**The Book of Proverbs** | **Potential Preaching Outline**

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  **Sermon** | **Title** | **Text** |
| Sermon 1 | Enter | Proverbs 1:1-7 |
| Sermon 2 | Listen | Proverbs 1:8-33 |
| Sermon 3 | Pursue | Proverbs 2 |
| Sermon 4 | Trust | Proverbs 3 |
| Sermon 5 | Guard Your Heart | Part 1 | Proverbs 4:1-27 |
| Sermon 6 | Guard Your Heart | Part 2 | Proverbs 4:10-27 |
| Sermon 7 | Sex and the Wisdom of God | Part 1 | Proverbs 5-7 |
| Sermon 8 | Sex and the Wisdom of God | Part 2 | Proverbs 5-7 |
| Sermon 9 | The Fate of Foolishness and Fools | Proverbs 6:1-19 |
| Sermon 10 | The Wisdom of God…and More | Proverbs 8 |
| Sermon 11 | What the Wise Eat for Dinner | Proverbs 9 |
| Sermon 12 | The Wisdom of God and Work | Various Texts |
| Sermon 13 | The Wisdom of God and Words | Proverbs 18:21 |
| Sermon 14 | The Wisdom of God and Money | Part 1 | Proverbs 30:7-9 |
| Sermon 15 | The Wisdom of God and Money | Part 2 | Proverbs 3:9-10 |
| Sermon 16 | The Wisdom of God and Friends | Proverbs 27:17 |
| Sermon 17 | The Wisdom of God and Parenting | Part 1 | Proverbs 1:8-19; 22:6 |
| Sermon 18 | The Wisdom of God and Parenting | Part 2 | Proverbs 1:8-19; 22:6; Deut 6 |
| Sermon 19 | The Wisdom of God and Food  | Proverbs 23:20-21; 1 Cor 10:31 |
| Sermon 20 | The Wisdom of God and Plans  | Proverbs 16:1-9 |
| Sermon 21 | Faithfully Walking in the Way | Proverbs 16:1-9 |

**The Book of Proverbs | Preaching the Gospel from Proverbs**

The book of Proverbs is not, as Tremper Longman points out, “a book of practical advice with an occasional nod of the head to Yahweh.” (Tremper Longman, *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament, Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 57.) Christ is revealed clearly in Proverbs and all of the wisdom in Proverbs is rooted in the message of the Gospel. To preach it in a non Christ-centered fashion is to turn Christian literature into secular literature.

There are four key hermeneutical truths needed to preach Christ and His Gospel from the book of Proverbs.

**Truth 1: The Proverbs Teach the Two Ways to Live**

The most important New Testament passage in understanding the book of Proverbs is Matthew 7:13-14. One of the most pervasive metaphors in the first 9 chapters of Proverbs is *derek*, a Hebrew word translated as “way,” “path,” or “road.” This word occurs twenty-five times in this section and the idea of the way of wisdom versus the way of folly permeates the entire section. All of Proverbs 1-9 seeks to point out exactly what Jesus pointed out in Matthew 7. In Proverbs, there are two paths: the path of wisdom and the path of folly. These paths lead to two destinations: life or death. There are two groups of people: the wise and the fool.

**Truth 2: The Way of Wisdom is Only Entered One Way**

Jesus makes it very clear in Matthew 7:13-14 that the narrow path can only be walked by those who enter through the small gate. As Jesus will go on to clarify throughout the Gospels, the only way to enter into the life of following Christ which inevitably leads to eternal life with Christ is by trusting in Christ (John 14:6). The gate must be entered by faith before the path is walked. There must be a moment of justification before attempting to live a life of sanctification. This basic understanding of the Gospel in the New Testament forms our entire understanding of the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 1:1-7 serves as a distinct unit, which make up the introduction to the book as a whole. (Bruce Waltke, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Proverbs 1-15* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005, 180). This introduction clearly lays out the purpose of the book, the life-altering benefits of the way of wisdom, and makes us hungry to receive all these benefits offered. But the last verse of this introduction serves as the key to unlocking *all* of the riches of wisdom. Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” The idea of “beginning” in Hebrews 1:7 gives the idea of that which is the “first thing,” “principle thing,” or “chief thing.” In other words, the only way to receive all the benefits of wisdom is to walk the way of wisdom and the only way to walk the way of wisdom is to enter through the gate of the “fear of the Lord.” This is seen even more clearly by the inclusio found in Proverbs 1:7 and Proverbs 9:10. The father begins and ends his conversations with the son clarifying that the way of wisdom is only for those who “fear the Lord.” The father does this because the son must first, before seeking the wisdom of God, trust in God’s means of attaining that wisdom. The wisdom is *only* for those who fear Him.

