



THE COMPLETE  
ANCIENT WISDOM,  
EVERYDAY WORSHIP

---

Re-discovering Proverbs

*90 Studies for Personal Meditation  
or Group Discussion*

by

MARTY PARKS

# ANCIENT WISDOM, EVERYDAY WORSHIP: Re-discovering Proverbs

# 1 - PROVERBS 1:1-7

## IT'S NOT *WHAT* YOU KNOW...

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. (PROVERBS 1:7)*

It all begins with God. It all ends with God. And it's all about God. Wisdom can only establish a firm foundation in our lives when we "put God in His place," so to speak; when we fully understand who He is, and especially when we understand that we're not Him!

The book of Proverbs falls very nearly in the center of our Bible, and that's appropriate. As a central focus for daily living, and a starting point for righteous behavior, we can hardly do better than to be certain our existence revolves around and is guided by these timeless truths.

But it all begins with God. Merely aligning ourselves with the latest personal enhancement technique, or the most current professional business model, or the savviest financial strategy isn't where real knowledge or wisdom originate. It all begins with God.

Solomon, whom most scholars agree was the composer of most of these practical instructions we call the Book of Proverbs, knew this. Or maybe we should say, *came to know this*. You're probably familiar with his story – his lavish lifestyle and his hedonistic inclinations. Yet, he admitted in his later years that it was all meaningless (see Eccl. 1 and 2). Even the pursuit of knowledge, gained for its own sake, was futile outside a direct relationship to the Source of wisdom and the Fount of knowledge.

There are two key words in verse 7 of Proverbs 1 that are worth noting. Most Bible translations mention the "fear" of the Lord, and that word (*yirah* in Hebrew) indicates a deep reverence or respect. The word "beginning" – as in, "the beginning of knowledge" – is *reshiyth*, first in order or rank; the principal thing. It's related to *rosh*, a word that implies something set apart, at the forefront.

And there you have it – our main focus, our driving passion is to be a deep reverence for God Himself ... who He is, what He says and what He expects. Everything else is just data.

## DISCUSS

What would you honestly say is the driving passion of your life?  
How is that evidenced in your daily life and in your worship?

# DISSENSION AMONG THE RANKS

*For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way of life. (PROVERBS 6:23)*

Have you ever noticed that some of those around us just seem to enjoy stirring up dissension? Maybe it's because there's a faulty sense of superiority in that. Maybe it's a "Look at me; I'm not like them" mentality. Maybe it's just insecurity, and bringing others down gives us the impression of lifting ourselves up. At any rate, once again, it seems that pride is at the heart of the matter.

This is strong language, but scripture says that God "hates" that (see verse 19). Among seven detestable characteristics, "a man who stirs up dissension among the brothers" is despicable to God. Yet we see it regularly, and beyond that, we tolerate it. We may even have been guilty of initiating it.

Oh, we tend to whitewash it with "concern" over this or that, and to be sure, there are legitimate reasons, on certain occasions, when we must voice an observation or even a complaint. But let's be honest here: what motivates these actions? What are we really trying to accomplish? Is this an essential matter or is it simply a matter of personal preference?

You see, one of the inherent problems (among many) in "stirring up dissension" is that shattering of unity is a poor representation to an already fractured world around us. When the Church can't even get along, how in the world do we expect to be attractive to unbelievers?

I'm not talking about absolutes of the faith here. And I'm not talking about going along just to get along. What I'm suggesting is finding gentle, compassionate, love-soaked ways to settle our differences. That is, of course, after determining if our differences are really worth addressing at all! Responding to each other in grace-filled ways can be a difficult challenge ... but oh, so worth it.

## DISCUSS

Are there any differences among those you minister with that need to be addressed with love, with patience, with grace?

Are there any you simply need to release?

## LET'S GET MESSY

*Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty, but from the strength of an ox comes the harvest. (PROVERBS 14:4)*

Today's theme verse, verse 4, might seem odd or hard to relate to in our cultured urban or suburban lifestyles. My dad used to quote this verse a lot and then he always added his own paraphrase, which went something like "An orderly office is appealing, but the resulting income can be lacking." I guess that's sort of akin to "A clean desk is a sign of a sick mind," but that's an entirely different devotional thought!

I think it comes down to investments. Not financial investments, necessarily, but investments of thought, time, emotion and, yes, labor. Relationships or ministry endeavors that are worth pursuing are worth an investment. And investments can be costly. The strength of an ox brings an abundant harvest, but feeding and cleaning up after that ox can be messy.

