

“Words of Wisdom” (Prov. 1:1-6)

1. Title (1)

- a. A collection of wisdom teachings including speeches laying out the ultimatums describing two paths and their respective consequences (chs. 1-9), and terse, poetic, pithy statements intending to influence sound thinking re; VMAPs (Values, Motives, Attitudes, and Priorities) (chs. 10-31). Both collections share the objectives to exhort to wise living and warn of foolish living.
- b. Such are not just helpful suggestions to make life easier but fundamental principles which convey reality. This is God’s world, albeit tainted by sin, and thus going with God’s design benefits the souls who “fear” Him; and rebelling against His design incurs natural negative consequences which ultimately end in utter destruction.

2. Purpose/Objectives (2-6)

- a. V. 2 To know wisdom and instruction: “Wisdom” *hokmah* is a broad term indicating overall prudence, obedience, mindfulness. It encompasses the following terms and is repeated in the conclusion of the purpose of this collection (7).
- b. V. 2 “Instruction” connotes correction and discipline – which can be both negative and positive.
- c. V. 2 “Understanding” or discernment. Many can relay facts of a situation but not all can deduce the implications. Discernment or true understanding is seeing more than what is displayed on the surface. It’s the opposite of naiveté or being gullible, simple, or foolish.
- d. V. 3 “*Wisdom*” (v. 3) is better read as “well-used skill”; Hebrew *sākal* (about sixteen times in Proverbs) connotes both the ability to apply wisdom and the success or prosperity that come with that application.<sup>1</sup>
- e. “Righteousness, justice, and equity” = the rightness of God’s moral Law, the justice of carrying it out, and the fairness of such i.e. blind scales or no respecter of persons.
- f. V. 4 “Prudence” *ormah* actually more sharply defined as shrewd.
  - i. Such can be used in positive or negative contexts. In positive contexts it connotes being astute, clever, calculating or savvy. In negative conveyance, it connotes being ‘slick,’ ‘sly,’ or ‘foxy.’
  - ii. Jesus illustrated how this concept of shrewdness can be employed for self-preservation (Lu. 16:1-12).
  - iii. David Hubbard points out how such an attribute can be used negatively: “cunning,” “cleverness,” even to the point of deceit (Ex. 21:14; Josh. 9:4; a related form describes the serpent in Gen. 3:1), although that is precluded here by the stellar virtues in verse 3.<sup>2</sup> Many evil men can be clever in devising complex manipulative plans for self-gain, yet such will be ultimately met with destruction and judgment cf. Ps. 2:1-2, 9-12.
  - iv. “To the simple” those morally infantile or immature. The simpleton may not prove foolish though naïve and ignorant. The gullible can be taught and avoid self-destruction. To such the proverbs can serve as a corrective, but the fools choose rebellion with knowledge of their immorality and schemes. And the Proverbs speak to their destruction.
- g. V. 4 “Knowledge” connotes correctness and rightness of learning as conveyed in v. 7. And ‘discretion’ connoting ‘intentions’ used positively here and negatively in 12:2 “evil devices” or “wicked intentions.”

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<sup>1</sup> Hubbard, D. A., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1989). [Proverbs](#) (Vol. 15, p. 46). Thomas Nelson Inc.

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- h. V. 5 “Learning” understanding or grasping well the truth of a matter enough to teach and persuade others. Also used in a negative way in 7:21 where the adulterous woman knows and used what she has to entice and seduce.
- i. Such a wise man will yet attain wise counsel still. No one has arrived and one who need not learn is a ‘know it all’ and foolish. The “simple,” young, and naïve may learn but the fool refuses to heed counsel. Both sides of this coin are conveyed in 9:8-9 and reinforced by the echoed theme in v. 10.
- j. Vv. 6-7 In wrapping up the intro of objectives is actually gaining wisdom to understand the wisdom being conveyed.
  - i. There is versatility of wisdom in her verbal forms found throughout Proverbs, other wisdom writings, and canon of Scripture. We are to learn wisdom’s forms of communication and discern the different techniques she uses e.g. parallelisms, acrostics, poems, songs, contrasts, satire, metaphor, reduction, parables, etc.
  - ii. Such artful teaching uses the terseness of poetry, sarcasm of hyperbole, ambiguity of enigma which is allusive and not initially apparent in meaning like riddles.
  - iii. A failure to understand *Proverbs* can lead to the simplistic thinking (which *Proverbs* seeks to correct) of making these wisdom teachings hard truths with wooden application. These are not hard promises (tit for tat) but spiritual principles which providence and sin effect. Think of Joseph and his brothers or Job who was not guilty, yet suffered greatly – yet was rewarded in the end. Cf. Jn. 9 where the man born blind was for God’s glory. Cr. Exod. 4:11, Gal 4:14; 2 Cor. 12:7-10.
  - iv. The psalmists ask ‘why do the wicked prosper and righteous suffer?’ Ecclesiastes acknowledges a reality which balances the teachings of Proverbs (7:15-18; 8:14; 2:12-17 all share same experiences; yet all will be put to rights (12:13-14) and the weights of justice and judgment are tipped by how we live – so living wisely is beneficial BEYOND time into eternity. Sure, you may suffer now living by faith – but that’s what faith and wisdom are for.
  - v. We are tempted to go the easy route of instant gratification and relief, and thus the Bible (including *Proverbs*) teaches us to persevere in righteousness. Jesus and the New Testament is filled with promises of trials, tribulations, persecutions for those who live wisely.

3. Veracity

- a. What the wise know is that such wisdom conveyed here is empirical. And it is undeniably so because such acknowledges reality and that God created the cosmos with laws including morality and physically (physics e.g. law of gravity, inertia, photosynthesis, etc.). Therefore, physical, psychological, and spiritual laws govern reality. Hence, to ignore them is to be foolish and to acknowledge them is to be wise. How foolish would it be to jump off a ten story building trying to defy and deny gravity?
- b. Our aim ought to be acknowledging reality – the greatest of which is God who created the cosmos and governs such with His innate attributes which are conveyed in Scripture and seen in creation. Read Ps. 19:1-11.
- c. There is evidence well beyond the shadow of a doubt that a Creator exists. And though His creation speaks without verbal language, His Word verbally conveys who He is and what He expects, commands, and has purposed and provided.
- d. And because of this preeminent fact, the foundation of wisdom and the key to successful living begins with “the fear of the LORD.”

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- e. The key to success in life is not attaining or possessing certain attributes, positions, prosperity, pleasures, positions, or circumstantial peace (cf. Jer. 9:23). It is knowing the One who provides all things as we seek first His Kingdom and righteousness (Mat. 6:33; cf 7:7-8).
- f. And success does indeed come with a reward viz. eternal life! (Jn. 17:3).

PC: As we begin looking into the book of *Proverbs*, we find that its purpose is stated in many synonymous yet nuanced terms which are indicative of the many approaches, techniques, and employments of wisdom. Wisdom is not accidental nor incidental but intentional. It requires an acknowledgment of God because after all, how can one be wise when he fails to acknowledge the most important and obvious truth viz. God’s existence (Ps. 14:1). Among the techniques of *Proverbs* are two presented ultimatums illustrated by two paths: one leading to destruction and the other to prosperity; and two women: one wise who calls for reason and the other foolish who lures into death. The wise may be wiser still when they are corrected and learn; and the simple can become wise when they heed wisdom’s call. However, the fools despise correction and wisdom, thus are left with their own ‘wisdom’ which only leads them “down to the pit” (Prov. 1:12).