To “fear the Lord” is to recognize who God truly is and respond in humble submission. The quest for wisdom begins with recognition of who God is in contrast with who we are, responding in humble submission, and entering into a covenant relationship with Him (thus the use of YHWY). (Jim Newheiser, *Opening Up Proverbs* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2008, 26). The “fear of the Lord” in Proverbs is the Old Testament way of saying “you must be born again.” It is embracing the reality that this is God’s world and we are just living in it. To “fear the Lord” means to fully embrace a Biblical worldview.[[1]](#footnote-1) (John Kitchen, *A Mentor Commentary, Proverbs* (Ross-Shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2006, 59.) That being said, it is clear that a decision to trust God and submit to His authority is the starting place of the way of wisdom. The gate of fearing the Lord must be entered before the path of wisdom is walked.

**Truth 3: The Way of Wisdom Teaches God’s People How to Know God and Live God’s Way for God’s Glory**

If we understand that the Proverbs demonstrate two ways to live and that the only way to walk the way of wisdom is through trusting Christ, then it is inevitably true that the wisdom of Proverbs is solely for God’s people. The fact that the book of Proverbs clearly begins with the gate that must be entered demonstrates that the way of wisdom is for God’s people alone. This understanding of the wisdom in Proverbs dramatically affects the way we teach it. This means that with every sermon from Proverbs we must clarify that the only way to walk the way of wisdom or to reap the great rewards of wisdom is to *first* come into a covenant relationship with God through Christ. This immediately transforms the book of Proverbs into a radically Gospel-centered book.

**Truth 4: The Wisdom of Proverbs is Personified in Christ**

When preaching the book of Proverbs the preacher must help people understand the primary motivation for seeking this wisdom. This attempt to motivate should not merely focus on a desire to be a better leader, a better businessman, or a better conversationalist. To preach Proverbs in this manner is to miss the entire point of the wisdom of Proverbs and to reduce the book of Proverbs to a book of self-help tips. Yet since the book of Proverbs does not initially appear to be distinctively Christian literature, the challenge is to motivate Christians as to why they should be seeking the wisdom contained there. As New Testament Christians, what motivates us to seek wisdom “as silver and search for her as hidden treasures?” The answer is found in a Gospel-centered approach to Proverbs.

There are many connections between wisdom and Christ given to us in the New Testament. In Colossians 2:3 Paul says that in Christ are “hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” In 1 Corinthians 1:24 Paul says that Christ is “the wisdom of God.” What the New Testament writers teach is that Christ is the personification of wisdom. It is also interesting that Luke concludes the account of Jesus’ early life with the words, “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52.) His earthly teaching also revealed His wisdom and those who heard him were often amazed by His wisdom (Mark 1:21-22; 6:2). “The Greek word translated as “parable” (parabole) in the New Testament is a translation of the Hebrew word for “proverb” (masal). In other words, Jesus was a teacher of wisdom.” (Anthony Selvaggio, “Does Proverbs Speak of Jesus?” *Reformation 21* (2008); accessed 03 March 2010. Available from <http://www.Reformation21.org>. Internet.) What this means is that Jesus is both the personification of wisdom and a teacher of wisdom.

The implications of this are that our search for wisdom is not a search for moral instruction; our search for wisdom is a search for Christ-likeness. On this side of the cross, the Proverbs teach us how to be like Christ. To seek to walk the way of wisdom is to seek to walk faithfully the way of Christ. Understanding the book of Proverbs in this manner makes the book as a whole completely Christ-centered and Gospel-focused. The wisdom that we find in Proverbs for parenting, eating, talking, working, and planning is given to us so that we might do these things in such a way that we manifest the life of Christ in them. What a treasure Proverbs becomes when we see it as practical instruction for how to be Christ-like in every arena of life.

