

Proverbs 2:2-3,9-12a

Make your ear attentive to wisdom,  
Incline your heart to understanding;  
For if you cry for discernment,  
Lift your voice for understanding;  
Then you will discern righteousness and justice  
And equity and every good course.  
For wisdom will enter your heart  
And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;  
Discretion will guard you,  
Understanding will watch over you,  
To deliver you from the way of evil,

Today we will continue our journey through the first of the ten treatises in Proverbs. Before we dive in, I want to relay the ground we've tread so far by first reestablishing our principles and Philosophy to guide us in our reading of proverbs and then retracing our steps through this first treatise. Remember, understanding scripture means we must understand "context, context, context."

Our principles for reading proverbs has to do with the nature of the book itself, and how it was intended to be read. Regarding this, there are three principles we must keep in our minds:

1. The book of Proverbs is wisdom, not law. It expects you to read between the lines and pick up what is being placed before you. While most books of scripture expect you to sit and be educated, Proverbs invites you to sit and ponder with it to search the depths of Wisdom and her sisters.
2. Secondly, keeping with the theme of conversation, proverbs is a book of indicatives, not imperatives. It is not giving you didactic teaching or even sermons, it is giving you indications on how things work. Proverbs cares much more about "what is" than anything else.
3. As with all of scripture, Christ is the point of Proverbs. All of scripture speaks about Christ, and when we read and study this book, we are learning about the ways of Christ just as

much as when we read Romans or Exodus. This book is meant to direct us to Christ as our source and end of all wisdom.

As Christ is our Lord, this leads us to the Philosophy of Proverbs:

1. Fear the Lord, for this is where all wisdom and knowledge come from. Fear is recognition of and thankfulness to God for what He does and Who He is, followed by diligent obedience to His commands and instructions.
2. Seek wisdom in all that we do. We should understand God's law and be practical and prudent on how we exercise it.
3. Honor your parents. Embedded in the very structure of the book is the idea of heeding your father and mother in their advice and obey that advice, often comparing your usage of their wisdom to jewelry and ornaments. This mirrors the first element of this philosophy in that honoring your parents is a form of honoring God, and the kind of relationship you have with your father is similar to that which you have with God.
4. Teach your children. Finally, corresponding to the second element of this philosophy, you are to pass on what you learn to your children, to teach them to love the Lord your God and seek wisdom. Entailed in this element is the expectation that you will be wise enough to pass wisdom on and be honorable enough to cause your children to listen.

With these things in our mind, let's retrace our steps through this first treatise. This treatise is the first of ten, in which we have been invited to sit and watch a father give instruction to his son. When we hear the father speaking, he is not speaking to us, but rather is speaking to his son, and we are to learn not just the content of his teaching, but also the manner in which he teaches it.

If you have noticed so far in this treatise, the father has crafted a message that has a sort of symmetry. The first half of this treatise deals with evil doers, who the son is supposed to avoid, and the second half deals with the righteous, who the son is supposed to emulate. The father begins his treatise by telling his son of the kinds of men who gain through violence and evil. They will entice like the harlot entices, but promise all the falsely masculine vices to the son. They say they prize wealth, brotherhood, and success, while not really believing in those things.

They do not believe in wealth because they do not believe in building in a virtuous way. Instead of spending their lives working to leave an inheritance for their children's children, they dig pits for the innocent to make a quick dollar. Instead of living a life that produces wealth, they steal the wealth that others build.

They do not believe in brotherhood because they do not believe in true friendship or family. They are treacherous, wanting only wealth and power over others, trading other people's lives for money. Any form of attachment that would lead to true brotherhood or family is swallowed up by their way of life that prioritizes themselves over others.

They do not believe in success because they reject the One from Whom all success comes: God. In the world God made to reflect Himself and His Perfections, the wicked reject both for the short-term gain. Their way of life is a trap they set for themselves. More stupid than the birds, they see the trap, set the trap, and then fall into their own trap. In their desire to not be consumed by their own foolishness, they will reach out to the son to save themselves, or in the very least, drag him down with them.

