

GOAL OF PROVERBS

Monday, January 12

Reading: Proverbs 2:1-22

Proverbs 1:7 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

In Proverbs 1-9, we saw a father's instruction to his son in the way of wisdom. We heard wisdom's call to follow and her warning not to be enticed by wicked men and wayward women. Beginning with chapter 10, we have a new pattern. Now we are given individual proverbs on various subjects in rapid fire progression. These short two-line sayings are not arranged by theme and often do not appear to relate with each other. They each stand alone. Many students of Scripture have combed through these 375 individual proverbs and organized them into groups that talk about a common theme. But why did God inspire the writers of Proverbs to put the book together in this seemingly haphazard way? One commentator suggests that perhaps it is because that is the way life happens.

"We human beings don't wake up in the morning and deal first with our marriage and family issues, and then our money issues, and then our tongue, all in a logically planned order. No – from the moment we wake, life actually comes at us in the same kind of fluid chaos that Proverbs presents as it teaches us that wisdom is applying God's truth to all of it, all of life, in all its messiness. How wonderful that God sees and speaks into what so often feels like the chaos of our lives." ¹

Having these words of wisdom all mixed together makes it difficult for us to pick and choose what we want to work on and focus on our whole life. Obviously we will not be able to cover every proverb, but in these devotions we will take the proverbs as they come. Before we jump in, let me make a few suggestions to help us understand and apply these proverbs better.

1. Remember these are proverbs – NOT PROMISES. A proverb describes how things usually go in life. They describe general truths about life but there are exceptions to their principles. The righteous do not always prosper and the wicked are not always judged – at least not in this life. But Proverbs should make us look to the ultimate end of our journey where justice and righteousness will always prevail. We must remember to take these wisdom statements as guides for living but not promises or rules that always apply to every situation.
2. The individual nature of the proverbs could tempt us to pick one that we will 'work on' in our lives. However, the danger is that we may fail in our efforts and so give up altogether. We must remember that the goal of Proverbs is not self-improvement but growing in "the fear of the Lord" (1:7; 2:5-10). We do not do this by applying a proverb here and there, but by working on every area of our lives. Proverbs was written to help us have a better relationship with God and each other.

¹ Kathleen Nielson. Proverbs for You, p 92