**The Book of Proverbs | Six Principles for Studying Proverbs**

**TIP 1**: Proverbs teaches God’s people how to live God’s way for God’s glory.

(Wisdom is not just knowledge; it is a way of life.)

**TIP 2**: The wisdom of Proverbs is only for those who have relationship with God.

**TIP 3**: Proverbs are guidelines not guarantees.

**TIP 4**: Proverbs demands that we think carefully.

**TIP 5**: Proverbs are personified in Christ.

(The goal is to make us like Christ.)

**TIP 6**: Proverbs give us both theological foundations and practical applications.

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**The Book of Proverbs | Sample Sermon Summaries**

**Proverbs: A Travelers Guide for the Christian Journey**

**Enter**

**Proverbs 1:1-7**

**J. Josh Smith**

Introduction

As Jesus came to the close of His Sermon on the Mount, he concluded with a moving invitation. The invitation was given in the form of a word picture in Matthew 7:13-14. He tells of two gates, two paths, and two destinations. This is one of the greatest metaphors for the Christian life because it clarifies that the gate you enter will lead to the path you will walk which will determine your final destination. The book of Proverbs is written with the exact same word picture in mind. Proverbs takes us down the path of wisdom but that path must be entered through the correct gate. The book of Proverbs shows that there are two ways to live and only one leads to life.

Purposes and Promises for the Foolish (1:1-4)

 The author of Proverbs begins by listing a series of 10 words that clarify the purpose and promises of these proverbs for those who obviously need it. “Wisdom” is best defined as the skill of living. “Instruction” is best understood as discipline that comes from the skill of living. To “discern understanding” means the ability to see things as God sees them. To “receive instruction” is the ability to choose the right way for the right reasons. “Give prudence to the naïve” is to help those who are easily led astray. To “give youth knowledge and instruction” means that these Proverbs will give a young person what is usually only learned through years of difficulties and experiences. A person can either live and learn or learn and live. These proverbs show a person how to learn and live. The book of Proverbs is filled with purposes and promises for those who so obviously need wisdom.

Purposes and Promises for the Wise (1:5-6)

 Interestingly, in verses 5-6 the attention of the author changes from those who so obviously need the wisdom found in Proverbs to those who already appear to have it. This book has great purposes and promises for those who are already classified as wise. For them, these words will only increase their wisdom and understanding. In other words, everyone, no matter their experience or age, has something to gain from these proverbs.

Purposes and Promises for Life (1:2-6)

 Interestingly, the one thing the book of Proverbs never promises is information. This is because even in this day the author of Proverbs knew that information is not what we need. We are constantly bombarded with information. What we need is the wisdom that God alone can provide. We need the ability to see the difference between the two ways to live. We need the ability to see the world as God sees it. We need the ability to think in a way that God thinks. We need the God given skill of living for Him in this life. This is what the book of Proverbs offers. This is so much more than pithy statements. The book of Proverbs contains the purposes and promises for life.

Entering the Way of Wisdom (1:7)

 In verses 2-6 we are on the outside looking in. We are told about all of the magnificent purposes and promises offered on the path of wisdom. But it is as if we are standing outside the door peering in through the window and the door is locked. These verses make us hungry for the way of wisdom. We read all that is offered in this book and begin to long for all that is found in this amazing path. And although everyone needs what is on the way of wisdom and even though the way of wisdom is the only way that leads to life, not everyone will walk it. The only ones who walk the way of wisdom are those who enter through the correct gate. Verse 7 clarifies the way we enter the way of wisdom.

 Verse 7 teaches us how to unlock the door to all the treasures hidden in this book. Verse 7 is the hinge on which everything else in the book of Proverbs swings. If we miss this verse, we will always find ourselves on the outside looking in. The way of wisdom must be entered through the gate of the “fear of the Lord.” The purposes and promises are only for those who fear the Lord. The fear of the Lord is both the entrance into the way of wisdom and the way in which we walk the path of the wise.