Wisdom, however, has taken account of their refusals to Fear the Lord, and will punish them for their sins. She spends her time going out into the world, begging all men to listen to Her, to be wise, and to fear the Lord, but they refused to listen. These unrepentant fools will suffer Wisdom's Wrath by falling further into their own depravity. Wisdom hides from them, mocking them as they flail to survive and cannot succeed. The father's words are wise indeed. He says, "**do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path, For their feet run to evil And they hasten to shed blood.** (1:15-16)".

Since Wisdom comes to all men, she has also come to the son. The father then begins the second half of this treatise advising the son to do the opposite as the wicked: run TO Wisdom and seek her embrace. Much like a desperate lover, the son is to seek after her to the abandonment of all other things. The son is to cry out for Wisdom, and "**seek for her as for hidden treasures** (2:4)". The father wants the son to recognize that "**the Lord gives wisdom;**" and "**From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.** (2:6)". The father is acting as an agent for wisdom. Instead of waiting for his son to fall into error, he seeks his son out and teaches him, begging him to keep the teaching in his heart and wear it like jewelry. In doing so, the son will learn to fear the Lord, and by fearing the Lord will honor his father and mother. The end result of this search for wisdom will be the son's ability to "**discern righteousness and justice And equity and every good course** (2:9)". It is here that we begin today.

The father opens this last section of the treatise with the word "for", which is used to establish intent, justification, purpose, or meaning. He uses this directly following the promise that the son will be able to "**discern righteousness and justice And equity and every good course** (2:9)", indicating that what follows is an explanation of the "how" — or an underlying justification for — that state of discernment. The remaining portion of this treatise is also in contrast to the second section, which describes Wisdom's Wrath against the wicked. Just as Wisdom's Wrath follows the violent men who reject Her by their evil deeds and willful disregard of her, so too do the gifts promised to the son in this last portion of the treatise follow from the son's Fearing the Lord and

Seeking after Wisdom. If the wicked are punished with Wisdom's absence through the means of their disobedience and lack of a fear of the Lord, then the son will be gifted with Wisdom's bounty if he obeys and learns to fear the Lord. Put differently, you get out of Wisdom what you invest in Her.

Notice also that there is no middle ground here. You either fear the Lord, or you do not. You either search for Wisdom, or you reject her. Despite anything else, this treatise is a call to action for the son which, if he answers, will result in a certain outcome: "**wisdom will enter your heart And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you, (2:10-11)**". This contrasts with the actions of wisdom toward the wicked, namely that she "**will also laugh at [their] calamity**" and "**mock when [their] dread comes (1:26)**". She "**will not answer**" them, and "**they will not find [her]**" (1:28). The end of Wisdom's mocking the wicked is "**so they shall eat of the fruit of their own way and be satiated with their own devices (1:31)**". Contrasting with the treatment of the wicked, if the son listens to his father's counsel and searches for Wisdom, she will enter his heart with knowledge and discretion and understanding to "**deliver [him] from the way of evil (2:12)**", which is practiced by the perverse man and the adulteress. This places the blessings of wealth, brotherhood, and success in a very specific framing. That is: You do not deserve these gifts even if you obey, and you may not get them in this life, but you will certainly never see them if you never search for Wisdom and Fear the Lord.

To rephrase what the father is saying here: if the son cries out to wisdom and understanding, making them his desire, they will enter into his heart with the goal of keeping him from the ways of the perverse man and adulteress, resulting in the fear of the Lord and discernment in all things. What is being contrasted in the son is not "doing evil" vs "abstaining from evil". Rather, the contrast is actively disregarding Wisdom vs actively seeking after Wisdom. This difference is significant. What is often taught today is that following God means abstaining from bad deeds and holding on to the faith until God rescues us. We are told that doing bad things is bad, and all God expects of us is for us to try to do good sometimes, but mostly just stop doing this list of things that God doesn't like.

