waylay only themselves! <sup>19</sup> Such is the end of all who go after ill-gotten gain; it takes away the lives of those who get it.
- a) These two verses mark the end of this story. The main point to this story is that if one chooses a life of crime, that person will always lose in the end. They may win some material wealth in the short run, but in the end, they are usually caught. Even if they don't get caught, one can spend eternity in hell for choosing this type of lifestyle.
  - b) Let me also address anyone who might be reading this from a jail cell: No matter what one has done, it is never an unforgivable sin. The people you have hurt may choose not to forgive you. Society may choose not to forgive you. God is different. If God is perfect, then He is "perfectly willing" to forgive. The only unforgivable sin is to deny Jesus as payment for your sins. To confess Jesus as Lord is not a ticket to get one out of jail. For the sake of society, one still has to pay for the crime. What confession does, besides grant one salvation, is to rid the conscious of guilt and accept the fact that someone does forgive you and love you, and know that you want to change.
  - c) I was reading this verse and thinking about who usually murders hardened criminals: It is most often other criminals. Criminals compete for territorial rights and don't like competition. A hardened criminal is more likely to be murdered by another hardened criminal than by a policeman or a victim's family member. Think about that fact and the first part of Verse 18: "These men lie in wait for their own blood".
  - d) Remember that we're only in Chapter 1 of Proverbs. In fact, we're just past the introduction. I doubt most hardened thieves read Proverbs early in life. The underlying point, for all Christians, is to be careful what path one chooses in life. The other point is to pass on the knowledge about good moral decisions to our children and others.
  - e) I suspect this section is designed heavily for the parents or guardians of young people. The idea is to guide them and help them make the right choices as one goes through life.
19. Verse 20: Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares; <sup>21</sup> at the head of the noisy streets she cries out, in the gateways of the city she makes her speech:
- a) In Verses 20-22, we get a contrast to the previous nine verses.
    - i) In Verses 10-19, we have the danger of going down the wrong path.
    - ii) In Verses 20-22, the idea is about choosing the right path in the sense that "wisdom is everywhere" telling us to do the right thing.
  - b) Verse 20 says, "She (wisdom) raises her voice in the public squares". Does that mean there are billboards saying, "Do not steal?" Does that mean there are people yelling out in public squares, "Don't join that group of thugs?" Of course not.



- i) The first point is that many sins are instinctively wrong. God designed people with an instinctive knowledge that say, theft and murder are wrong.
  - ii) The other idea is that if God loves us, He cares about the decisions we make. He doesn't force His will upon us, but somehow, we instinctively know about making good moral choices. Knowing biblical laws increases our chances for making good (i.e., "wise") decisions in life.
20. Verse 22: "How long will you simple ones love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?"
- a) From Verse 22 to the end of the chapter, is essentially a speech by God saying in effect, "Hey, listen to what I have to say! If you don't, there is going to be consequences!"
  - b) Remember this section is addressed to the "simple". The Hebrew word literally means "an open door". The idea is a person who is willing to try anything does not think out the consequences of those decisions.
  - c) Also, remember that this whole section is an introduction to Proverbs. God is opening this book by saying in effect, "Make the right decisions. Get the right knowledge in order to make the right decisions. I (God) am trying to get you to have a happy, fulfilled life. Taking short cuts to riches (i.e., theft) never pays in the long run. Let Me (God) help you (that's us) make the right decisions in life and go down the correct path.
  - d) Let's step back for a second. I can hear some of you saying, "You know, I wasn't planning on mugging anyone today. ☺ How does any of this apply to my life?"
    - i) The bigger picture is about getting God involved in one's decision making process.
    - ii) The practical idea is to study one's bible, and then "use your brain" to decide what decisions to make in life, knowing what does please God and what does not please God. For example, a bible trusting person knows stealing is wrong, so therefore, one realizes it is a sin to steal some object.
    - iii) To apply Godly wisdom, I will add the necessity of consistent prayer. Remember Solomon prayed for wisdom, got wisdom, but turned to idolatry later in life. Having the right head knowledge is not enough. It still requires sticking close to God for help. Remember Peter denied Jesus three times. The night before the denials, Jesus asked Peter to pray with him three times and all three times Peter fell asleep! The point is wisdom requires sticking close to God through prayer.
    - iv) To apply Godly wisdom, I'll also add the necessity of accountability. The fear of having to confess our sins to fellow Christians is a great motivator!
    - v) I'm not saying, "Do these things and one will never sin". No matter how hard we try, we will never be perfect. With that said, there is nothing wrong with setting high goals for ourselves. These steps do limit the amount of sin in our lives, and in the long run that is a good thing.
  - e) Meanwhile, God is still ticked off at these people and warning them to turn to Him! ☺
21. Verse 23: If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you.
- a) Let me start by saying to the sinner, "You have no excuse". Notice in Verse 23 it says that "If you had responded to my rebuke". Again, God does not put up signs around town saying, "These are the sins I want you to avoid today". God designed humans with the instinctive knowledge to avoid sins. One has to willfully turn from God in order to commit such sins.
  - b) This verse is saying in effect, "If you would have listened to Me in the first place, I would have given you a great life and drawn you into a close personal relationship with Me!"
  - c) This verse, along with the rest of the chapter, is implying "There is a point of no return" with God. We don't know that point, nor do humans have any way of telling when a person has reached that point. One has to understand, that point does exist. Let me add a few more verses and I'll come back to this concept.