 The one who fears the Lord is the one who recognizes the true reality of themselves and the true reality of God. To fear the Lord is to see God as the creator, king, and judge of the universe and to see ourselves as rebellious and sinful creations who have missed God’s purpose for our lives. To fear the Lord begins with the terrifying recognition that we have fallen short of the glory of God. But that terror leads to humbly submitting to God and His purposes for our lives. To fear the Lord is to turn from our sin, trust in God’s way of salvation, and choose to walk with Him. And the only way to walk the way of wisdom is to first enter through the gate of the fear of the Lord. Those who do not fear the Lord will never walk the way of wisdom.

Conclusion

 Jesus ended his sermon on the mount with an invitation. The invitation was to enter through the gate of trusting Christ. It is only through entering that gate that a person can walk the way of Christ and spend eternity with Christ. The book of Proverbs begins the exact same way. This side of the cross, the fear of the Lord is to turn away from sin, to trust in Christ who is the incarnation of wisdom, and choose by faith to walk in His ways. If you long for wisdom, then you must begin by trusting Christ.

**Proverbs: A Travelers Guide for the Christian Journey**

**Listen**

**Proverbs 1:8-33**

**J. Josh Smith**

Introduction

One of the wonderful things about the Bible is that it gives us the opportunity to eavesdrop on some amazing conversations. We get to hear Abraham talking to Pharaoh, Jonah talking with God, Mary talking with an Angel, and Jesus talking with the disciples. Proverbs, chapters 1-9, allows us the amazing opportunity to eavesdrop on a father talking to his son about the way of wisdom. But what makes this such a wonderful privilege is to know that the way of wisdom is the way of Christ and to hear the father talk with the son is as if God is sitting down with His children instructing them on how to live this Christian journey. In Proverbs 1-9 the father is God the father, the son is His children, and the wisdom that he is pointing us to is the wisdom personified in Christ and that which will conform us into the image of Christ. As we eavesdrop on this first conversation, the father is teaching the son that in order to walk the way of wisdom you must possess the indispensible quality of listening.

Hearing Voices

 The father knows that his son is about to walk out into a world filled with a variety of different voices. Each of these voices will be telling him which way to go. The voices will come in all different tones from all different places and if the son does not learn how to listen then he will certainly be led astray. The father knows a very important principle - the voices you listen to determine the direction that you go. Chapters 1-9 portray many different voices. There is the rebellious voice (Prov. 1), the perverse voice (Prov. 2), the voice of the wicked (Prov. 4), and the voice of the adulteress and the idolater (Prov. 5-7). In chapter 1 the father begins introducing his son to the various voices so that he will be prepared for life.

Hearing What You Have Heard (1:8-9)

 The father begins instructing the son in verses 8-9 by reminding him of his need to hear that which he has already heard. Proverbs 1 reaffirms the truth of Deuteronomy 6; the home is the primary place for moral instruction. The son was raised in a home in which he was taught by his mother and his father the way of wisdom. But just because he has heard it does not mean that he heard it. When the father tells the son to “hear” in verse 8 it introduces us to a word used over 26 times in the book of Proverbs. The word hear means to obey or to keep close. The son has been given the proper foundation, but he must hear with his heart and will what he has heard with his ears.

Hearing the Stupidity of Folly (1:10-19)

 Interestingly, the father does not attempt to shelter his son from the voices by acting as if they do not exist. The father’s goal is not for his son just to do the right thing but to be a wise person. For this reason, the father tells the son exactly the types of voices he is going to be hearing (1:10-19). Not only does the father tell his son what voices he will be hearing, he also breaks down their arguments and shows his son the stupidity of the voices of folly. First, he shows them that their path always leads to destruction (1:15-17). Second, he tells them that their promises are never kept (1:17-19). Third, he tells them that their plans always break down (1:11-14). In other words, these voices always write checks they cannot cash.