What the father in Proverbs teaches, however, is that our goal is an active discipline of mind and heart so that we reject the ways of the wicked and turn toward Wisdom in Love. We are called to look for Wisdom wherever we find it to the end that Wisdom will enter our hearts and keep us from evil. Our end in this life is not just abstaining from whatever bad deeds we happen to have proclivities toward. Our end in this life is to actively search for Wisdom as she searches for us. The abstinence from evil deeds is then a byproduct of Wisdom, not the end itself. To rephrase this again: we are searching for the Fear of the Lord through Wisdom, who conforms our hearts to herself causing us to no longer walk in the path of the wicked. The end is Christ, the means is wisdom, the result is righteousness.

Don't misunderstand me: sin is bad. Don't do it. The goal, however, isn't to follow a list of rules, but to have loyalty to God and a desire to be like Him. St Paul said that "the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified (Romans 4:13-14)". I quote Paul speaking of faith, but is that not what we are speaking of already? If we fear the Lord — that is, if we acknowledge God as God and give Him thanks — is this not from a heart of Faith already? The unrighteousness that God and Wisdom Judge is a lack of the fear of the Lord. So too, then, does God and Wisdom graciously grant us Righteousness as a result of having that Fear of the Lord. What we get wrong in equating obedience to God with a list of rules is that God frames this as Love, not a list of rules. Yes, Christ says, "If you Love Me, you will keep my commandments (John 14:15)", but even here, His emphasis is on the love, not the commandments. This instruction comes from the greatest commandment, which is "You shall Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37)"

Keep in mind that wisdom (Chokma) is practical knowledge. This is a kind of science that we are commanded to be disciplined in. Chokme was used when speaking of the kind of skill given to the craftsmen who built the temple, as they crafted ornaments and implements. It is a conditioned habit of action towards a specific end. For the metal workers who smelted, hammered, and cast the implements of the Temple, their end was high quality, functional tools — for the carpenter who carved the wood in the temple, it was ornate and beautiful pieces meant to provide structure and beautify — for the tailors and weavers who made and sewed together the fabrics of the temple, it was quality fabrics and fine seams that accent and embellish the actions of the priests in their determined places, making them practical and beautiful. The end for the father in Proverbs is to teach his son to Fear of the Lord. For each of these ends, a science is required.

For metalworkers, the science is metalworking. The metalworkers start with quality mines to gain the materials needed for the perfect balance of strength, flexibility, and beauty. Different metals have different qualities, and a knowledge of materials is the beginning of his trade. Then comes the formed habit of action where the metal worker takes the metal, melts or softens the metal with heat, and either pours the metal into a cast or uses a hammer to beat the material into the desired pieces. When casting a piece, the metalworker must consider the sand, the mold used, the temperatures required for each metal type, the negative prototype used to make the mold shape, and the method of binding the materials to keep the mold in place while pouring the hot metal. For forged pieces, hammering is required. While hammering the metal, the metalworker must consider the weight of the hammer, the type of hammerhead, the technique using force or angles to apply the force, and the anvils or tables used to force the metal into the correct shape. These specifics are all born from the practice of understanding the materials and desired end, which leads to the development of the practices and standards. The standards are set by the goal and the materials and shapes required for the goal. The techniques are born from many a mistake and error in trying but failing to get the desired result. It takes discipline, tenacity, strength of will, vision, insight, and a

dedication to the practice itself to gain the necessary skills to get the desired results. And I've only been talking about metalworking.

Each of these trades requires of any given practitioner to learn the elements of his craft to best apply the most effective and appropriate means to the end requested. For the craftsmen who built the temple, each of these varied tradesmen were called on to build various items with specific materials and with specific motifs, all with the end of creating a temple. The pieces were meant to come together and accent one another, in a grand spectacle expressing God's magnificence.