22. Verse 24: But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand,<sup>25</sup> since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke,<sup>26</sup> I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you--<sup>27</sup> when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you.
- a) Let me paraphrase God here: "Well, just take a look at you! You've been a criminal for years. Now you've hit rock bottom and want my help. Well, why didn't you listen to me earlier when I told you not to go down that path? You (the criminal) weren't willing to listen to Me (God) back then, why should I listen to you now?"
  - b) This verse sounds contrary to what Christians are taught about salvation. Christians are always taught it is never too late to ask God for salvation and turn one's life around. It appears in this verse like there is a point where it is too late.
  - c) Again, if such a point exists, it is God's decision and not ours. Since we can't read minds, and we as humans don't know what the future holds, we should never give up on people. I've personally read stories of people who have done terrible things and in jail, truly give their lives to God and change in jail, albeit while still staying in prison.
  - d) The concepts in the latter part of Proverbs Chapter 1 are very similar to what is taught in Romans Chapter 1.
    - i) In both Proverbs 1:20-21 and Romans 1, the idea is taught that God gives us both instinctive knowledge of what is right and wrong. (See Romans 1:19-20).
    - ii) In both Proverbs 1:24-32 and Romans 1, the idea is taught that there is a point where it is too late to change. (See Romans 1:24).
    - iii) The idea is God is saying to such people, "Don't do that! Again, I'm warning you, don't do that! Ok, if that's what you really want, I'll make it even harder for you to change. I'll grease the road to make it harder for you to stop!" ☺
    - iv) The point of God "increasing the desire for that sin" is granting a person what they want. It also has the potential to make them realize more quickly the path they have chosen is the wrong path in life.
  - e) The other point of these verses is for us to understand the consequences of turning to a sinful life. The point is to show these verses to our children and say, "Look what God is capable of doing if you choose that lifestyle!" These verses are designed to scare us. Unless God is willing to back up His words with actions, they are empty threats.
  - f) My final point is if we see someone down and out and willing to turn to God, we are not to point them to Proverbs Chapter 1 and say, "Read these verses buddy! It's too late! You should have thought of that a long time ago!" The idea of Jesus saying "Do not judge" means that we are not to judge one's eternal salvation. That means if a person is truly willing to repent, we are to help them. Do we have to be careful of con artists? Of course. Should such people still have to pay their debt to society? Of course.
    - i) The balance in life is to discern (i.e., judge!) behavior, but not to decide for God whether or not a person is sincere in their desire to turn to Him.
    - ii) Let me end with an extreme example taught by a former pastor of mine: "Do I have a problem pulling the switch on the electric chair? No. I will sincerely ask that person if they want to be saved. I will do by best to lead that person to salvation. I will help that person make that decision and pray with them. Then, without any sense of guilt, I'll flip the switch."
    - iii) The point is we are to judge behavior. If we let people get away with crime just because they want to repent, we are being unloving to the victim of the crime. At the same time, we can't read people's minds. If they sincerely want to change, we need to give them an opportunity to change. It doesn't mean we forgive them of their crime, but it means we now watch their future behavior.
  - g) Meanwhile, God's still pretty angry. ☺