Hearing the Voice of Wisdom (1:20-33)

 In the midst of all of the voices that will inevitably surround this young man as he enters the world, there always will be another voice crying aloud in the street. The voice of wisdom is crying aloud and leading the son in the right direction (1:20-33). But the son must learn how to discern the voice of wisdom above all the other voices. In the same way that Christ called out to the wicked and foolish and offered them an opportunity to be saved by following Him, wisdom calls out to the wicked and foolish and offers them the way of life. The father tells the son why the voice of wisdom is superior to all other voices and the terrible results of ignoring his voice. The voice of wisdom always offers hope and life and knowledge (1:20-23) but sadly most will choose to ignore his voice, will not fear the Lord, will eat the fruit of their way and ultimately by destroyed (1:24-33). Failing to heed the voice of wisdom has horrific consequences.

Conclusion

All of us know those who have heard the voice of wisdom but have not heard (in the way Proverbs defines hearing) the voice of wisdom. Many people know what is right but choose to listen and follow the voices of the foolish. And all of us know the sad and inevitable consequences that follow. These stories prove once again that the voices you listen to will determine the direction you go. The call of Proverbs 1 is a call to listen to Christ, follow his direction, and trust that he always keeps his promises and leads us in the paths of righteousness.

**Proverbs: A Travelers Guide for the Christian Journey**

**The Wisdom of God and Work**

**Proverbs 13:4**

**J. Josh Smith**

Introduction

Instead of putting our Bibles down to think about work, the Proverbs call us to pick up our Bibles to think about work. The emphasis that the book of Proverbs puts on the issue of work proves that our work matters to God. No matter if our primary work is that of a teacher, doctor, realtor, homemaker, or construction worker, God cares about the way we work. In Proverbs 13:4 we are introduced to two very colorful characters that highlight the wisdom of God and work.

Work Matters (Laying a Theological Foundation)

Before getting into what the book of Proverbs says about work, it is important to lay a theological foundation for work.

1. We were created to work (Genesis 1-3). Work is not a result of the curse. Work is one of the ways in which we manifest the image of God.
2. The curse distorted work. The curse caused some to make work an idol and some to neglect to work.
3. Work is a calling God has placed on our lives. Our work is part of God’s call on our lives used as a means to glorify Him.

Diligent vs. Sluggard

 Proverbs shows us how we can put God in the center of our work. The primary way the book of Proverbs teaches us about work is by showing us the contrast between the sluggard and the diligent. Every time we see a verse with one of these two characters, it is telling us something about the wisdom of God for work. Proverbs 13:4 is a great place to start.

Plans vs. Dreams

 The diligent thinks carefully about his work while the sluggard only dreams.

1. The Diligent Plans (Proverbs 21:5; 10:5)
2. The Sluggard Talks (Proverbs 14:23; 21;25)

Initiative vs. Excuses

1. The Diligent Makes Progress (Prov. 6:6-11; 14:23)
2. The Sluggard Makes Excuses (Prov. 6:9-10; 22:13)

Finisher vs. Starter

1. The Diligent Finishes His Work (Prov. 27:18; 12:11)
2. The Sluggard Never Follows Through (Prov. 12:27; 19:24)

Ambition vs. Carelessness

1. The Diligent Plans to Succeed (Prov. 22:29)
2. The Sluggard Fails to Plan (Prov. 10:4; 13:4; 21:25)

Conclusion: The Myth of the Workaholic

 It is very interesting that the Proverbs never mention the workaholic when this has certainly been an issue. But the reason the workaholic is never mentioned is because there is no such thing as a workaholic. A person who spends too much time at work is not a workaholic but just a sluggard at home. The Proverbs teach that God calls us to be diligent in every area he has called us to in order of priority. In order to work with wisdom we must clarify our callings in order of importance and seek the way of wisdom in each area.

**Proverbs: A Travelers Guide for the Christian Journey**

**The Wisdom of God and Food**

**Proverbs 24:13**

**J. Josh Smith**

Introduction

1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “Whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” That is an amazing verse. It’s amazing because it tells us that it is possible to glorify God even in the most mundane tasks of life. More specifically, it tells us that we can actually glorify God in our eating. But the question is, “how in the world can God be glorified in our eating?” The book of Proverbs tells us. The book of Proverbs is not just a book or warm, pithy, greeting card statements about wisdom. The book of Proverbs is a book to teach God’s people how to live God’s way for God’s glory. The book of Proverbs teaches us, in very practical terms, how we can doeverything for the glory of God - including how to eat for the glory of God.