In keeping with this analogy, the father whom we are learning from, treats his duty to give wisdom to his son as a kind of workmanship. In this, his trade is wisdom, his end is the Fear of the Lord in any given circumstance, his tools are proverbs, wit, pithy sayings, and analogies, and his skill is in the application and usage of those tools toward that end. The father, then, is a master craftsman teaching his son in the skills required to mimic his own trade, just as a tailor, weaver, carpenter, or metalworker would teach their son their own trade so that their son could carry on the family business. Where this analogy comes to its fullness is in the next treatise, where Wisdom is understood to be that which God used to create the world. The father says: **"The Lord by wisdom founded the earth, By understanding He established the heavens. By His knowledge the deeps were broken up And the skies drip with dew (3:19-20)."** For us, the listeners, this means two things:

(add "Wisdom is both an end and a means" here)

1. all trades find themselves within the category of "Wisdom". Wisdom is the means of discerning the qualities and properties of the materials used, as well as discovering the skills and techniques required to make effective use of those materials to any given end. This makes sense, since this the word for Wisdom is used to describe both the skills required to build the temple and the insight into righteous being and living that the father is trying to impart to his son in this book.
2. As is described in the next treatise, Wisdom is that which resulted in the materials that we have and use to create any given work of art or science. The nature and structure of the woods, metals, and fibers used in all the trades mentioned find their origin in Wisdom herself.

What we are to understand about Wisdom is that Wisdom is both an end and a means. In this way, the trade, the end, and the skill of wisdom are all Wisdom herself. To deny the end of Wisdom is to deny the Fear of the Lord, which is foolishness. To abandon the skill required for Wisdom is to reject Wisdom herself. To treat Wisdom as if she were not a trade is to reject the very essence of Wisdom. By accepting Wisdom as Herself, you accept all three, and the tools are what may vary.

This is, in fact, what we see in Proverbs, and it is already qualified in the introduction. The book of Proverbs has been given for us “to know wisdom and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding, To receive instruction in wise behavior, Righteousness, justice and equity; To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion, A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, To understand a proverb and a figure, The words of the wise and their riddles (1:2-6)”. These tools — the proverbs, figures, words of the wise, riddles, and sayings — all have their place, and we find the structure of the book of proverbs provides a sampling of all of these to us as an example. The book opens with formal training sessions, then catalogs a list of sayings and witticisms, followed by riddles and sayings, and concludes with series of poems used for reflection.

When you see a moment where wisdom is needed, do you use humor to compare the lazy man to one who cannot be bothered to raise the spoon to his mouth to eat and live or do you soberly remind everyone that God hates unbalanced scales? Does someone need to be reminded that people like a generous man? Perhaps they simply need to weigh the productivity of the ox against the pile of poo? Maybe they need a protracted parable on the way wisdom hides from and mocks those who hate her. Or they might need a small poem comparing the swagger of a king walking with his army to a rooster. Notice that each of these can be used positively or negatively.

When speaking to a diligent man who is exhausted, it may be wise to remind him of the dangers of laziness in a funny way. That man already knows the dangers, which is why he is diligent. However, reminding him of those dangers through humor provides support for his diligence while providing a much needed laugh. This same saying can soften the blow of a rebuke to a brother who has not been as diligent.

When speaking to a generous man, perhaps reminding him that everyone likes a generous man will caution him against being so generous as to put himself in financial danger or cause him to reflect on why so many are friendly to him in times of want but distant in times of plenty. To another, who struggles with building or maintaining friendships, it could be counsel to bring gifts to people when you meet them to help in building friendship.

These are the tools that the author of proverbs provides to us and is included in what the father is regarding as wisdom, which is what he says we must seek diligently and hold in the highest regard. This Wisdom is the trade that the father intends for the son to take on as a continuation of his own house. The end, as with all other kinds of Wisdom, is to acknowledge God as God and be thankful to Him for all He has given. The skill is in the recognition of what Wisdom is and how we may apply the principles of Wisdom in our everyday life.

These truths are upheld across the wide array of all these sciences I have mentioned. A firm grasp of the wisdom of metalworking results in good tools and brackets and car door panels that hold up in accordance to the purpose for which they were made. That bracket will reliably support your shelf if installed properly because the bracket was designed for that purpose.

The kind of wisdom that the father is giving to his son in this specific treatise is the wisdom of avoiding the traps of evil men, but the book of proverbs as a whole is giving us the wisdom of recognizing and conforming to the ways of wisdom. It is the wisdom of wisdom, so to speak. Inherent to all trades is Wisdom herself. A grasp of any one expression of her ways provides insight into the other expressions of her ways. This makes the science that the father is teaching to the son in these treatises is one that learns the wisdom of Wisdom and applies that wisdom to all circumstances, but primarily to moral matters. The science that the father wants his son to learn is True Philosophy, or, the Science of truly loving wisdom.