23. Verse 28: "Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. <sup>29</sup> Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD, <sup>30</sup> since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, <sup>31</sup> they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes. <sup>32</sup> For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them;
- a) If you read through the text since Verse 24, it is God saying in verse after verse, effectively, "I told you so! You didn't listen to me early in life, and now you are paying the consequences!"
  - b) What I encourage you to do is read verses 24 to 32 without my commentary. As I read these verses, I can't help but think of people I know or have read about. It's amazing to watch these verses literally come true in the lives of those who turned from God.
    - i) I once heard Ray Steadman (a famous bible teacher in Christian circles) say, "A Christian needs to go through life with a bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. You need one to understand the other". That is so true to watch the lives of those who turn from God. These predictions in these verses come literally true.
  - c) I'm convinced these verses are not written so much for the person who has already traveled down this road, but for the young person deciding which way to go in life. The temptation is always there to take the easy way out, i.e., take shortcuts in life. Currently, in the sports world, the big controversy is athletes steroids to enhance their performance, at the cost of one's health. It is just another example of taking shortcuts in ways that are displeasing in life. Another example is cheating on tests or in sports in order to win. This is a lighter example of those who choose to steal and murder in order to achieve "stuff".
  - d) Are these verses also for mature Christians? Of course, the bible is convicting to people of all ages. My point to the "seasoned sinner" is to understand it is never too late to seek God's forgiveness. One may not be able to start your life over, but one can change their outlook and their behavior from this day forward.
24. Verse 33: but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm."
- a) Through the first few chapters of Proverbs, we are going to encounter a "carrot and stick" approach to God. If you don't know that expression, it refers to riding a horse or donkey. You can entice that animal to go with a carrot or punish them by hitting them with a stick.
  - b) Notice the assurance given in this verse: Whoever listens to God can live "without fear of harm". That statement appears naïve. Are you saying a Christian can't screw up? No ☺
    - i) My point is one can have assurance of forgiveness. When one states they want Jesus to pay the price for their sins, we are forgiven for past, present and future sins. As long as we are trusting in that fact, one can have a sense of peace that all is forgiven. That is not an excuse to go sin, but an assurance that all is forgiven.
    - ii) With that understood, Proverbs then becomes a set of rules, taught in riddles and expressions with the idea of how to live a life that is pleasing to God.
25. Let's wrap up this chapter:
- a) God uses both the "carrot and stick" in these first few chapters. God warns us of the danger of going down the wrong route as well as the rewards for going the right way.
    - i) The text of the first few chapters appears to use the "stick" more than the "carrot". This does not change throughout the bible. Jesus taught more on hell than he did on heaven. As a teaching tool, we as humans tend to learn far more from punishment than we do from rewards. It is human nature and God knows that.
  - b) A famous bible teacher named Walter Martin used to preach, "If they won't hear Jesus, give them Moses!" What he meant by that is in effect that if people aren't interested in hearing the Good News of Jesus, they need to hear how God demands perfection in obedience to God's laws and the punishment is hell for those who refuse. (Remember that Moses is associated with God's laws.)

- c) God is in effect, saying the same thing here in Proverbs, although it is not as blunt. The point here in Chapter 1 is God saying in effect, "Hey folks, you have two paths to choose in life. I'm giving you free will and I will not force you to choose the path that leads to Me and leads to eternal life. I, God, will however, beg and plead for you (that's us) to choose the right path in life as I want you all to live a happy and fulfilled life."
  - d) In other words, God does not give us the Book of Proverbs as to brag about His perfect knowledge of right from wrong. It is written to be studied and applied. That is the secret of life. It is a constant, daily battle as we are always tempted to turn away down the wrong path.
  - e) The "other path" in life is always a step away and always has some appeal. Elderly Christians will tell you that sin never dies of old age. The trick is to "abide" (i.e., stay close to) God in all that we do. That includes regular time in God's word and time with other Christians as to stay accountable and regular pray. Speaking of prayer, it's time to wrap up this week's lesson.
26. Let's pray: Father, give us the discernment and wisdom to stay on the path you have chosen for our lives. Bless the decisions that are pleasing to You and block the ones that are not. Help us to strive to please You in all that we do. Father, we all admit, there are times when we don't know what is Your will. Help us to have the assurance that by sticking close to you through prayer, through relationships with other believers and through Your Word that we can be doing Your will, even if we don't fully comprehend it. Guide as we go through this book, and help us to individually and collectively apply what You want us to learn from Proverbs. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

27.