Enjoy the Gift

1. Food is a Gift for which we should be thankful (Prov. 30:8)

The Word of God continually points us to the truth that food is a gracious gift from God (Deut. 8:10; James 1:17)

1. Food is a gift that we should enjoy (Prov. 24:13)

The taste of food is a gracious gift of God and to enjoy it is a means by which we can glorify God. Food is a gift to be enjoyed.

Avoid the Abuse

 Food is a wonderful gift but can be perverted like anything else. We live in a day in which many people misuse the gift of food and turn something good into something that causes them to sin. Think of the sins in Scripture caused by good. Food caused Adam and Even to sin. Food caused Esau to sell his birthright. Food and drink caused Noah to be humiliated. Food caused Eli’s sons to commit great sin by abusing the Passover meal. The Corinthian church abused the gift of food at the Lord’s Supper. The Proverbs use the glutton to show the dangers of abusing the gift of food.

1. The Glutton Lacks Control (Prov. 23:20-21)
2. The Glutton Comes to Ruin (Prov. 23:20-21)

Conclusion

 Food can be a means to glorify God. Food can also be a means to disgrace God. But there are many ways we can redeem the usefulness of food. We use food to share with others in need, practice hospitality, gather with family, and encourage and fellowship with other believers. Throughout the Bible you see meals as a primary time for fellowship, encouragement, and instruction. Mealtime is a time for ministry, not just a time for fulfillment. Don’t allow the fear of abuse to keep you from enjoying the gift of food. And don’t allow your enjoyment of food to lead you to abuse. And, above all, remember that our hunger for food is there to ultimately remind us of our hunger for Christ who alone can satisfy (John 6:26-35).

**Proverbs: A Travelers Guide for the Christian Journey**

**The Wisdom of God and Plans**

**Proverbs 16:9**

**J. Josh Smith**

Introduction

Have you ever struggled trying to figure out the will of God? Have you laid out your fleece, waited for a feeling, for a dream, or randomly opened up the Bible hoping for direct revelation? Have you ever had a change of plans? How did all the plans for your future that you laid out in college turn out? It’s amazing how quickly plans can change. When it comes to determining the will of God or making plans, confusion within Christians abounds. But the book of Proverbs is actually filled with wisdom for how to make plans and discern the will of God.

Embrace Reality (Prov. 16)

1. Embrace Who God Is

We must begin by embracing the reality that God’s sovereignty encompasses human responsibility. In Proverbs 16:1-9 the word “Lord” is used 8 times in 9 verses. It is actually the word “Lord” that binds this entire text together. Proverbs 16 shows us how an earthly king has power, but not ultimate power. God is the king over all things (Ps. 104-105). We must embrace God as sovereign.

1. Embrace What God Does

Proverbs 16 gives us a long list of what God does. God determines the answers we give, the plans that are established, the steps that we take, and even the direction of the lots that are cast. What an amazing thought. Proverbs 16 wants to make sure we embrace the reality that God controls all things and will work all things out according to His plan.

Embrace Responsibility (Prov. 16)

 The same passage of Scripture that calls us to embrace the reality of God’s sovereignty is also the text that calls us to embrace our responsibility to make plans, think, work, and make wise decisions.

1. We Are Responsible to Plan. Life demands planning and there is no wisdom in failing to plan.
2. We Are Responsible to Examine. We must examine our plans in light of God’s word and use the wisdom God has given us.
3. We Are Responsible to Commit. We must commit our plans to the Lord and be confident in Him.
4. We Are Responsible to Trust. We must trust that God will work all things according to His perfect plan.
5. We Are Responsible to Walk. After we plan, examine, and trust, we then must walk forward in confidence.

Embrace Rest

 How do we balance our plans and God’s sovereignty? By resting in the confidence that no one frustrates the plans of God and everything he does is right and best. (Eph. 1:11; Is. 14:27)

Conclusion

God asks us to make plans because the process draws us to him. The process forces us to seek wisdom, examine our hearts, examine Scripture, trust in God, and walk by faith. So the wisdom of God and plans is simply this: Make your plans and hold them loosely.

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)