At the beginning of this sermon, I mentioned that the wicked men of this first treatise claimed they wanted wealth, brotherhood, and success, but did not truly want those things. Let's imagine that a metalworker was tasked with forging a set of metal flesh-hooks for the temple. When crafting the flesh-hooks he did not check for impurities or make any attempts to purify the metal, while working the metal he took no notice of the quality of his work. These flesh-hooks will break, barring some Providential protection from God.

For sure, the metalworker bought, hammered, and polished some metal. What looked like work, however, was mere following the rules of the trade that he supposedly practiced. He made some flesh-hooks, but did not take care to really make the flesh-hooks. Applied to the wicked men of Proverbs 1, we see that these men play act as wanting wealth, brotherhood, and success, just like our metalworker play acted as wanting to craft some metal flesh-hooks. Their error, however, was that they wanted to have the result of the science without the discipline of the science.

If these men had listened to wisdom, the quality of their lives would naturally bring about the wealth, brotherhood, and success they claimed to want. Instead, they chose not only the foolish path, but also the one least suited to bring about the end they claimed they wanted. Just as the metalworker should have known that carelessly crafting a flesh-hook would result in a poor product that would break if used for its intended purpose, so too should these wicked men have known that you cannot create good by practicing evil. What the father is telling the son is this: to properly craft a set of flesh-hooks, he needs to examine his metal, his craftsmanship, and his tools and ensure they align with the end goal he has been given. Or: if the son wants to have the things that these evil men say they wanted, he must do all that he can to not act in the way that these evil men act.



The goal of any given craftsman is to hone their craft, have clear defined goals, to have the proper tools required for the job, and to have the skill in applying all these things to achieve the goal that had been set. With this in mind, and with the goal of causing his son to fear the Lord, the father then begins his work by describing the desired outcomes, but pursued by men with no respect for the craft that would result in those outcomes. He then describes the failures of those men by highlighting the motivations of those men and how they differ from the craft.

You see, these men desired, above all things, wealth, brotherhood, and success, and they were willing to murder for them. The contrasting motivation that the father provides for the son is not a desire for wealth, brotherhood, or success, but a desire for wisdom, knowledge, discretion, and understanding. To gain what any man would want, his son must instead seek wisdom. For from Wisdom, he will learn to “discern the fear of the Lord And discover the knowledge of God (2:5)”. Here, we have another “for” statement, justifying why you will discern the fear of the Lord by seeking Wisdom. “For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding (2:6)”.

In my last sermon, I spoke about the Sons Requited love for Wisdom — This desire for Wisdom as if she were a lover — and how Wisdom is like the Kingdom of Heaven that Christ mentioned, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it (Matt 13:44-45)”. This searching for wisdom requires the son to first recognize that he does not have wisdom and needs her desperately.

The father builds on this idea by grounding the result of such an attitude with an infilling of the son with wisdom, hence, “For wisdom will enter your heart And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you, To deliver you from the way of evil, (10-12a)”. The antidote the father is giving to the son is a pursuit of wisdom and the fear of the Lord above all things, and the poison that he intends to destroy is the pursuit of wealth, brotherhood, and success above all things. It is not as if these things are evil unto themselves. All three are spoken of highly throughout the sayings in this book. However, without Wisdom, these things are meaningless, and a rejection of wisdom destroys these things. What’s more, the pursuit of wisdom is that way of living that is most attuned to the accumulation of wealth, the building of brotherhood, and of ultimate success. He says in the next treatise, “Long life is in her right hand; In her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways And all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast. (3:16-18).”

What the father wants for his son is more fundamental, however: If the son loves wisdom, and pursues the fear of the Lord, honing his craft of seeking after her like the wicked seek riches, then the son will discover God, and Wisdom will cling to him and never reject him. Even if his son never

finds material wealth, earthly brotherhood, or worldly success, he will have found the riches of Glory, Kinship with God, and the Hope of Eternity.