If you've ever had a pet, or especially an income-producing animal, then you know that their care and feeding can be messy. The same is true if you're raising a teenager, but again, that's a different devotional thought!

So, who are you investing in? What endeavor are you pouring yourself into? For what or whom are you willing to get messy? Can you make that sacrifice, that investment, for the sake of the end result? Better still, who has invested in you? Who got messy because of the potential they saw in you?

Thank God they did that. No, really. Right now... stop... and thank God.

## DISCUSS

What "investments" occupy most of your time, attention and labor?  
Just how "messy" are you willing to get?

# ANCIENT WISDOM, EVERYDAY WORSHIP: Re-discovering Proverbs

# 48 - PROVERBS 17:9-16

## GOD WITH US

*He who covers over an offense promotes love; but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends. (PROVERBS 17:9)*

Have you ever encountered someone you just have to love from a distance? You know what I'm talking about. A family member, a ministry partner, a co-worker, a neighbor. Try as you might, close encounters with them are counter productive and unfruitful. Yet, you know you're called (even commanded) to love them. By the way, chances are they feel the same way about you.

I'm learning that there are lots of things and situations I just have to release. I have to let them go. I have to forget about them. I have to love from a distance. And I'm pretty sure there are those who feel the same way about me!

It's a fortunate person who has a friend who loves them enough to confront them, in a grace-filled way, about attitudes or actions that are inconsistent with those who name the name of Christ. But when we're secure in, and confident of, our love and acceptance of each other, these encounters are truth-soaked and life-giving.

After all, that's the model God Himself provided for us. Not content with allowing us to wander our own way, He's lovingly shown us that He's more than willing to remedy, to cover over, our obvious short-comings. As far as the east is from the west, He's removed our transgressions. And as high as the heavens are above the earth, that's the scope of His love.

Best of all, He's promised *not* to love us from a distance. He's right here with us.

## DISCUSS

How does realizing God's love for you, and His presence with you, affect the way you see Him?  
How about the way you worship Him?

## NATURALLY UNNATURAL

*Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off. (PROVERBS 24:14)*

At the time of the writing of the Book of Proverbs, honey wasn't a manufactured commodity in Israel. That was more a product of Egypt or other more sophisticated societies. In Israel, honey was found in a more natural state; more by surprise; a sweet serendipity.

Honey to the writer and original readers of Proverbs was different, distinct, a bit exotic. That's why verse 13 of chapter 24 states, *Eat honey, my son, for it is good; honey from the comb is sweet to your taste.* Which then puts today's theme verse in its proper context.

True wisdom, like honey to the ancient Hebrew, is different; it's distinct. Even today, images of the “wise man” or the “sage” are somewhat exotic ones. These types aren't naturally found in our world and they weren't centuries ago, either.

Way back in our discussion of Proverbs 3, we looked at the word, “wisdom,” and how its original word, *chokmah*, implied “skillfulness.” That makes sense because wisdom – *chokmah*, skillfulness – in handling our world is exactly what's called for. We can't dictate or even predict what this day will hold, but we can be prepared to face it with God's wisdom, with the mind of Christ.

That's not the sort of approach everyone takes, you know. It'll make you distinct, but it's a skill you can acquire. It'll make you different (maybe even exotic!), but we're called to be different, aren't we?

## DISCUSS

Is your way of handling your circumstances noticeably different to the world around you?  
How do you think others would characterize how you react and how you respond to life?

# ANCIENT WISDOM, EVERYDAY WORSHIP: Re-discovering Proverbs

# 81 - PROVERBS 28: 11 - 22

## KEEP IT REAL

*He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. (PROVERBS 28:13)*

Confession may be good for the soul, but it's fallen out of favor with many of our churches. Maybe that's because many of our churches have begun taking on the characteristics of the world around us where mistakes can be fatal, failures will ostracize you, and weaknesses cannot be tolerated.

How could this happen? How could we so blatantly come to the place where we're afraid of confessing our sins (which we've all got), preferring to put a shiny-faced-everything's-great facade over every aspect of our lives?

Let me be clear – not every failure, every sin, is to be confessed before the entire congregation. Caution and discretion are called for in order that the church isn't thrown into confusion or controversy. Some confession is appropriately offered to a smaller group of trusted believers, or to an individual confidante, or to God alone.

But can I remind you of just a little of what God's word says about all this?

– *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. (James 5:16)*

– *Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)*

– *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)*

I'm pretty sure that Solomon's father, David, knew a little about all this.

## DISCUSS

Is confession a comfortable and accepted part of your church's tradition?

How would you say confession impacts worship?